

Great Moments in the Open

By FRANCIS OUIMET

USGA OPEN CHAMPION, 1913; USGA AMATEUR CHAMPION, 1914, 1931

When I accepted this assignment, I thought it would be rather pleasant to look back on some of the Open Championships and to review a few of the highlights that still live in my memory. It seemed a simple thing to do, but now I find myself enmeshed in a series of situations that, to describe adequately, would require the writing of a book. This I have no time to do, because it would take too many pages to cover properly those moments which meant so much to the winners and to those who just failed to win.

One great stroke at the right time is usually the thing that determines the winner.

I remember, for example, walking from the 10th green to the next tee in the 1913 Open Championship at Brookline. I had just taken a 5 on an easy par 3 hole at a time when, instead of squandering strokes, I should have been saving them. It was necessary to play the final nine in 36 to tie Vardon and Ray. The 5 seemed fatal, how fatal I could not tell.

As I trudged wearily toward the tee through a lane of spectators I heard one member of the gallery say in a loud voice, "It's too bad. He's all through." Of course the import of that remark was soon forgotten.

An Eight-Foot Putt

Then as the holes passed by more favorable things began to happen, and with three holes remaining I had a chance to tie. The 16th was a short one, and I reached the green safely enough with my pitch. A poor putt from 20 feet left me eight or nine feet from the cup.

In such a position you cannot think of the holes that are coming up and how you hope to play them. Neither can you call yourself into the private office of your mind and say, "If I had only gotten that three on the tenth, things would be much better." It is too late to go back

and folly indeed to look ahead. There is the putt; it must be dropped.

The putt was holed and then a brand new stream of thoughts had to be put together for the play to the next hole. The fact that a 15-foot putt was holed on the next-to-last green was valuable, but it would have been useless had the eight- or nine-footer on the green before failed. That is why I will always feel that one single stroke is the dividing line between winning an Open Championship and just missing.

In 1915 Jerome D. Travers won the Open. After much ragged play on his final 18 holes, he had worked himself into a position where he must play the last four holes in 4-5-4-4 to win. Not necessarily in this sequence but its equivalent.

The figures outlined were possible, although par on the card read 5-5-4-4. Jerry had discarded his wooden clubs and in place of the driver was using his driving iron. The 15th hole at Baltusrol measured about 460 yards, and while it was easy enough to make in 5, the badly needed 4 was something else again. Very few of the competitors were able to get home in two because the last 75 yards was over rising ground.

Travers had driven a long ball with the driving iron, which was imperative, but another 200 yards along was a huge trap that spread across the fairway. He could play short of the trap if he wished, but to do so meant a blind third shot to the green. Or he could try the big carry and, if successful, have a good peek at the flag. He chose the latter, accepting all the dangers and the risk of disaster that must go with failure. Hercules at his best would have been hard pressed to bang an iron with sufficient power to clear that trap and Jerome D. Travers was no Hercules.

Jerry could always be relied upon to think clearly when called upon to play a vital stroke. Many of us thought he

was digging his own grave. No man living could have hit a shot more solidly than Travers hit that second with a driving iron. As the ball climbed through the air there was considerable doubt as to whether it had the power to land safely. After a few seconds of watchful waiting, the ball landed a scant three feet beyond the hazard and bounded another 10 or 12 yards toward the green. As a reward for that great shot, a pitch and run of some 30 yards, played with a jigger, left him a putt of four feet which he never looked like missing. Getting his 5-4-4 with great steadiness, he thoroughly earned his title.

As we know, a terribly thin line separates the winner and the golfer who comes next. At Scioto Joe Turnesa was shaping up as the new Champion. He had a good lead and only nine holes to play.

