

"Freak of Fortune"

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USGA AMATEUR CHAMPION 1940, RUNNER-UP BRITISH AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP 1947,
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The stymie, which has been played as a part of the game almost continuously since its origin, has been the subject of much controversy, especially in the past decade.

The traditional British (R. and A.) rule provides that when both balls lie within six inches of each other on the putting green, the ball nearer the hole may, at the option of either player, be lifted until the other ball is played; whereupon the lifted ball shall be replaced.

In 1938 the United States Golf Association modified the British version by adding a provision that (when both balls are on the putting green) if the nearer ball lies within six inches of the hole, it may be lifted at the option of either player until the other ball is played. After trial in 1938-39-40, the USGA rule was made permanent.

Henry Longhurst, well-known English author and golf correspondent, has been one of the staunchest supporters of the British stymie rule. However, after my fifth-round match in the British Amateur Championship last May, in which I was laid five stymies and lost on the 19th hole as a result of the fifth, Henry completely reversed his hitherto unswerving belief in this feature of the game. In an article in the LONDON TIMES entitled "Woeful Obstruction," he personally condoled with me and stated that the time had come for the abolition of this "freak of fortune" unless a player by his own poor putt lay himself a stymie.

The champions of today are usually distinguished from the mass of fine players by their ability to hole the all-important putt. In the matter of morale and/or nervous tension, it is much more upsetting to miss the short, final putt on a hole than the tee or iron shot where the possibility of recovery is still very much alive.

But to be blocked completely from a fair entry into the hole by a ball on the very lip of the cup—the result of a missed putt by one's opponent—does not seem to



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pound the basic purpose of the game—good sportsmanship. The player who wins under these circumstances finds himself apologizing and with the feeling of an unsatisfactory victory.

Therefore, the competitor who places his ball upon the green should be entitled to have an unimpeded effort with his putter, and not have to change suddenly to a niblick and trust to Providence that he will loft over successfully.

Hugh McDermott, British golfing actor now starring in the film "No Orchids for Miss Blandish," told me in London just prior to our departure for the States that he believed most stymies arose as a result

of a poor putt on the part of an opponent. In golf, he went on, one should not have two chances, such as "If I miss it I may lay him a stymie."

In my talk with Hugh, I expressed the opinion that plugged (embedded) balls on the green should be lifted and placed without penalty. I recalled the 1947 Walker Cup Match and the 19th hole at St. Andrews when Leonard Crawley was so unfortunate as to have his second shot bury on the putting surface in his singles match with Bud Ward.

Four Stymies in Two Holes

In retrospect, the R. and A. stymie rule has caused my downfall on five important occasions.

Playing in the semi-finals of the 1938 North and South Amateur at Pinehurst and 2 up with 4 to play, I was stymied four times in two holes. That hardly seems possible, but here it is:

My iron shot to the par 3 15th was stymied by my opponent's. My niblick loft, which stopped three feet short, was stymied eight inches from the hole by my opponent's putt. My second loft went in the hole and out—and I was only 1 up.

My second shot to the par 5 16th found the front of the green but was stymied by my opponent's. My niblick loft went four feet beyond the hole but was stymied by my opponent's putt. My second loft went in the hole and out—match even.

The 17th was halved in birdie 2s, and I lost the 18th when my opponent chipped in for his third straight birdie and my 15-footer rimmed. You can then imagine my feelings about the stymie.

In 1930 I lost in the final of the New England Amateur Championship as a result of stymies on the 34th and 35th holes. In 1939 I lost in the final of the Metropolitan Amateur as a result of a stymie on the 35th hole.

In 1947 in the final of the British Amateur I was 1 up after 20 holes of play. On the 21st after putting I was stymied. I shall never forget the 24th, a 550-yard par 5: I was on the front edge in 2; my opponent, Willie Turnesa, had hit three shots and was buried in a trap immedi-

ately hole-high. My approach putt stopped three feet short but was stymied by his trap shot, which stopped one inch from the hole dead in line. For Willie, this was fine, but I think even he will admit it was a cruel stroke of fortune for me since his drive, second and third shots were in trouble.

In the morning round of this match on the 13th hole, when my lead of 5 up at the ninth had been whittled down to 2, our iron shots came to rest eight feet on either side of the hole. Being away by inches, I putted; the ball went into the hole and then just came out on the lower side of the hole, giving Willie two chances to hole his putt, which he did. Instead of being 2 or 3 up, I found myself only 1.

The final coup d'etat came in the fifth round of this year's British Amateur when I was stymied on the second, fourth, eighth, 15th and 19th holes. Three of these, the second, fourth and 19th, were laid dead on the lip of the cup, making entry impossible. The other two were laid approximately eight inches from the hole. Of these five stymies, I was able to negotiate only one—that on the eighth hole.

Having experienced this manner of ill fortune on the links, it is my humble opinion that there is enough luck in the game without adding more to it. With the exception of the man who lays himself a stymie by his own poor putt, a player should be rewarded for his efforts to the green by an unrestricted attempt to hole out, not by a "freak of fortune."



When We're Moaning

When we're moaning in a sand trap
O'er a deepened heel-print lie,
Do we scuff it worse and leave it
For some other nicer guy?

T. G. McMAHON