

Upswing in British Golf

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To those who expect the Walker Cup Match to be just another American victory, I would advise that the British will bring from their geographically small islands some real players. This is an inescapable conclusion which I reached while playing in, and watching, the British Amateur Championship at the Portmarnock Golf Club near Dublin, Ireland.

We know well the excellent play of their captain, the long-hitting, left-handed Laddie Lucas, and those on hand for the Walker Cup Match at the Winged Foot Golf Club, August 19-20, will find that the other Englishmen — Gerald Micklem, Ernest Millward, Arthur Perowne, Kenneth Thom and Ronald White — are good in any league. White in particular is worth watching; the English Closed Champion plays a well-controlled, careful game which is most impressive.

Having seen many colorful Irish golfers, I am happy that four of their best will be here for the Walker Cup Match — Jim Bruen, whose terrific outside-in loop does not prevent a beautiful and powerful hitting position and whose distance and recovery shots are phenomenal; Joe Carr, the shortswinging, wide-arc'd long-hitter; Cecil Ewing, the Irish Champion and stylist, and, of course, the new British Champion, Max McCready, whose sound swing and ideal temperament have given British golf a shot in the arm.

Playing Conditions Abroad

No British Amateur Championship can be discussed without mention of the conditions of play, which indeed differ from those encountered on this side.

The smaller ball is of obvious importance, though it is actually much easier to handle in the wind and seems to have greater distance than ours. Its only disadvantage seems to be its lying closer to the ground, or lower in the grass, so



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that our thick-faced brassies are difficult to use.

Another consideration to be reckoned with by the Americans venturing across is the fast condition of the seaside courses, where a sand foundation gives good drainage and leaves the fairways hard to the bounce. A straight drive does get a long roll, but play to the green is complicated, especially with a following wind. Instead of playing for the stick, or even for the green, one must often either play a high ball far short and allow for the bounces or use a low-number club and play a long run-up.

The outstanding point of difference between golf here and there, however, is the weather. What I would call a gale was described as a breeze by those who had become conditioned to golfing near the Irish Sea. The question wasn't

whether or not there would be a wind; rather, it was as to the force and direction of it, for it seemed to change daily.

Each shift of wind changed the course considerably—so much so that, for example, on the seventh hole, 188 yards downhill, I hit the proper distance on different days with a No. 2 iron and a No. 9 iron! On the greens, good putting demands allowing for the wind.

I was most interested in what I saw of the players across the Atlantic. Henry Cotton has written much of our closed or semi-closed swings, and the comparison with their open, wristy swings is inescapable.

Although the good showing of the American veterans, Ellis Knowles, Chick Evans, Francis Ouimet and Robert A. Stranahan, Frank's father, might be a counter to their points, the British claim that their style of play is not just for the young and strong and thus allows for more years of good golf for an individual.

Whatever the merits, there does seem to be a great number of fine, long-hitting older players in the British Isles. Of course, the recent war took its toll, but even so, the average age of their players at the Championship seemed surprisingly old—unless I was fooled by the mustaches and such.

Speaking of appearances, I might add that plaid caps and tweedy plus-fours were much in evidence, and for a touch of decorum one of the English internationalists had his ball teed by his caddie.

For some reason—perhaps because golf is an institution to the British—there were in the championship a surprisingly large number of professional men, a number of lawyers and doctors being among their better players.

All the British play faster than most Americans. The Irish, with perhaps typical impetuosity, carry their hit'em-quick tendency to the extreme. And the Irish average some 30 yards longer off the tees than do the other Britishers, according to tests made at Portmarnock. They also are somewhat wilder, I might add. They use heavy-headed, soft- and

long-shafted clubs, wide stances (often pigeon-toed), considerable body sway and tremendous wrist action. All the British players use full gloves on the left hand, and their iron clubs have considerably more loft than do clubs of American make.

There is no need here to review the results of the Championship, but I do want to pay tribute to Willie Turnesa, tagged by the British press as "imperturbable master of the wedge," for his spirit in coming from two or more down in at least four matches before finally losing to McCready in the final, 2 and 1.

Frank Stranahan, who was caught off balance by the eventual Champion, gave such a good account of himself in defeat that his determined efforts on the last few holes of his losing battle were applauded by the Irish. When his final putt slid by the hole, the tremendous crowd followed its ovation for its victorious countryman with applause for the loser for remaining a champion in defeat. The galleries, by the way, were large all week and extremely well-mannered.

I would venture the risk of sacrilege by noting that eight of the 10 top favorites were drawn in separate quarter-final brackets. The Royal and Ancient Golf Club would admit, I am sure, of nothing less than the completely blind draw, but I do compliment them on their good luck. American golfers would be interested, if not surprised, to hear that the consensus of the top British players seems definitely to prefer, to their own blind-draw system, a method of seeding by qualifying rounds, and perhaps also of limiting qualifiers so as to allow for fewer 18-hole and more 36-hole matches.

My first and last impression — of Secretaries Carson, of the R. and A., and Murray, of Portmarnock; of home-club Professional Eddy Hackett, and of all others connected with the Championship, and also of Ireland as a country — was of the really amazing hospitality of the people.

I cannot overemphasize the pleasure of such a wonderful experience as I had.