

The Development of Mexican Golf

By PERCY CLIFFORD

MEXICAN AMATEUR CHAMPION, 1928-1929-1930-1932-1933-1938

MEMBER, MEXICAN AMERICAS CUP TEAM, 1952

William Townsend, originally from Louisville, Ky., was one of an early group of immigrants who came to Mexico some sixty years ago. He and a few other Americans, Scots, English and Irish were responsible for the initiation and growth of sports in this country. One group started soccer football. Another built some tennis courts. Townsend headed the group which organized the first golf club.

In 1897 nine holes were constructed on a barren piece of land in the suburb of Puebla, about forty-five minutes ride by

street car to the southwest of Mexico City. The street cars, incidentally were hauled by a pair of mules. They erected a small tent near the first tee, and this also served as a clubhouse and refreshment stand. This first club was named the San Pedro Golf Club.

Alex Smith, the USGA Open Champion in 1906 and 1910 and a brother of Willie and Macdonald, came from New York to visit Townsend a few years later. By this time the number of golfers had increased to the point where it had be-

MEXICAN AMATEUR CHAMPIONS

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| 1926: Claudio M. Butlin defeated Dr. James Vance, 1 up. | 1944: Carlos Belmont defeated Percy Clifford, 2 and 1. |
| 1927: Claudio M. Butlin defeated Percy Clifford, 4 and 3. | 1945: Wallace Ulrich defeated Carlos Belmont, 2 and 1. |
| 1928: Percy Clifford defeated Claudio M. Butlin, 2 up. | 1946: Frank Stranahan defeated Earl Stewart, 3 and 2. |
| 1929: Percy Clifford defeated Max Wright, 4 and 3. | 1947: Smiley Quick defeated Ollie Sleppy, 2 and 1. |
| 1930: Percy Clifford defeated Max Wright, 5 and 4. | 1948: Frank Stranahan defeated Charles Kocsis, 9 and 7. |
| 1931: R. R. Billings defeated John M. Joss, 3 and 2. | 1949: MacGregor Hunter defeated Earl Stewart, 1 up. |
| 1932: Percy Clifford defeated Rafael Elguero, 1 up. | 1950: Joe Conrad defeated Jack Culp, Jr., 8 and 7. |
| 1933: Percy Clifford defeated Max Wright, 2 and 1. | 1951: Frank Stranahan defeated Billy Maxwell, 3 and 2. |
| 1934: Gus Moreland defeated Percy Clifford, 1 up. | 1952: Al Mengert defeated Henri de Lamage, 1 up. |
| 1935: Ed White defeated John Dawson 10 and 8. | 1953: Billy Maxwell defeated Frank Stranahan, 8 and 7. |
| 1936: John Goodman defeated Percy Clifford, 10 and 9. | |
| 1937: John Goodman defeated Don Schumacher, 6 and 5. | |
| 1938: Percy Clifford defeated Blaine McNutt, 1 up. | |
| 1939: John Barnum defeated Robert F. Riegel, 2 up. | |
| 1940: John Barnum defeated Ellsworth Vines, 3 and 1. | |
| 1941: Wilford Wehrle defeated Verne Stewart, 2 and 1. | |
| 1942: David Goldman defeated Percy Clifford, 2 and 1. | |
| 1943: Robert F. Riegel defeated Percy Clifford, 7 and 5. | |

Unofficial

1903: Robert Everitts. 1904: Dewitt Hammond. 1905: A. C. Scales. 1906: C. H. Bartlett. 1907: C. H. Cummings. 1908: M. W. McLaughlin. 1909: L. H. Parry. 1910: J. C. Finningan. 1911: J. C. McDonald. 1912: J. C. McDonald. 1913: R. M. Tolin. 1914: A. Young. 1915-16. No tournaments. 1917: A. R. Dobson. 1918: No tournament. 1919: E. E. Danielle. 1920: C. M. Butlin. 1921: C. M. Butlin. 1922: H. M. Van Zandt, Jr. 1923: James L. Stewart. 1924: C. M. Butlin. 1925: Max Wright.

come necessary to consider building a permanent golf course and clubhouse, and Alex's advice was most helpful in this project. In 1907 construction was started on what is now the Mexico City Country Club.

