

*360° of Golf in Douglass Park, 1997*



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How many degrees of change does a golf swing contain? In the late 1930's, a dozen black men organized the first black golf league in Lexington, Kentucky. With their leather golf bags, wooden tees, and fashionable wool derbies, they brought a vigor and chatty gossip into this empty field. Before golf, kids tethered kites to wooden pegs and watched the small cotton squares snap above the trees in this field. Before kites, city officials smiled over this grass and agreed that this was the largest and finest park for the Negro citizens of the Bluegrass. When was the first smile, or sailing kite, or golf swing? Officially, the first smile was on July 4, 1916, when the park opened to crowd bursting over 5,000. Although the mayor could not attend this gala event, he did send a few words honoring the healthy progress of Lexington's race relations. After these words leaped from speaker's lips, they briefly hovered above the freshly mown lawn and vanished with the first kite torn from a child's hand by the new wind. Before this field was Douglass Park, it nourished a tree farm that channeled and diffused the wind into a harmless matrix of breezes. Without the wooden brace, the new wind fell hard on this field. And then the men came with the irons and knobbed shoes and declared this land would host a new sport. With the first swing, the first golf ball sailed over the baseball diamond and into the pool. These men brought a new economy to the park when they paid boys a nickel to deep dive for sunken golf balls. Boys still haunt the mysterious corners of this park, but they do not find golf balls or baseballs in the same places. Golf left the park over 40 years ago, and the city built a elementary school directly over the baseball diamond in the 1970's. Today, the only things lost back in this field are the screams of play.