

The Case for All-Match Play

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Over the years, from 1895, the USGA has experimented with many methods of conducting the Amateur Championship. There have been qualifying rounds to select fields of 16, of 32, of 64. About the time of the first World War the tournament was conducted with an elimination round of 18 holes, after which the low 64 scorers proceeded through 36 holes more of qualifying for 32 places in the match rounds. Probably the most unpopular system ever attempted was that used at Oakmont, near Pittsburgh, in 1925, when only 16 players qualified for match play and all matches were at 36 holes.

As golf mushroomed through the United States, and more and more highly skillful players developed, it became necessary to hold preliminary eliminations in localities scattered over the country, because it was not possible to accommodate them all in one Championship proper.

In 1934, a radical departure was made. After sectional qualifying rounds, the Championship proper was held at all match play. The popularity of this method was instantaneous and the tournament continued under that system for three years.

Qualifying at the site of the Championship proper was resumed in 1937 and remained in vogue after the interruption of World War II. The first post-war Championship at Baltusrol in 1946 was played under that system.

Polls Uphold Match Play

The USGA has always felt, however, that the Championships belong to the players, and a poll was conducted among the competitors after that tournament. The result left nothing in doubt. Of those who replied, 81 favored an all match-play tournament. Only 21 voted in favor of continuing the qualifying at the site of the Championship proper, and all-match play was restored.

This would seem to have closed the is-

sue. Not so, however. With an ear to the ground, the Association has heard over recent years scattered criticisms of the all-match play system, so last fall another poll among the contestants was conducted. This elicited an even greater response than before, and although the figures were not so one-sided, they were decisive enough. A total of 140 balloted; 94 favored continuing the present plan, 45 favored a return to qualifying at the site of the tournament and one favored neither. Of those who voted for a return to qualifying, one later wrote that he was entirely satisfied with the present method of play. He might well be, having won major Championships at both. He is Dick Chapman, who won the 1940 USGA Amateur after winning also the medal at the tournament, and who this spring won the British Amateur at all-match play.

In a space on the ballot for remarks, many stated the reasons for their preference. The reason most often put forth in favor of the present system was that after a player travels as far as most of them must to reach the site of the Championship, he is entitled to at least one match.

"I traveled 800 miles once and 1,000 miles another time and failed to qualify for match play," wrote James A. Wittenberg, of Memphis, Tenn. "I'd much rather lose a match than not play one at all."

"I feel that a lot of players would hesitate to make a trip to the tournament not knowing whether they would qualify," said George L. Coleman, of Miami, Okla. "Even though I lost my first match (22 holes)," said Jimmy Johnston, of Minneapolis, "I still felt I had been in the tournament. The method that allows the most to play, it seems to me, should be your goal."

Oddly, the same line of reasoning was advanced in favor of the other method. "Qualifying guarantees at least 36 holes of play in the Championship, which is im-

Site of the Amateur Championship



A chip shot over a bunker to the 18th green at Saucon Valley Country Club, Bethlehem, Pa. The Amateur takes place on this course September 10-15. In background is the clubhouse.

portant to us lesser lights," wrote Richard Allman, of Philadelphia.

"Since the field is cut in half the first day, it seems a long trip to play 18 holes," said Dale E. Rose, of Mansfield, Ohio. "With qualifying at the scene of the Championship, a player gets a better chance to 'average' his game and this would, I believe, get a high class match play group."

"Under the present system, at least 50 or 60 are eliminated after traveling to the tournament and playing one round," said James W. Paul, Daytona Beach, Fla. "These are eliminated under the old system before being forced to travel all the way to the tournament."

The remarks of the players repeatedly showed that what is one man's meat is another man's poison. While some favored the present plan because it gives little known players more chance to spring upsets at the expense of well-known stars, others opposed it for the same reason.

"I like very much the plan of qualifying at the scene of the Championship because it creates greater interest," said Donald Cole, Greenville, S. C., while

Danny Carmichael, Columbus, Ohio, stated: "The present plan means more players at the tournament, more interest, more color."

"I don't think the tournament can be made any more enjoyable than the one last year," said Don Bisplinghoff, Orlando, Fla.