Willie Smith, who also had won the USGA Open in 1899, came from Chicago to serve as professional at this Club from the time of its institution until his death in 1915. He will always be remembered very dearly as a great player, a great teacher and the first golf professional in Mexico. Twice, as a representative of Mexico, he was runner-up in the USGA Open, and in 1908 he lost to Fred McLeod only in a play-off.

Willie Smith and the Rebels

Willie remained at the Country Club all during the 1914-15 revolution, refusing to leave for safer quarters and risking his life for the Club he loved so much. The clubhouse was shelled and smashed by rebel troops. Armed bandits rode in on horseback, used the ballroom as a stable, ransacked the locker rooms, took the members' belongings and used the wood to build bonfires at night. Defending troops on the river bank 1,500 yards to the north brought up small artillery and shelled the club again, trying to oust the rebels. Willie hid in the cellar and, when found, was in critical condition.

During the following fifteen years, the political climate was not conducive to sports. Construction of other clubs was not to be considered, even though the number of foreigners was sufficient to warrant such undertakings. As soon as conditions became more favorable, Nelson Rhodes organized the Chapultepec Golf

Club, which by 1923 was as active as the Country Club. This eighteen-hole course was the work of Alex Smith.

Golf in Mexico received its big lift in 1924. The Tampico oil boom was at its height. Dutch Shell, Standard Oil and other companies had hundreds of foreign employees. In Tampico alone three nine-hole courses were constructed.

John Bredemus came from Texas and in his primitive but efficient way built some fine nine-hole courses. His best work was done for the Tampico Country Club, the Guadalajara Country Club, the Monterrey Golf Club and the Mexico City Country Club, which was remodeled. Mexicans took up the game, too, in sufficient numbers to warrant building additional courses, but these were built particularly in localities which attracted tourists. From 1925 to 1930 nine-hole courses were built in Torreon, Agua Caliente, Fresnillo and Cuernavaca. Other courses came later at Acapulco, Pueblo, Hermosillo, Tehuacan, Fortin, Laredo and Saltillo.

In 1947 the most modern golf club in Mexico came into being. This is the Club de Golf Mexico, on the extreme south side of Mexico City. Here are 36 holes which are considered to be among the world's best. It has been the scene of the Pan-American Open in recent years.

Harry Wright, a Virginian who became president of the original Consolidated Rolling Mills, did more to promote golf than any other. He not only rebuilt the Country Club and carried it for many years but also gave all-out aid whenever it was requested to other clubs.

Wright founded the Asociacion Mexicana de Golf, of which he was president for many years. The Mexican Amateur Championship owes its existence to Harry Wright because during its first few years he shouldered the entire responsibility for it. At his personal invitation came Walter Hagen, Joe Kirkwood, Robert T. Jones, Jr., and many other famous players. His book, GOLF IN MEXICO, is the only complete history of the game in this country and required many months of work. Its many historic photographs are priceless.

MEXICAN OPEN CHAMPIONS

1944:	Al Espinosa	281
1945:	Al Espinosa	290
1946:	Al Espinosa	286
1947:	Al Espinosa	292
1949:	Tony Holguin	201
1950:	Tony Holguin	289
1951:	Roberto de Vicenzo	275
1952:	Bobby Locke	276
1953:	Robert de Vicenzo	275

Little is known about the professionals who came to Mexico in the early days, sometimes risking their lives, to teach the Mexican people this wonderful game. Thanks to their sacrifices we now have many hundreds of golfers all over the country. Some names deserve repeating, such as Willie and Alex Smith, Tom Hepburn, Harry Brown, Willie Lamb, Manuel Barrera, Al Espinosa, Olin Dutra, Al Escalante and Joe Belante.

