

# RADIO GOLF

## Synopsis

*Radio Golf*, August Wilson's last play, is also the last play chronologically in his famous Pittsburgh Cycle. In the play we find Harmond Wilks, a man who discovers both himself and the place that birthed him at a crossroads. On the verge of an almost-guaranteed win as a mayoral candidate, Wilks finds his identity shaken when his morals and ideals are questioned by those around him. Ultimately, he must recognize what the price of his success is and decide whether he is willing to pay it.

## Characters

**ELDER JOSEPH "OLD JOE" BARLOW:** Recently returned to the Hill District where he was born in 1918. Although ostensibly as harmless as he is homespun, his temperament belies a life checkered by run-ins with the law and a series of wives. He sees and calls things plainly, requires little and seeks only harmony.

**HARMOND WILKS:** Real-estate developer seeking mayoral candidacy. He grew up a privileged and responsible son of the Hill District and intends to bring the neighborhood back from urban blight through gentrification, while making a fortune in the process. He cares about the city of Pittsburgh, the neighborhood and its people, but is caught between what is politically expedient and what is morally and ethically just.

**ROOSEVELT HICKS:** Bank vice president and avid golfer, as well as Harmond's business partner and college roommate. Roosevelt is preoccupied with his financial status and getting green time. He values the end result of a transaction more than the practical or spiritual virtues of a job well done. Had he any time for self-reflection, he might describe himself favorably as a consummate materialist and conspicuous consumer.

**MAME WILKS:** Harmond's wife of more than twenty years and a professional public relations representative. She is focused on Harmond's success, as well as her own, and confident that she has the proper plan to achieve both. Firm, independent and ambitious, her love of and belief in her husband are tested by his struggle to stay focused and on message.

**STERLING JOHNSON:** Self-employed contractor and neighborhood handyman who robbed a bank thirty years ago. Sterling and Harmond attended the same parochial school as boys, but the economically disadvantaged Sterling chose in youthful recklessness to rob a bank rather than build one. Now an older, reformed pragmatist, Sterling finds pride in his work and in his independence.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-01  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Inspirational  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 3

OLD JOE

They supposed to have some Christians out at the Mission but they forgot how to call on God. I seen the people call God down. They don't do that too much no more. But I seen it happen. Over on the Northside. The fourteenth day of November 1937. The people called him down and God came in a blaze of Glory. I seen him. Had a pot of water say he could make it boil without fire. The people wanna bet against God. You can't bet against God and win. The people put up their money. God walked over and stuck his hand in the pot and stirred it around. Told one of the fellows, "Now you do it." Man walked over and tried to stick his hand in the pot and had to draw it back. The pot was boiling! If you had thrown some beans in there you could have cooked your supper. He asked the people if they wondered how he could do that. He said, "I am He." He didn't say he was God. He just say, "I am He." But who else could he have been. Made a pot boil without fire. Can you do it? If you can't do it you ain't got nothing to say.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-02  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Patriotism  
Type 3: War

Act 1; Scene 4

OLD JOE

That's a nice pin you got there. That look like the flag.

Nice colors. The Red White and Blue. We had a flag during the war. Company B Fourth Battalion. Fellow named Joe Mott carried the flag. He got shot in the head on the second of November 1942. He was betting against it but he lost.

Lots of men died under that flag. That American flag was everywhere. Joe Mott carried it into battle but it was everywhere. In the mess hall. In the dance hall. We had a great big mess hall and they would bring the women in from the town and we'd have a great big old dance. You look up and there would be that flag hanging behind the bandstand. That flag was everywhere. You saw it in the morning when you woke up and you saw it at night before you went to bed. Sometimes you saw it in your sleep. When the time come and I saw Joe Mott fall with that flag...shot right through the head... bullet went in one end and come out the other...I don't know where it went after that. When I saw him fall I said, "No, I ain't gonna let you get away with nothing like that." That's what I said when I picked up that flag. This the flag on *this* side of the battle. That's what side I'm on. Joe Mott ain't died for nothing. If his life don't mean nothing then my life don't mean nothing. I had sense enough to see that. A lot of people can't see that. I can't let him die and let the flag lay there. I was the closest one to it. I didn't even think about it. I just picked it up. I picked it up and carried it right up to the day I got discharged. December 4, 1945. I got out the army and went and saw Joe Mott's mother. She live down in Georgia. I went down there and saw her. Walking down the street a white fellow stopped me. Reached up and tore my flag off my coat. Told me I ain't had no right to walk around with an American flag. I hope they let you keep yours.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-03  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Love