Then a few things happened. He was an experienced tournament player and sensible enough to realize that he could take nothing for granted. An iron failed to stay on the green, the chip was not

close and a 5 was marked down. It occurred again. I watched him play the 17th, the second-last hole. He had a fine drive and hit what seemed to be a satisfactory iron. The ball kicked a bit to the right and just trickled off the green. Another 5. Joe finished with a total of 294, a splendid figure and, as I think of the severe rough that resembled a wheat field on both sides of the fairways, a fine performance.

Jones' Strength

Trailing Joe, that is to say playing in back of him, was the redoubtable Bob Jones. Bob might make a mistake here or there, but when it came down to the point where no strokes could be wasted, he was supreme. As I think back over his phenomenal career, only once do I recall him finishing badly. That was at Inwood in 1923 when he made a 6 on the last hole which permitted Bobby Cruickshank to tie. To do this Cruickshank placed a long iron six feet from the cup and holed the putt for a 3. Ever after Bob Jones left no similar



Francis Ouimet at Brookline, with his caddy Eddie Lowery.

openings. In retrospect I believe the great strength in Bob's game was his ability always to play the last nine or closing holes in perfection. Others might falter but never Bob after 1923. Think it over.

To get back on the main line, Bob Jones was picking up a stroke here and another there. As he stood on the final teeing ground he needed a 4 to beat Turnesa. It is not easy to remember that last fairway at Scioto because the championship was played in 1926 and that was 24 years ago. Amid the wheat fields, the grass just off the fairways was at least 18 inches tall, a golden brown in color. The ground sloped from right to left. Had I been a competitor, my powers of visualization undoubtedly would be more accurate. I was simply a spectator.

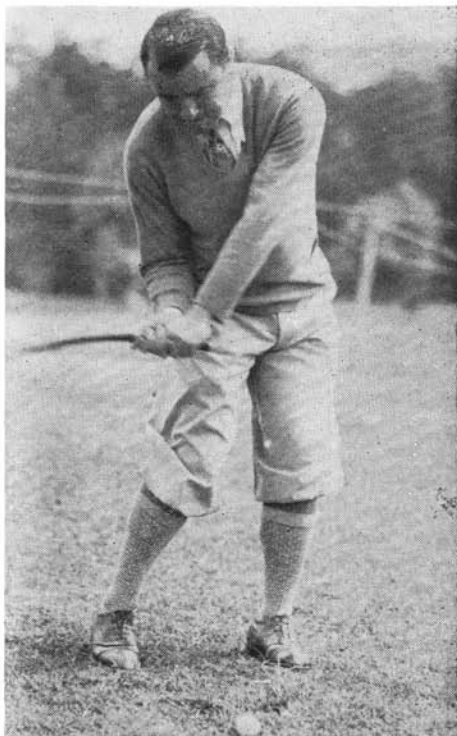
Length and position with relation to the playing of the second shot were the first requirements. The hole was about 480 yards long, a simple 5 perhaps but the stiffest sort of a hole to play in 4, the figure needed. The drive had to be started for the right half of the fairgreen. A well hit drive that traveled on a straight line to this area would gain little run because it would hit the face of the incline and die immediately. A tee shot directed to this spot with draw, that is to say moving from right to left, would have a forward run and pick up additional yardage. In the first instance a long wooden club would be required to play the second shot from a side-hill lie. In the second, the green might be reached with an iron if all went well.

Bob hit his ball perfectly and it had just a wee semblance of a draw. It struck the ground just to the right of the center of the fairway and then kept going forward, following the contour and finally coming to rest on the left-hand side of the cut surface 300 yards from where it had started, on a nice piece of level ground. That was the beginning of his quest for a 4.

The ending was not delayed. A priceless iron shot that covered the flag all the way stopped nine feet beyond the hole. Two carefully played putts secured the important 4, and Bob Jones had added another Open to his record.

There is no telling what it is that comes over a golfer who performs as did Gene Sarazen in 1932. He had already won the British Open at Prince's, and since the United States Open was being played on his home course at Fresh Meadow, he would dearly love to win that as well. Many think because a golfer is playing his home course he should win, but there are so many factors surrounding such a situation that it is not necessary to go into detail. Sometimes local knowledge and good friends unwittingly subject a player to severe handicaps.

