



# GARY GALYEAN'S GOLF LETTER®

THE INSIDE REPORT ON WORLD GOLF

NUMBER 352

OUR 32<sup>ND</sup> YEAR

OCTOBER 2021

Dear Subscriber:

**N**ATIONAL SPORTS TEAMS for centuries have been used for political purposes by national leaders looking for admiration by association with someone else's success.

The World Cup is the most obvious example in our time, as are Olympic, Ryder Cup, Presidents Cup, and Test Match teams. Those who shine in country v. country sports competitions appear at the White House, Buckingham Palace, Red Square, and city halls in their respective domains.

When the United States (amateur) ice hockey team defeated the four-time defending gold medal (professional) Soviet team at Lake Placid during the 1980 Olympics it was a Cold War victory, a David-and-Goliath moment, a symbol of U.S. excellence, resolution and accomplishment that spawned books, movies, decades of speaking engagements, and countless photographs with politicians unafraid to take credit for something to which they contributed nothing.

The Summer and Winter Olympic Games are political stages. Six months after Lake Placid, the U.S. boycotted the Summer Olympics in protest of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; eight years before (1972), 11 Israeli athletes were murdered by Palestinian terrorists at the games in Munich; and twelve years before Lake Placid (1968), U.S. athletes raised their clenched fists on the medal stand in Mexico City in opposition to their government.

For pure, political exploitation, no Olympic Games come close to what happened in Berlin in 1936. The symbols of Nazi Germany were in full bloom until Jesse Owens' winning of four gold medals left Hitler's Aryan "supremacy" in a crumbled heap. The golf story that follows took a similar toll on the Nazi blowhards following the Berlin Olympics.

## When England First Turned Hitler August 1936

Ten days after the close of the 1936 Olympic Games and three years before the declaration of war between Great Britain and Germany, the Third Reich hosted an international golf tournament in Baden-Baden, the results of which were exhilarating for the British and wonderfully embarrassing for der Führer.

Six years ago, THE GOLF LETTER focused on the return of golf to the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Setting that historical stage, we reflected on the 1900 and 1904 Olympics in which golf was officially included and then dropped due to

lack of interest.

We were quasi corrected by a particularly knowledgeable English subscriber who wrote to inform us that golf was also a part of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, also known by some as the Nazi Olympics. While golf was not officially a part of the Olympics, a tournament was organized close enough to the games that golf might be considered an extension, if you will, of the sort of international competition that had taken place at the Olympics in Berlin.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

GROSSER GOLFPREIS DER NATIONEN  
August 1936

### HOLIDAY GIFTS

SAVINGS FOR CURRENT SUBSCRIBERS

- In November, gift or renewal forms will be snail-mailed to those subscribers who have given THE GOLF LETTER as a gift in past years.
- Following that, an additional, generic e-mailing will be made to all subscribers who may want to make such gifts this season.

Our subscriber mailed us a small booklet describing the details of the teams, the competition, the prizes, and some historical components. It is titled *ADOLF, ARNOLD & TOMMY - GOLF AND THE 1936 BERLIN OLYMPICS* and was written by Derek Holden. Ninety-nine per cent of the story that follows below must be credited to Mr. Holden's authorship of this book, as well as the support he received from the English golf clubs that were involved and with whom Mr. Holden is affiliated.

This story is not unlike others that include the truly remarkable 1936 Olympic performances of Jesse Owens, the University of Washington's eight-man rowing team, Louis Zamperini, and Glenn Edgar Morris. The after-Olympic golf competition has never been, nor should it be, as prominent a story as those mentioned above. Nonetheless, the performances of two English golfers did provide Great Britain another notable moment to significantly embarrass Nazi arrogance generally and Hitler specifically.

### The Event

Hans von Tschammer und Osten was appointed in 1933 by Hitler as the Reich Sports Minister. He, in turn, appointed Karl Henkell to serve as president of the German Golf Union (D.G.V.). The ineluctable Henry Longhurst referred to Mr. Henkell as the Golf Führer.

Mr. Henkell, in turn, appointed the presidents of all the various German golf clubs. Mr. Henkell, it should also be noted, was the brother-in-law of Joachim von Ribbentrop. Mr. von Ribbentrop was a businessman and close friend of Hitler. He became the Nazi foreign minister in 1938 and was hanged eight years later for his war crimes.

Mr. von Tschammer und Osten decided to highlight golf, tennis and equestrian events immediately following the Olympic Games in Berlin that were to take place during the first two weeks of August.

He created the Golfpreis der Nationen (Golf Prize of the Nations), referred to by Mr. Henkell in writing as the "Grosser Golfpreis der Nationen" or *Grand Golf Prize of the Nations*. *Grosser* is also part of the title as engraved on the individual salvers presented to each of the winners. Thirty-six countries were invited to compete on August 26 - 27, 1936, at Baden-Baden G.C., which is

actually located at Baden-Oos, a seven minute train ride from Baden-Baden.