Act 1; Scene 3

HARMOND WILKS

You striking out in the dark and there's nobody there but yourself. You're all alone. I used to walk around in the dark complaining 'cause I couldn't find a woman. I didn't understand. I had everything a woman could want. I had money, I had confidence, I was doing something with my life. They all used to tell me I was too intense. Too serious. That I needed to enjoy life.

Shouldn't worry so much about the things I couldn't change. Then I met Mame. The first time I saw Mame it was raining. I thought she was gonna melt. The rain look like it hurt her. Like the two wasn't supposed to go together. You couldn't mix them up. That's what made her stand out. She had a frown on her face and the rain was beating on her. She hurt from the injustice of it. That's what made me like her. She could be strong and soft at the same time. I said I like that. I wished I had an umbrella but I didn't. I went and stood and blocked the rain. I told her she looked too pretty to be getting all wet. That's how we got talking. She called the rain some names I ain't gonna repeat.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-04  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Race

Act 2; Scene 4

HARMOND WILKS

No. Common sense says that ain't right. We see it different. No matter what you always on the edge. If you go to the center you look up and find everything done shifted and the center is now the edge. The rules change every day. You got to change with them. After awhile the edge starts to get worn. You don't notice it at first but you're fraying with it. Oh, no, look... We got a black mayor. We got a black CEO. The head of our department is black. We couldn't possibly be prejudiced. Got two hundred and fourteen people work in the department and two blacks but we couldn't possibly be race-conscious. Look, we even got a black football coach. You guys can sing. You can run fast. Boy, I love Nat King Cole. I love Michael Jordan. I just love him. We got a black guy works in management. Twenty-four million blacks living in poverty but it's their fault. Look, we got a black astronaut. I just love Oprah. How do you guys dance like that? After awhile that center starts to give. They keep making up the rules as you go along. They keep changing the maps. Then you realize you're never going to get to that center. It's all a house of cards. Everything resting on a slim edge. Looking back you can see it all. Wasn't nothing solid about it. Everything was an *if* and a *when* and a *maybe*. Of course . . .but not really. Yes . . .but not really. I don't want to live my life like that, Roosevelt.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-05  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Sports  
Type 3: Freedom

Act 1; Scene 1

ROOSEVELT HICKS

I signed up two more kids last week. That makes eighteen. I just want these kids to know what it feels like to hit a golf ball. I hit my first golf ball I asked myself where have I been? How'd I miss this? I couldn't believe it. I felt free. Truly free. For the first time. I watched the ball soar down the driving range. I didn't think it could go so high. It just kept going higher and higher. I felt something lift off of me. Some weight I was carrying around and didn't know it. I felt like the world was open to me. Everything and everybody. I never did feel exactly like that anymore. I must have hit a hundred golf balls trying to get that feeling. But that first time was worth everything. I felt like I had my dick in my hand and was waving it around like a club. "I'm a man! Anybody want some of this come and get it!" That was the best feeling of my life.

That's why I keep my golf clubs in the trunk of my car just in case I drive by a golf course. I keep looking for that feeling. That's what I want these kids to have. That'll give them a chance at life. I wish somebody had come along and taught me how to play golf when I was ten. That'll set you on a path to life where everything is open to you. You don't have to hide and crawl under a rock just 'cause you black. Feel like you don't belong in the world.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-06  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Crime  
Type 3: Judicial Process

Act 2; Scene 3

ROOSEVELT HICKS

Mr. Barlow? Let me tell you about that old crazy motherfucker. *(Rummages about his desk until he finds the set of papers.)* Here's your Mr. Barlow. I had Sergeant Griffin fax me this.

