



GARY GALYEAN'S GOLF LETTER

THE INSIDE REPORT ON WORLD GOLF

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Dear Subscriber:

“ENJOYED YOUR LAST ISSUE [the evolution from 22 to 18 holes at St. Andrews] but notice that you didn’t address where we really came from,” was an e-mail *soigné* from an Englishman. January’s issue was stage setting for now describing the primitive game that evolved on the linksland of St. Andrews at least four centuries *before* the standard of 18 holes was agreed to in 1746.

How & Why Golf Began at St. Andrews

David Joy, the noted golf historian and fourth generation St. Andrian, authored the book *ST. ANDREWS & THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP* in 1999. In his introduction, Mr. Joy states that 6,000 years ago *Muckross* was the name for the area that eventually became St. Andrews. It derives from the Pictish language used by hostile tribes who lived north of the Firth of Forth. It means “headland of swine” or “land of the wild boar”.

In the fourth century after the birth of Christ, St. Regulus, a Greek monk attempting to hide Christian relics from Emperor Constantine in remote corners of the world and establish a church named for St. Andrew, either stopped or was shipwrecked in Fife on the coast of Muckross. The monk is claimed to have brought with him three fingers of St. Andrew’s right hand, the upper bone of an arm, one kneecap, and one of his teeth. St. Regulus traveled with 16 other monks and two virgins.

Thus, St. Andrews, as the area became known, was established as the ecclesiastical center of Scotland. In 1158, construction began on the Cathedral there, which is the largest church ever to be built in Scotland. At least two significant events occurred during the 160 years it took to

complete the Cathedral: 1.) The linksland that juts into St. Andrews Bay north of the Cathedral, and provides a link between the estuary’s safe harbor and the town of St. Andrews, was bequeathed to the town residents for, according to Mr. Joy, recreational use and the breeding of rabbits; and 2.) The Third Crusade (1189-1192) was taken up and, to give the lads a nice send off, the Swilken (or Swilcan) Bridge was built so they could easily—and with some panache—cross the Swilken Burn. Six-hundred years later the bridge would, of course, become a great landmark of the Old Course, and the burn its only water hazard (sic).

The Cathedral was consecrated on July 5, 1318, with King Robert I in attendance, having ridden his horse up the 390 ft. center aisle. There is nothing quite like the clapping of horse hooves in the nave of your local cathedral to let everyone know you are open for business. St. Andrews became the centre of the Medieval Catholic Church in Scotland, the seat of the Archdiocese of St. Andrews, and the seat for the Bishops of St. Andrews.

As St. Andrews became a center for monastic writing and teaching, it is not surprising that the University of St. Andrews was established less than a century later in 1412. It is the third oldest university in Great Britain [Oxford-before 1167; Cambridge-1209]. Three signatories to the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America graduated from the University, including Benjamin Franklin.

It seems likely that at some point between the completion of the Cathedral and the founding of the University, the Dutch arrived in St. Andrews by sea with visions of their game *kolven* in their heads.

As evidenced by their artwork, the Dutch began playing *kolven* before the 13th century, first on land and

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later on ice. For the land game they struck croquet-sized balls with large, wooden mallets from starting points and played to castle and courthouse doorways. Four holes, totaling approximately 4,000 yards in length, were played.

A kindred Dutch word *kloven* (with the L and the O transposed) referred to the butt of musket. Indeed, *kloveniers* were guildsmen depicted in paintings of the time. What that might mean to the game kolven is not clear. However by 1297, Dutch portraiture depicted young people with kolven implements and balls. In later years, kolven players were depicted wearing kilts, a form of dress unknown to the Dutch and attributed to their trading interaction with the Scots. In 1654, Rembrandt etched kolven players on the winter ice. The words *puje* (putt) and *tuitje* (tee) had become part of Dutch nomenclature.

Dutch trading ships routinely sailed from the Netherlands across the North Sea to the east coast of Scotland. Whatever kolven was at that time, the notion of it came ashore 1¼ miles from St. Andrews on the duned banks of the Eden River estuary.

The trading ships could anchor safely in the estuary buffered by the peninsula of the linksland. Their crews would come ashore and make their way to town - to the taverns. To pass the time while walking across the linksland (non-arable land) between the whins and the gorse (thick, prickly shrubs), they began swatting at pebbles with sticks. The number of strokes it took to get to town presumably determined who bought the drinks once they arrived.

