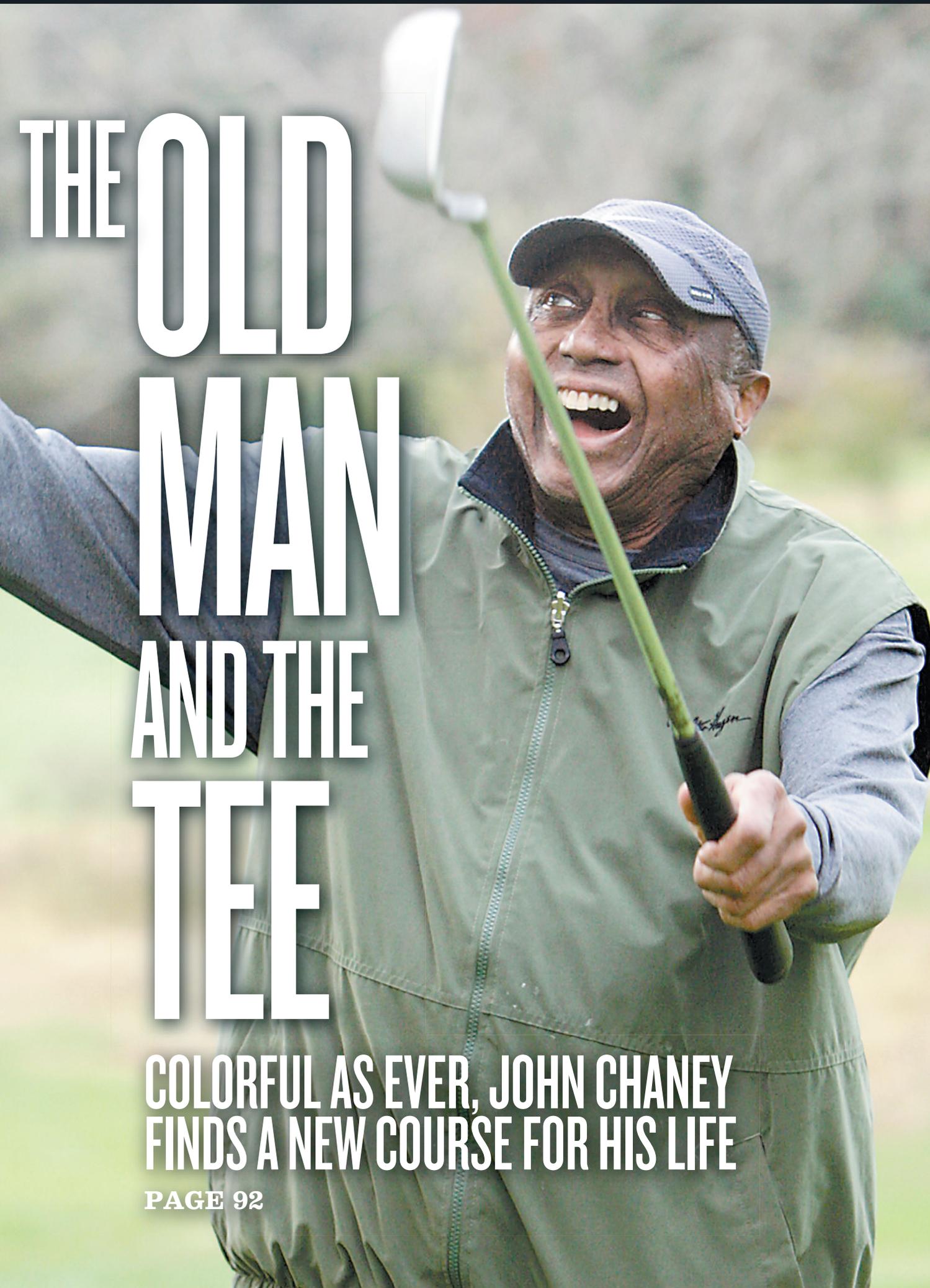


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# THE OLD MAN AND THE TEE

COLORFUL AS EVER, JOHN CHANEY FINDS A NEW COURSE FOR HIS LIFE

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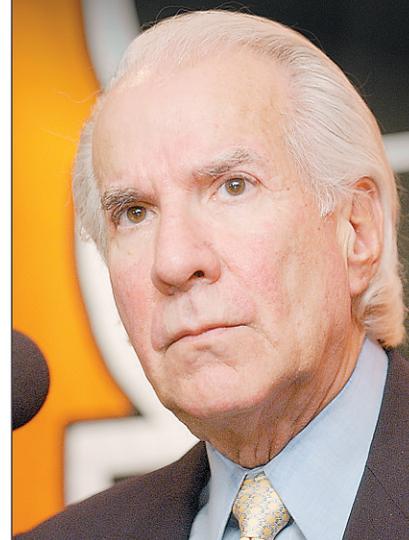


# DAILY NEWS SPORTS

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## ED SNIDER: I'LL FIX THIS MESS

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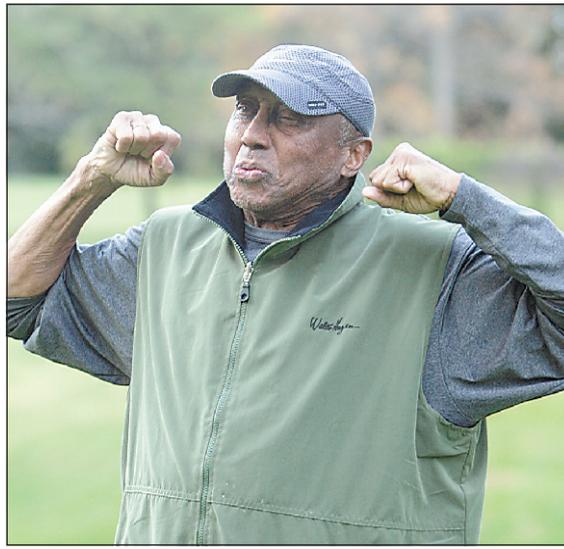
## GAITHER NOT DOWN FOR COUNT

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# TIGER CHANEY

Temple basketball legend finds the grass green in retirement



John Chaney is often behind the wheel of a cart these days at Walnut Lane Golf Club. He is enjoying his retirement as evidenced by the celebration of an eagle (above and right).



“My players were like a blanket to me. And I covered myself with them. Whenever I was in trouble, they were always there for me to go to. They gave me the strength and conviction to do what I believed in. I loved them.”

**JOHN CHANEY**

Photos: JORI KLEIN/Daily News

By **MARK KRAM**  
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COACH HAD JUST teed up a shot at Walnut Lane Golf Course when a Labrador retriever began galloping toward him. “Oh, here he comes,” John Chaney said with that hoarse laugh. He slid his club back into his bag and withdrew a sack of Milk-Bones from the rear of his cart. Salivating in anticipation, the animal circled Chaney and looked up at him with a tilted head.

Chaney dangled a treat before his eyes and ordered, “Now sit!”

The dog remained focused on the contents of his hand.

“Come on now,” Chaney said with playful irritation. “Do as I say! Sit!”

A fellow golfer eyed Chaney and asked

with a grin, “Is that how you used to talk to Mark Macon?”

Chaney lowered his voice as he again addressed the dog: “Now I am not telling you again. Sit down or this goes back where it came from.”

Obediently, the canine then unburdened his legs. And Chaney flipped him the treat. “Good boy!” Chaney told him. And he scratched him behind the ear.

Twilight had begun to settle on the Philadelphia golf course on this cool October day. Chaney had been out here since 3:30 p.m., just as he has been more or less every day since he stepped down as the basketball coach at Temple. Nike had sent him a set of clubs as a retirement gift. While Chaney had never played before — in part to avoid the unending invitations that coaches receive for golf outings — he has

found himself at age 74 with a passion that occasionally leaves him in the same state of exasperation that coaching once did. But he enjoys the exercise and is always the center of attention when he plays, if not because of his colorful personality then because of the chow he generously dispenses to the local fleabags.