*(Roosevelt scans and reads from the rap sheet excerpts that strike his eye:)*

Fraud. Hijacking. Grand theft. Assault. Loitering. Drunkenness. Disturbing the peace. Vagrancy. He has a record go all the way back to 1937. Stole a crate of chickens in 1938. Burglary. First-degree assault. Born 1918. Highest grade completed: fourth. Married. Divorced. Married. Divorced. Defendant says he is the father of eight children, ages six to eighteen. This was in 1942. Probably didn't take care of any of them. He too busy stealing. Spent eight months on the county farm, 1939. Discharged from Army in 1945. Two years for assault of a police officer, 1948. Three years Western State Penitentiary for hijacking 1952. Thirty days loitering, 1957. Sixty days vagrancy, 1958. Spent four months in Mayview State Hospital. Sent for ninety-day observation. Was kept an additional thirty days for further observation. It wouldn't have taken me but thirty minutes to tell he's not all there. Defendant reports his address as 1839 Wylie. Was caught breaking and entering. Defendant claims to have lost key to said residence. Here you go! This what I'm talking about. This is how crazy that nigger is. Defendant claims to be a member of a lost tribe said to have migrated from the Arabian peninsula five hundred B.C. Defendant states he wants to bring charges against the United States Government for harboring kidnappers. Claims to have journeyed to a City of Bones sunken in the Atlantic Ocean. See? I told you. You can't get any crazier than that.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-07  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Commerce

Act 2; Scene 4

ROOSEVELT HICKS

Each one crazier than the next. I always told myself niggers could be doing a little better than they was doing. I thought it was because they was lazy but I see now these niggers done let the white man drive them crazy. Now you take this man. He didn't grow up. He still playing cowboys and Indians. He hasn't stopped to think about how he's going to get that paint off of his face. Now why he do that? Why is he walking around with a can of paint? We haven't got to that part yet. That's the part which proves the equation. Here's a man who's painting a house that is going to be torn down. Now you think about that a minute. They are going to tear down the house and he declares war on me. He doesn't have enough sense to know who the enemy is. I'm not the enemy. The enemy is right in his mirror. I don't understand. There isn't much I understand anymore. I don't understand you. I stood by and watched you commit suicide. For what? A raggedy-ass house. I don't understand. And you don't have nothing to show for it. The judge threw out the injunction. He ordered the demolition. The bulldozers are up there now.

The judge dismissed the temporary injunction and ordered the demolition.

Bulldozers start at 10:15.

Harmond, did you really think the judge was going to let that raggedy-ass house stand in the way of a multimillion-dollar redevelopment project that's spearheaded by the city? Common sense would tell you otherwise.



RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-08  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 4

MAME WILKS

I got a call this morning from the governor's office. They cancelled my next interview and said they didn't want to reschedule any further interviews with me at this time.

You jumped but I'm falling too. I'm the wife of Harmond Wilks. That's all the governor sees. All any of the other board members see. What all our friends see. I tied myself so tight to you that there is no me. I don't know if I can carry this any further.

I have a center too. What happens when that caves in? I have questions too. You're acting like a kid who because things don't go his way takes his ball and goes home. That's what your problem is. You've always been the kid who had the ball. You're the one with the glove and the bat. You had the bike when nobody else had one. All your life you always had everything go your way.

I'm still standing here, Harmond. I still love you. But this is all you now. Your campaign, that old house, the Hill... You're on your own with all that. I can't live my life for you. And you can't live yours for me. But I'm still standing here.