It is thought intermediate targets (holes) were introduced in order to make keeping track of the score easier, and to make the number of possible bets greater. Seven holes were dug as successive targets on the way to town. They were placed in the larger, flatter areas that were uncluttered with gorse—eventually they became putting greens. [NOTE: By 1834, a second hole was dug in each of the seven flat areas, to ease the congestion of those playing out having to navigate those playing home. Those double-holed greens are the same seven double greens used today.] The game of golf, and the Old Course over which it is still played, began in this way—but in its own way—very different from kolven.

The first written reference to golf appeared in 1457. The popularity of the game had to be outlawed to give military training more attention. In that year, the Scotch Parliament under James II banned the playing of golf and football so that archery would be practiced in preparation for war with England.

The ban was lifted in 1502. Fifty years later golf was again mentioned in writing when Archbishop Hamilton was licensed to breed rabbits on the linksland so long as such breeding did not interfere with the residents' golf.

A few years after this (1559), the arson and havoc subcommittee of the Scottish Reformation, motivated by a three-day John Knox tirade, incited a riot that resulted in the burning of St. Andrews Cathedral, and the merriment of St. Andrews life took something of a breather for about two hundred years. It was that long before the Society of St. Andrews

Golfers became the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews and our game flourished once again.

“That’s Not Done Here”

When Ben Hogan (1912-1997) missed a short putt at the 1950 U.S. Open (Merion - East) and a spectator rudely applauded, the late William C. Campbell (1923-2013) approached the man and said, “That’s not done here.”

The man replied, “Mister, I paid my way. I’ll do what I want.” However, Mr. Campbell recounted that the man was quiet for the remainder of the round.

Mr. Campbell, who was President of the United States Golf Association (1982 & 1983), and Captain of the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews (1987-1988)—the only individual to ever serve in both positions—told this story to the Associated Press by way of reflecting upon the excitable fans that were drawn to golf in the wake of Tiger Woods’ enormous popularity.

At the 1997 U.S. Open at Congressional, Davis Love, III, was so struck by the spectators’ change in decorum that he stated publicly it was the most ill-behaved gallery he had seen in all his years of competitive golf.

No one suggested a repression of enthusiasm, rather



the maintenance of decorum and manners that golf galleries have typically maintained, even as we have watched spectator behavior eroded in other sports.

As Mr. Campbell said years ago, "It doesn't take many coming into the game from the outside to change the image if they haven't been exposed to the traditions and don't understand the difference."

Which Game Do You Want to Play? Weighing Traditional Architecture & Modern Equipment

The grimthorping that sometimes is condoned at golf's greatest courses gives pause to ask what it is that we want from the game. Must we accommodate the prodigious lengths achieved by professional players using under-controlled equipment? Is the obviousness of this question any different now than it was when steel replaced hickory, gutta percha replaced feathers, or mowers replaced sheep? The answer comes clearer when applied to golf's shorter masterpieces: the Old Course, Merion (East), Sunningdale, Chicago, Sandwich, National ...

It is appropriate that this question will be clearly on display at the Old Course this July. The course's defense will be the rough, wind, undulations, and bunkers, much as it was at Sandwich last summer, and as it is at most linksland courses. When seaside conditions are fully in play, length does not factor as significantly as it does when you leave linksland for parkland.

As we play the great parkland courses, the question becomes, as it always has been asked, do we want the professional game and equipment advancements to determine and alter the breath-taking courses that fully test our amateur skills and which have been historically important?

Do we prefer the game of the gutta percha ball when John Ball and Horace Hutchinson were champions? Rather, do we prefer the Haskell ball period when Bobby Jones, Cyril Tolley, and Francis Ouimet won? Do we prefer a little later time when Michael Bonallack, Bill Campbell, Vinny Giles, and Jack Nicklaus used a perfected wound ball? Or do we like things the way they are now with the perfected solid ball?

The improvement of golf equipment has always been a part of the game. Shafts, grips, heads, balls, inserts, gloves, spikes ... have all slowly changed the game that evolved at St. Andrews and, understandably, many of the early changes were invoked at St. Andrews. Change has been part of the process. Arresting the evolution of golf may deprive us of the Merion (East)-like courses of the future; not arresting it may deprive us of the joy in playing the Merion (East) of the present.

Merion has traditionally defended herself against the game's strongest players by demanding that the ball be properly positioned in order to approach her befuddling putting greens; and the East Course has repeatedly tested golf's best. No course in America has hosted more U.S.G.A. championships (18). It was here in 1916 that Bobby Jones first walked onto the national stage as a 14-year-old playing on bent grass greens for the first time; and it was here that he completed his Grand Slam in 1930.