As the Labrador chased a rubber ball that his owner tossed down the fairway, Chaney teed up again. Off to the side, a friend told him: “Keep your head down!” Chaney has to be reminded this because it is counterintuitive to him. Basketball has trained him to look at the hoop. Now he has to force himself to look at the ball instead. As a few other golfers looked on, Chaney swiped at the ball, which attained virtually no altitude before it skipped off the fairway.

Chaney peered into the horizon. “Where did it go?” he asked.

A friend laughed and replied, “Behind that tree over there.”

Chaney grimaced and replied, “Son of a gun.” Except that he did not say gun.

That John Chaney is out walking the golf course and no longer running the Temple University basketball team is going to take some getting used to. Ordinarily, he would be overseeing the beginning of practice last weekend, a job that now falls to his successor, former Penn coach Fran Dunphy. “No one goes on forever,” said Chaney, seated a week before in a lux-

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ury box overlooking the court at the Liacouras Center. For 24 years, he presided over the team here with a clarity that catapulted the Owls to one of the top basketball programs in America. But that was just part of what he did. Of larger consequence is how he took young lives that had been robbed of hope and galvanized them into people who have become productive adults. He did it with a unique and occasionally exasperating blend of love and indignation, the latter of which perpetually placed him in the eye of the hurricane.

Coach used to get up before dawn in order to get to practice by 5:30 a.m. There, he would lecture his players not just on the intricacies of zone play and such, but on life. With his late assistant, Jim Maloney, following him around with a notebook, assiduously jotting down his every word, he would speak on the philosophy of Plato and Socrates and “how the question is more essential than the answer.” The Public League MVP in 1951, he became an educator and would come to look upon himself as an urban Don Quixote, “always taking on those windmills.” The inequity of Proposition 48 enraged him: Eighty percent of the young men who played for him had come from single-parent households, and the NCAA regulation took away from some a chance to better themselves. Chaney said with eyes ablaze: “We have allowed ourselves to outdistance the poor.”

Retirement has been the period of tranquil relaxation that Chaney had envisioned. A daily concern remains the health of his wife, who he says is doing better since he announced he was leaving Temple. His own health is fine with the exception of a continuing case of asthma and the fact that he is a Type 2 diabetic. While he still gets a handful of calls each week asking him to do speaking engagements, he is careful not to overbook in order to keep his schedule open for seeing old friends. Occasionally, he will drop in for a beer and a crab confection at the Pour House on Ridge Avenue and the South Philadelphia Tap Room on Mifflin Street. At either place he is certain to be surrounded by fans, with whom he engages in a lively banter full of laughter and rage.

“Name the two things that are more important to the world than anything else,” Chaney

said, challenging a group at the Pour House one evening. “Two things that have done more for mankind.”

An attorney asked, “Family?”

Chaney replied, “Outside of your own wife and children. Two things.”

A young woman then wondered: “Religion? Is that one of them?”

“No,” Chaney said. “Medicine is one. And sports is the other. Both have given us hope.”

Conversation flowed long into the evening. Some of it veers into anger, especially when the subject of the Iraq war comes up. “I would like to attend a White House press briefing just once,” Chaney said. “They would never call on me, but if they did, I would ask: ‘Is it worth the young lives that have been sacrificed over there?’” Solemnly, he grieves over this, just as he grieves over the death toll this year on the streets of Philadelphia, where more than 300 lives have been erased in gunplay. For years Chaney has spoken to young people in an effort to steer them from that end. “But I am done talking to young people,” he said sharply. “I want to talk to their [bleeping] parents. That kid was born to somebody.” The players he coached came to him with what he calls “the same scars.” Few knew how deeply he loved being with them, even if it appeared to some that he had crossed the line into crazy. He laughed as he told of the story of a radio interview Eddie Jones gave as a sophomore.