*(Harmond takes Mame up in his arms for a long embrace. His cell phone begins to ring.)*

See you tonight.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-09  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Employment/Unemployment

Act 1; Scene 4

STERLING JOHNSON

Naw...you don't understand. I'm my own union. I got my own everything. Except my own bank. But I got my own truck. I got my own tools. I got my own rules and I got my own union. I don't play no games. I have to have my own. That's the only way I got anything. I've been going through the back door all my life. See, people get confused about me. They did that ever since we was in school. But I know how to row the boat. I been on the water a long time. I know what it takes to plug the holes. I ain't dumb. Even though some people think I am. That give me an advantage. I found that out when I was in the orphanage. Mr. Redwood taught me that. He told me, "You ain't dumb, you just faster than everybody else." I was so fast it made me look slow. I was waiting for them to catch up... that made it look like I was standing around doing nothing. They kept me behind in the fourth grade 'cause I wouldn't add twelve and twelve. I thought it was stupid. Everybody know there's twelve to a dozen and twenty-four to two dozens. I don't care if it's donuts or oranges. They handed me the test and I turned it in blank. If you had seventeen dollars and you bought a parrot for twelve dollars how many dollars would you have left? Who the hell gonna spend twelve dollars on a parrot? What you gonna do with it? Do you know how many chickens you can buy for twelve dollars? They thought I didn't know the answer. Every time somebody come to adopt me they say, "Well, Sterling's a little slow." That stuck with me. I started to believe it myself. Maybe they knew something I didn't know. That's when Mr. Redwood told me, "You ain't dumb. You just faster than everybody else." I've been going in the back doors all my life 'cause they don't never let me in the front.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-10  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Inspirational

Act 2; Scene 1

STERLING JOHNSON

“Come one, come all. Paint Party, 1839 Wylie Avenue. Thursday, ten A.M. Music, dancing, refreshments.” Put that up. I organized this. Let’s see you tear down the house now. I know that house. That’s Aunt Ester’s house. You should go up there. I bet you ain’t even been inside. Used to be a line to her door every Tuesday. I went up there to see Aunt Ester once. Had to go up to the red door three different times before she see me. She was sitting in this room. You had to go through some curtains into this room and she was just sitting there. Had this peacefulness about her. Aunt Ester told me I got good understanding. She say that before I could say anything to her. She just looked at me and said that. I talked to her a long while. Told her my whole life story. I asked her how old she was. She say she was three hundred and forty-nine years old. That was twenty-nine years ago. I was sorry to hear that she died. I went up to see Aunt Ester cause I was feeling sorry for myself for being an orphan and I was walking around carrying that. She told me set it down. “Make better what you have and you have best.” Told me if I wanted to carry something carry some tools. I’ve been carrying tools ever since and I’ve been at peace with myself. You should go up there.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-11  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Race

Act 2; Scene 4

STERLING JOHNSON

You got too big too fast. They don't like that. If you hadn't did it to yourself they was laying for you. They don't mind you playing their game but you can't outplay them. If you score too many points they change the rules. That's what the problem was...you scored too many points. If things had kept on going like that you was gonna have to buy you a gun. Time this is over you ain't gonna be able to walk down the street without somebody pointing at you. If they point *and* whisper you in trouble. You'd have to move out the state. Start over again somewhere fresh. That is if you still wanna play the game. If you still wanna play the game you gonna have to relearn the rules. See...they done changed. If you relearn the rules they'll let you back on the playing field. But now you crippled. You ain't got but one leg. You be driving around looking for handicapped parking. Get back on the field and every time you walk by somebody they check their pockets. That's enough to kill anybody right there. If you had to take a little hit like that all day every day how long you think you can last? I give you six months.

But do you know when the game is over. When you in an argument the best thing to do is to stop arguing. I got in an argument with Buddy Will over Muhammad Ali. Buddy said Muhammad Ali won all his fights by out thinking everybody. Say he used psychology. I asked him what the hell his hands were doing while his mind was thinking. Told him to go ask Joe Frazier what they were doing. He ain't had enough sense to see what I was saying, so I say, "You right." And walked away. That's what you got to do. Like that man stole three hundred million dollars. He say, "You right." They fined him thirty million dollars and give him a year in jail. The way I figure that leave him two hundred and seventy million dollars profit.

Unless my math is wrong. Giving in is good for your blood pressure too. Your heart and everything else.