The first year in which visitors from foreign countries participated extensively in Mexican tournaments was 1934. Gus Moreland, a Texan and a Walker Cup player, had the honor of being the first visitor to win the Mexican Amateur Championship. He defeated the defending champion, Percy Clifford, 1 up, in the 36-hole final. Following in Moreland's footsteps came Ed White, in 1935; John Goodman, in 1936 and 1937; John Barnum, in 1939 and 1940. Other foreign winners have been Wilford Wehrle, David Goldman, Bobby Riegel, Wallace Ulrich, Frank Stranahan, Smiley Quick, Mac Hunter, Joe Conrad, Al Mengert and Billy Maxwell, who defeated Frank Stranahan, 8 and 7, in the 1953 final at the Churubusco Golf Club, in Mexico City, early this month. Maxwell won the medal with a 66 and scored a 64 in the morning round of the final.

The Mexican Open Championship was inaugurated in 1944, and was won four times in succession by Al Espinosa. In 1949 Tony Holguin defeated a field which included Sam Snead, Lloyd Mangrum, Jimmy Demaret and other leading professionals. Holguin won again in 1950. Roberto de Vicenzo, of the Argentine, triumphed in 1951. Bobby Locke, of South Africa, won in 1952 and de Vicenzo repeated this year. The 1954 Open will be held at the Club de Golf Mexico, February 24 through 28.

As competition increases and more courses are open to play, especially semi-public or public courses, it will become easier for Mexican youths to learn the game. The Americas Cup is the greatest incentive these boys have. They are anxi-

ous to become good golfers in the hope that they may one day be included on the Team which represents their country in international competition. This is the highest reward that any sportsman can acquire, regardless of what game he plays.

Mexico offers the visitor 365 days of golf every year on a variety of courses from the sea shore at Tampico and Acapulco to the mountains, 7,000 feet above sea level. It is truly a golfer's paradise and visitors are assured a cordial welcome and real Mexican hospitality.

MEXICAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS

- 1926: Mrs. Marjorie Elguero defeated Mrs. Hugh Rose.
 1927: Mrs. Ralph L. Smith defeated Mrs. J. J. Schissler.
 1928: Mrs. Marjorie Elguero defeated Mrs. Harry Brown.
 1929: Mrs. Ralph L. Smith defeated Mrs. Marjorie Elguero.
 1930: Miss Martha Kinsey defeated Mrs. Ralph L. Smith.
 1931: Miss Martha Kinsey defeated Miss Marjorie Conway.
 1932: Mrs. J. J. MacGregor Mills defeated Mrs. G. A. Rodriguez.
 1933: Mrs. Peggy Chandler defeated Mrs. O. R. Armstrong.
 1934: Mrs. Peggy Chandler defeated Mrs. T. R. Finley.
 1935: Miss Marion Miley defeated Mrs. C. G. Newbold.
 1936: Mrs. C. G. Newbold defeated Miss Betty Jameson.
 1937: Mrs. Peggy Chandler defeated Mrs. Mary Carruthers.
 1938: Mrs. Esther McMains defeated Mrs. Helen Whittlesey.
 1939: Miss Kathryn Hemphill defeated Mrs. Helen Whittlesey.
 1940: Mrs. Esther McMains defeated Miss de la Torre.
 1946: Miss Dot Kielty defeated Mrs. Mairat von Hartz.
 1947: Miss Sally Sessions defeated Mrs. Aurora Olagaray.
 1948: Miss Bertha Navarro defeated Mrs. Esperanza Madero.
 1949: Mrs. Aurora Olagaray defeated Mrs. Cristina P. de Garza.
 1950: No championship.
 1951: Miss Lesbia Lobo defeated Miss Bertha Navarro.
 1952: Miss Mary Ann Villegas defeated Miss Lesbia Lobo.
 1953: Miss Margaret Smith defeated Miss Luz de Lourdes, 7 and 6.