Four pre-eminent questions can be asked about Merion, which was recently renovated by Gil Hanse. They are the same questions that can be asked about Pebble Beach, Oakland Hills, San Francisco, Sunningdale, the Berkshire, etc. First, does the distance that the golf ball can now be propelled shatter Merion's positional defense? Second, if the answer to the first question is *yes*, has the case been made that ball performance should be rolled back? Third, if the answer to the first question is *no*, will equipment standards be held where they are now? Fourth, also if the answer to the first question is *no*, how many of these important and great courses can/will host future important championships?

It is ironic that if it were not for advances in golf ball performance we would not have Merion. The popularity of the Haskell ball at the turn of the 20th century is directly responsible for the new layout that became the East Course. Before the turn of the century, golf was popular at Merion Cricket Club. [NOTE: Merion Golf Club descended from the Merion Cricket Club in 1942.] The Club's first course was built at Haverford in 1896, and the game flourished there. However, by the first decade of the new century, the additional 25 yards that the Haskell ball could be driven made the Haverford course too short to be challenging.

The Club bought land at Merion G.C.'s current location on Ardmore Avenue and created a committee to look into building a new, longer course. Fortuitously, Hugh Wilson, an intuitive, young Princeton graduate and golfer, was selected to join the course-creation committee and, for all intents and purposes, assumed its leadership because of his interest and discernment for the design of the new course. After consulting with leaders of the game such as C.B. Macdonald, who had designed Chicago and National, Mr. Wilson traveled to Great Britain to study the design elements of golf's greatest courses.

Mr. Wilson's genius, an additional parcel of land, the presence of a meandering stream, an old quarry and an enlightened greenkeeper came together to produce a



course with shot values as strong as any America has ever produced. Cypress Point and Pebble Beach taunt us with their visual appeal, Shinnecock and Augusta with their historical importance, and Pine Valley with her beguiling audacity. More impressively, Merion makes her demands on a relatively mundane piece of suburban property.

Merion's experience with the Haskell ball demanded that Mr. Wilson use nearly every square foot of the newly acquired acreage to ensure that length would always be a part of her defense. Mr. Wilson's strategic combination of canted fairways and greens, ragged-edged bunkers, nicknamed "Merion's white faces" by Chick Evans—who won the first National Amateur played at Merion—guarded by Scotch Broom came together to make as fine a golf course as there is anywhere.

Bobby Jones' assessment of Merion foretold what so many championship players have experienced there:

I must confess to an abiding affection for Merion. Perhaps it would be unnatural if I had not such a feeling. But I know it is not entirely sentiment which makes me like the golf course and look forward to a tournament there. The place and the club are used to good golf and to championships ... Merion has always played a bit on the short side, and unless conditions of wind and weather make it otherwise, it will probably play a bit short this year [1960], despite the fact that several new tees have been built to give it length. But Chick's [Evans] "white faces" will still be there guarding closely the side of every green and fairway, making it tough for anyone who strays from the straight and narrow.

The perfection of scale at golf's best courses is worthy of preservation, not for the elite players, to use a bump-tious term, but for accomplished amateurs and those who simply love to play.

For E.F.S.:



"I introduced Liz to beer. She introduced me to Bulgari."

Richard Burton

commenting on his wedding gift,
a Columbian emerald necklace,
for Elizabeth Taylor, 1964

NGF Reports 2021 U.S. Participant Stats 600,000 Increase in Overall Participation

The National Golf Foundation (NGF) reports a two percent increase in total 2021 U.S. golf participation. That number amounts to 600,000 new players added for a new total of 37.5 million U.S. players. Growth was split evenly between on- and off-course. "We finished the year with an almost-equal number of participants falling into three groups," Dr. Joe Beditz wrote on Jan. 20. "1) those who participated only on-course; 2) those who participated only off-course; and 3) those who enjoyed both on- and off-course play." Off-course play includes golf entertainment venues, stand-alone driving ranges, and/or businesses that have simulators and screen golf setups.

Dr. Beditz's report stipulates that the average age of a new off-course player is nearly 20 years younger than on course players—31 years versus 49. New off-course-only players are 42 percent female, 40 percent people of color, and 41 percent with incomes over \$100,000.

Women now comprise 25 percent of all golfers, and people of color 21 percent, the report states. The total number of youth golfers remained stable in 2021, but this cohort's size has increased by almost 25 percent over the past three years alone, to more than 3 million.

Also from the NGF report:

- 3.2 million beginners played golf on a golf course for the first time.
- The NGF predicts an increase of approximately 5 percent in 2021 rounds played. Total rounds increased by 13 percent in 2020.
- Since 2016, female on-course players have increased by 6.3 percent; youth by 13.8 percent; and people of color by 20.4 percent.

Yours vy truly,

Gary A. Galyean
Editor & Publisher

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