Baden-Baden G.C. had hosted the German Open twice before: first in 1911, when Harry Vardon won; and again, the following year, when J.H. Taylor beat Ted Ray in a 9-hole playoff following a tie after regulation play. Mr. Ray took just 28 strokes in the playoff.

From the 36 countries invited to play only seven chose to do so. It would be, however, the first time that teams of two competitors from seven countries had ever competed. The countries accepting the invitation to compete were Czechoslovakia, England, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, and Italy.

The format would be four 18-hole rounds of stroke play by each team of two competitors. The team with the lowest aggregate score would be the winner.

### The Prize

The prizes as described by Mr. Holden:

*The first prize, donated by Adolf Hitler, was an impressive silver-gilt salver, inlaid with eight large amber discs, created in the workshop of goldsmith Professor Emil Lettre, who had been appointed to the Berlin Court by Kaiser Willhelm. Amber was selected by the jeweler as it was recognized as a true German stone, found primarily along the southern shores of the Baltic.*

*The second prize was a beautiful Meibner vase being donated by Reich Sports Minister, Hans von Tschammer und Osten, and the third prize, donated by the Federal Governor of Baden, took the form of a silver box from the workshop of artist Karl Lang-Hanau. The winners received not only the team prize but also a number of individual items.*

### England's Team

There were some among the British sports press who opposed British participation in the Grosser Golfpreis der Nationen, just as there had been opposition from various corners of the world about participating in the Olympics in Berlin. Indeed, the Soviet Union did not compete in Berlin. Ultimately, however, the English Golf Union (E.G.U.) did accept the invitation to play at Baden-Baden. The two men selected to represent England were Arnold Bentley, 25, and Tommy Thirsk, 36.



Both men were accomplished amateurs and during their subsequent competitive years became widely known throughout Great Britain. Mr. Bentley was born in Southport, was a member of Hesketh [Captain in 1953], and would later become a member of the Royal & Ancient G.C. He played 37 times for Lancashire between 1930 and 1954. In 1928, he played for England in the Boys' International. Mr. Bentley played in the internationals against France 1937 - 1939. Also in 1939, he won the English Amateur (5 and 4 over W. Sutton) at Birkdale.

Mr. Thirsk, 11 years Mr. Bentley's elder, was a natural athlete who excelled in many sports. He quickly assimilated golf eventually playing off +2. He played at Bridlington G.C. and became its Captain in 1935. During this same time he was a member at Ganton G.C. and became its president in 1972. He played for England more than 30 times and captained England against France in 1937 when Mr. Bentley was also on that year's team. In 1934, two years prior to the Baden-Baden tournament, Mr. Thirsk reached the semi-finals in the English Amateur at Formby.

Mr. Holden writes:

*And so it was the E.G.U. who selected Hesketh Golf Club's Arnold Bentley and Bridlington Golf Club's Tommy Thirsk, a Lancastrian and a Yorkshireman, to challenge Germany and the other five nations for the GROSSER GOLFPREIS DER NATIONEN. Thirsk turned out to be an inspired choice, in spite of having been a late substitute for that highly successful millionaire golfer rejoicing in the name Francis Francis.*

### Day One (Aug. 26, 1936)

The first day's competition was attended by Mr. von Ribbentrop, who at that time, prior to his 1938 appointment as Foreign Minister for the Third Reich, was the German ambassador to the Court of St. James. Mr. Hitler, however, stayed away expecting a German victory the following day and saving the magnificence of his presence for the presentation of his trophy to a victorious German team. Indeed, following the 36 holes played on the first day, Germany led by five strokes over England and ten over France. Germany's 19-year-old Leonard von Beckerath scored 68, 67 = 135, which was five strokes better than Mr. Thirsk who recorded a pair of 70s.

The German team score totaled 282; the English 287; and the French 292. Naturally, the Germans were elated. Anticipation was high for a victory the next day, and Hitler's appearance for the requisite Nazi gloating and prize giving.

### Day Two (Aug. 27, 1936)

Both England and France found their pluck, bravery and bottle overnight, and the second day brought a staggering turnaround. Where Mr. von Beckerath's individual score (68, 67) was low for the first day; Mr. Thirsk answered on the second day with two 65s.

At some point during or following the morning rounds of the second day, Mr. von Ribbentrop miscalculated the German team's chance for overall victory - never a good idea for an aspiring Nazi. He sent a message to Berlin that a German victory was imminent. This put Hitler's motorcade in motion and headed for Baden-Baden.