"I personally think it is hard enough to qualify in your own section without going to another state to qualify again," said Ray Palmer, Wyandotte, Mich. Yet, Fred Kammer, Jr., of Detroit, said: "I think qualifying is more fun for the player who can qualify sectionally."

One of the arguments most frequently raised by those who favor reverting to qualifying at the scene of the Championship was that a stronger field is assured by that method.

Which Makes Better Field?

"I believe qualifying at the scene affords a better field of 64 than is left in the 64 at the end of two days of match play," said Randall R. Ahern, of Detroit. John Sierge, Plainfield, N. J., argued: "I feel that the combination of medal and

match play at the Championship proper is a better test for a Champion."

However, Jack Purdum, Webster Groves, Mo., said: "I think your field is better if you have all-match play, as many young players cannot afford the risk of expense to come to the scene and not qualify. I also think all-match play makes the sectional entry larger and public interest is greater than when the galleries have to await two days of qualifying before they can follow a good match."

Jack Malloy, of Oklahoma City, said: "In order that the Championship be thoroughly national in flavor, it is essential that as many players be on hand as it is possible to handle. With reduced places in sectional qualifying areas, it is obvious that some good players may not secure a spot."

On the other hand, some of those who favored qualifying at the Championship remarked that if all match play is continued, they would prefer to see the field for it reduced to 128. "I think the bye is a sham and a disadvantage," said John D. Culp, Jr., of Chicago, in support of that view. "Only 19 of the 46 byes won second round matches at Minneapolis. This may not always hold true but I hope I never get a bye."

Quite a few players indicated that they not only preferred qualifying at the Championship to all match play, but would prefer a stroke play Championship to either. However, William P. Castleman, Jr., of Dallas, Texas, declared: "The Amateur Championship, essentially match play, should remain as such. Otherwise, the prime purpose of the Championship is altered."

Clipping Used as Argument

"I believe the Amateur should be confined to as little medal play as possible," seconded E. J. Rogers, Jr., of Oklahoma City.

Enclosing a clipping from GOLF WORLD, written in retrospect after last season, R. A. Henry, of Madison, N. J., submitted it as expressing his views. Said Editor Bob Harlow in that issue: "Talk of reducing the number of players does not find a warm response among those who

think it is a fine thing for the younger players to go to the Amateur and mingle with the veterans . . . We hope the USGA will not do anything to lessen the number of starters in this great event . . . Who wants a group of super golfers to contest the Amateur? It stands for something much bigger than such a contest."

A Convincing Argument

Certainly no more cogent reasoning in support of the present plan was presented than that from Jerry J. Cole, of Mt. Vernon, N. Y.

"I favor the present plan because of the broader scope of national representation," he wrote. "By this I do not mean that poorer players are given a chance to knock off a star. Quite the contrary — more good players get into the matches. The difference between 150 and 200 men competing can be very great.

"Take the 1950 Championship, for example. Four out of the eight quarter-finalists finished last or next to last in their sectional trials.¹ If only 150 sectional places were allotted, these four may never have gone to Minneapolis! On the other hand, of the other four quarter-finalists, three led their sectional qualifying and one was exempt. This contrast is striking — the sectional leaders and those who squeaked through might very well have had their positions reversed.

"The point is this: that even though a good player suffers an off day in his sectional trial, he still has a chance to show his stuff in the long pull of the Championship proper."

It seems to us Mr. Cole has stated the case most powerfully. But however it seems to us, there is no doubt the players favor it, and in the USGA, as well as in the US, the majority rules.

¹Editor's note—Mr. Cole knows whereof he speaks. The 1950 quarter-finalists fared as follows in their sectional qualifying: Frank Stranahan was exempt. Sam Urzetta, who defeated Stranahan in the final, was low qualifier at Buffalo. William Shields was low qualifier at Albany. Richard L. Kinchla tied for low qualifier at Hartford, Conn. Tom Veech won the last place at Milwaukee in a play-off. Bud Holscher tied for last place at Chicago. John P. Ward won the last place at Albany. Robert W. Knowles, Jr., won the next to last place at Hartford.