“We were down by 10 at the half to some team, and I let our guys have it,” said Chaney, seated at the bar as the crowd formed around him. “So, the game is over and we win by a few points and a radio reporter asks Eddie, ‘What did coach say to you at the half?’ And Eddie told him: ‘He called us a bunch of [bleeps].’ My wife happened to be listening and when I walked through the door later, she said: ‘How could you say that to those boys?’”

Laughter circulated up and down the bar.

Chaney continued, “Next day, I called in Eddie and said, ‘What are you doing, saying I called you all a bunch of [bleeps]?’” And he said, “Because you did, coach!”

Chaney chuckled and added, “My players were like a blanket to me. And I covered myself with them. Whenever I was in trouble, they were always there for me to go to. They gave me the



JORI KLEIN/Daily News

Retired basketball coach John Chaney throws a treat to Simba as his owner Frank Shindel smiles.

strength and conviction to do what I believed in. I loved them.”

Even Chaney himself is uncertain what he will miss other than the players as the season unfolds. Competitively, he hopes that he has replaced some small piece of that by playing golf, which he says is something he can do for his whole life. Out at Walnut Lane each day unless the weather is poor, coach slips inside his cart and joins up with whoever happens to be out there that day. Depending how he feels, he will play from seven to 10 holes.

Ordinarily, they will play for 25 cents a hole, then up it to 50 cents. Unobservant of golf protocol, Chaney chatted voluminously while he played the course, talking on subjects as far afield as what it would be like to coach Tiger Woods. “Oh,” Chaney said, “he would have been a good basketball player, as competitive as he is.” When a friend sliced a tee shot, he looked back over his shoulder at Chaney and said, “Golf is a quiet game.” Chaney cackled with laughter and said, “Now you are going to blame me for your bad shots.” Chaney himself fared far better with the dogs than he did with his clubs, which invariably seemed to deposit the ball into high grass or an even less advantageous area. When a ball he hit landed behind

a tree, he picked it up, placed it in an unobstructed spot and swung. The ball bounced up on the green.

The friend said, “Nice shot.”

Chaney sighed. “Finally,” he said. “But I know I am getting better at this. Even some success keeps you going. I remember I hit a shot from the fairway and was looking all over for it. Then somebody shouted at me, ‘Look in the hole, dummy!’”

Coach was sitting at lunch with some friends at the South Philadelphia Tap Room last week when he told yet another story. This one had to do with a painting he and Maloney once happened to see called “The Bench.” Chaney said, “All you could see in it were the legs of the players, and all of them were white.

Suddenly, that dawned on Maloney, who told the artist: “Hey, this painting is racist!”

“What?” the artist said.

“Where are all the black players?” Maloney asked.

To which the artist replied, “Out on the court!”

Chaney howled with laughter and said, “Oh, that Jimmy!” Some sadness bled into his voice then, for a friend suddenly gone too soon and for days that now have passed. The program he

sweated over for so long is now in what he calls the capable hands of Dunphy. Because he does not want to be perceived as second-guessing Dunphy, Chaney does not plan to attend any Temple games this year. But he does plan to keep a hand in with his former players and extend himself graciously to the public, which he did that day at the South Philadelphia Tap Room when a crowd of fans surrounded him.

One of them asked him, “How many years did you coach at Temple?”

Chaney chuckled and said, “Too many. I should have retired long ago.”

The group bubbled with laughter. Chaney then reached into his bag and began handing out autographed photos to some of the younger kids. He told them, “When I kick the bucket, they should be worth 35 cents.”

One by one, they shook his hand and departed. Chaney began to organize some papers in his bag when a woman who had been in the group approached him again, pointed to her friend across the room and said: “We just got back from burying her mother. This has been the highlight of her day. You are so kind. Thank you.”

Coach hugged her and replied, “No, thank you.” ★