However, as the final result came into view, both England and France surged ahead of the Germans. Mr. Thirsk's second 65 of the day and Mr. Bentley's 70, 75 were good enough to win the trophy from France by four and Germany by twelve!

Realizing, and probably terrified, that his Führer would not be happy if he were to arrive after an English shellacking and a third place German shortcoming, Mr. von Ribbentrop sped away to intercept Hitler en route. According to Mr. Holden's account, Hitler was predictably furious and ordered his driver to return to Berlin. Mr. Hen-

kell was designated to present the trophy to the England team.

"The England team had achieved the distinction of turning back Hitler in his own country," wrote Mr. Holden. Recounting the story years later, THE TIMES wrote, "It was not the last time the British would turn back Hitler in his own country. Like most Sunday hackers, the Führer failed to get out of the final bunker."

### The Trophy Trail

Messrs. Bentley and Thirsk won the Grosser Granpreis der Nationen Trophy for England. As such, it became the property of the E.G.U. Individual honors were won by Mr. Thirsk with his total score of 270 which was seven

#### GROSSER GOLFPREIS DER NATIONEN

August 26-27, 1936

Baden-Oos Golf Club

##### ENGLAND - 562

A.L. Bentley 73, 74, 70, 75 = 292

T.J. Thirsk 70, 70, 65, 65 = 270

##### FRANCE - 566

M. Carlhian 72, 71, 68, 66 = 277

J. Leglise 76, 73, 69, 71 = 289

##### GERMANY - 574

L. v. Beckerath 68, 67, 72, 71 = 278

C.A. Hellmers 75, 72, 76, 73 = 296

strokes better than the Frenchman Mr. Carlhian and eight better than Mr. von Beckerath.

Because the E.G.U. had no permanent home and nowhere to display the prize, nearly 20 years later, the trophy passed to the Golfers' Club, a notable social club established in London's West End in 1893. The E.G.U. approached the Golfers' Club in 1953 about an arrangement that would accommodate a home for the E.G.U. Following an agreement between the two organizations, Hitler's Trophy, as it is sometimes referred to, was presented to the Golfers' Club at a dinner on Feb. 15, 1955.

About this same time the membership of the Golfers' Club began to diminish, as expenses rose. By 1978, The Golfers' Club had become a proprietary club and was taken over by a property developer who bought its assets, which included the trophy, and liabilities. This venture was ultimately unsuccessful and the trophy ended up at the developer's house in Glasgow as a part of his personal property.

When approached in 2004 about selling the Granpreis salver to the Hesketh G.C., the developer said he had no wish to sell, but he would lend it to the Club if they agreed to insure it for a six figure amount, which the Club could not afford.

In 2012, it was announced that the trophy would be auctioned. The auction catalogue placed the value of the salver between £10,000 and £20,000. Hesketh went to work raising funds among their membership in various ways. In addition to Hesketh, Mr. Thirsk's home club of Bridlington and his other club, Ganton, were interested in the trophy. However, none of the three clubs wished to bid against one another. Bridlington declared a lack of interest. The Royal & Ancient G.C. communicated that they would not be bidding as they felt the trophy belonged with either Hesketh or Ganton. Hesketh's

enthusiasm won the day and Ganton reluctantly dropped out of the bidding.

On the day of the auction, the bidding for the trophy began at £9,000 followed by a commission bid of £9,500. So it went, back and forth, until the commission bidding stopped at £14,500. At £15,000 (£19,000 after tax and commission) Hesketh G.C. became the owner. The commission bid was later revealed to have come from the German Golf Archive in Cologne.

The Grosser Granpreis der Nationen is now displayed in the mixed lounge at the Hesketh G.C. Mr. Bentley's individual salver and many of his other golf trophies are displayed in the Club's Bentley Room.

### Hesketh's Hitler Tree

A tree was planted at Hesketh to commemorate the England Team's victory at Baden-Baden. This seems to have happened after the victory and before the war began. Mr. Holden described the tree's place in the Club's history:

*Curiously a small potted fir tree was also presented [to Hesketh] and this was planted on a sandhill behind the flagstaff, at the front of the clubhouse. It became known as the "Hitler Tree" and during the war years, members are reported to have relieved themselves against it, as they departed from the Club in the late evening - or, as Harry Foster succinctly put it, in his book ANNALS OF THE HESKETH GOLF CLUB, "the tree benefited from regular applications of nitrogen enriched surplus water. It certainly prospered; it has grown considerably and has taken up a most unusual attitude, one branch growing almost horizontal to the ground."*



For C.G.M.:

*"I asked, 'So what's it all about?'  
and you know he couldn't tell me."*

A London taxi driver who recognized  
his fare as Bertrand Russell

Yours vly truly,

Gary A. Galyean  
Editor & Publisher

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