Gene was going nowhere in particular after the first two rounds, and at the



Gene Sarazen at Fresh Meadow.

end of the first nine holes of his third round he had lost more ground to the leaders. A 38 for that nine was not good enough to close the gap, even though he did make a 2 on the ninth. He kept trying. A brilliant 32 coming home lifted

him out of the ruck into the middle of the contention, just one stroke behind the leader, Phil Perkins.

Gene was inspired. He always did like a battle. He never once thereafter looked like anything but the winner he proved to be. Bobby Cruickshank had played his two concluding rounds in 69 and 68. Perkins, the leader at the end of 54 holes, was great, making a 70. They scored for their 72 holes of play 289.

Sarazen could not be stopped. His final 66 was too much. When you add his 2 on the ninth and his 32 to the 66 you find he played 28 consecutive holes in 100 strokes, 12 below an average of 4s. Until I see or hear of a performance that can equal this on a first-class lay-out, I must accept it as the finest stretch of superlative golf on record, taking into consideration the importance of the competition.

The feats of Byron Nelson, Craig Wood, Ben Hogan or Lloyd Mangrum are too well known to the present generation to bear repeating. As I dream on of "great moments in the Open" I like to think of Walter Hagen. It was 1919 and no Championships had been played in 1917 or 1918 because of World War I. Mike Brady, a Boston professional of great ability, finished in 301 at Brae Burn, a total that seems high compared to modern standards of play. Nevertheless Brae Burn was a stiff test, and today I believe it would withstand the best efforts of the golfers of class to beat par consistently. This is a broad statement, I know, but Brae Burn is a real test of golf.

Mike was the leader at the end of 54 holes and could hardly lose. Hagen was five strokes in arrears and a comparison of their play in the final round revealed that Mike had picked up another stroke on the first five holes.

Now six shots ahead, there was nothing to it. Brady must win. No one can pick up six strokes on Brady with 13 holes to play, was the general thought. Mike, playing ahead of Hagen, made a 4 on the short sixth. Hagen, following behind, got a 2 but it did not seem important. Rumors, this time accurate, re-

ported that Brady had taken a 7 on the 10th. Players had reached that green in two and, while 4s were exceptional, anything above a 5 seemed silly. Hagen picked up two more strokes there. Mike managed to stagger around in 80 which, added to his 74-74-73, gave him his total of 301.

Mike's play outside of a few spots on the final round was excellent. Those few spots were just sufficient to give Walter Hagen the opportunity he longed for. Standing on the 13th tee, he had to get a 4 to tie. A fine drive was followed by a great second, 10 feet from the hole.

"Where Is Mike?"

As Hagen pushed his way through the crowd and saw his ball resting reasonably near the cup, a large smile came over his face. Mike was there. Walter studied the putt carefully and, before taking his stance, looked around and said, "Where is Mike? I want him to see this." It was the putt that would win. He hit the ball a bit too firmly, and while it caught the center, it did not go down.

That Walter Hagen won the play-off the next day is a story in itself. Then and there did he establish himself as not only a great golfer but a tremendous sportsman. He loved to win but it was just a game to him. He was quick to see the lighter side of golf and reveled in it as much as anyone.

These reminiscences could go on forever and space will permit no further reports. I think it is mighty nice that Merion is to be the scene of the Golden Anniversary of our Open Championship. The Merion Golf Club is steeped high in tradition. It has been most generous always in offering its facilities for the game of golf. It was at Merion that a young man, or perhaps I should say a boy of 14, first played in a major championship; it was at Merion 14 years later that Bob Jones in 1930 walked off the 11th green the holder of the four greatest golfing honors that any man could win. As the second half of the Century of Progress gets under way, I am sure Merion will continue to add to its luster.