

# The Dr. Livingstone of Golf

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When Ralph A. Kennedy played the Old Course at St. Andrews, Scotland, on September 17, it was an occasion to chalk up in golf records.

St. Andrews was the 3,000th course Mr. Kennedy has played in a pleasantly nomadic career. It achieved an ambition he had nurtured for years, and it was to be presumed that, having established a record which is apparently unassailable, he was prepared to rest upon his laurels.

Old habits, however, are hard to break. When Mr. Kennedy visited the USGA "Golf House" a few days after his return from abroad, he had already pushed his total to 3,020 courses and was still going strong. Obviously, nobody can say where this thing may end.

Mr. Kennedy, a portly man of medium size with a jolly twinkle in his eyes, is a founder-member of the Winged Foot Golf Club, Mamaroneck, N. Y. He estimates that he has played some 8,500 rounds of golf in his life. Naturally, not all of these have been upon strange courses. If a walk around the average course covers five miles, as generally estimated, then he has tramped golf turf a distance of nearly twice around the world.

He has played the game in 14 countries. He has toured about half of the 5,000 courses in the United States, some 400 in Canada, 20 in South America, all eight in Bermuda, and others in Cuba, Central America and Mexico. He added 35 more to his log in his recent 24-day trip to the British Isles: 26 in Scotland, seven in England and two in Ireland.

## Who's the Champion?

He scheduled his trip so that historic St. Andrews would be No. 3,000. On the day he was to record that event, the ground near the starting tee was crowded with onlookers. Worried by the prospect

of a gallery, he turned to Ellis Knowles, the former United States Seniors Champion, and inquired:

"Who's playing here today, some champion?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Knowles. "Ralph Kennedy."

Mr. Kennedy's companions on that round were Mr. Knowles, Leonard Crawley and John Beck. The last two have been British Walker Cuppers, Beck a former Captain of the Team.

"There were a lot of people watching and I was afraid I would miss my tee shot entirely," said Mr. Kennedy. "I was in such a daze, I still don't know who hit that ball. But it was a good drive."

He scored 93 for the round and was well pleased with it. Apropos of this, he does not believe that intimate knowledge of a course and its local conditions is much of an asset in scoring. He generally plays a course better the first time he sees it than upon a return visit.

"My club handicap is about ten strokes higher than I can really play," he said. "I can't play Winged Foot and it burns me up because I helped found it back in 1921."

Mr. Kennedy does not think of himself as a celebrity but to some extent he is one. When he reached Dublin on his last trip, he arrived on a bus; as he stepped off, he approached a policeman and asked:

"Where do I get a taxi around here?"

"I'll get you one, Mr. Kennedy," replied the officer, fairly dumbfounding golf's traveling representative.

"He had recognized me from a picture in one of the newspapers that morning," Mr. Kennedy explained. "But the surprising thing is that I don't think the picture was very clear and I don't see how anybody could identify me from it."

The Winged Foot man has seen almost every type of course in existence in the last half-century.

"I have played desert courses in South America, courses without a blade of grass on them," he related. "The ball just falls dead where it lands and you find it in a little crater like a nest; then you're allowed to set it up on the rim for your next shot. Of course, you don't have to be alarmed about getting into sand traps there.

"The greens on some South American courses are of oiled sand and they hold a shot well.

#### Where Greens Really Burn Out

"Cotton seed hull greens are not bad; they hold and they make a pretty good putting surface. You are not allowed to take a cigarette on any cotton seed green because they catch fire very easily and water won't put the fire out. They burn for days and don't stop until the seed hulls are burned out."

Mr. Kennedy has many times been asked what are his favorite courses and the worst he has seen.

"I won't name the worst," he said, "but it's out in the southwest. The grass is about two feet high, even in the fairway; in fact, they have stakes up to mark where the rough starts. You're allowed to beat the grass away with your club until you can make a swing at the ball."

Among the best, Pine Valley, near Clementon, N. J., and Cypress Point, at Pebble Beach, Cal., stand high on his list, although he believes that for some reason Pine Valley plays a few strokes easier than it did about 20 years ago.

"At least, it does for me," he said.

Mr. Kennedy also has a warm regard for Mid-Ocean, in Bermuda; Broadmoor, at Colorado Springs; Capilano, in Vancouver, B. C., and he considers Jasper Park, in Canada, one of the most scenic.

"On 11 of the 18 holes at Jasper Park, majestic mountain peaks are the markers for your line of play," he remarked.

After he had driven at Jasper Park and came walking up to his ball, he found



Ralph A. Kennedy

a small bear standing over it, sniffing curiously.

"What do I do now?" he asked the pro in perplexity.

"Oh, he'll beat it as soon as you get near," the pro explained, and the prediction was borne out.

#### Some Aces and Variations

Mr. Kennedy also likes Augusta National, "because it is tough and easy—tough for the good player and easy for the dub." He scored 82 there the first time he played it.

Four times Mr. Kennedy has holed tee shots. Two were legitimate aces, one he scored as a 3 (because his first shot was in a water hazard), and one as a 4.

"That last was on the ninth at the Maple Golf Club, Hope Valley, R. I.," he said. "There is a big maple tree in the line between the tee and the green; the hole is about 170 yards. I played a high 4 wood over the tree and found the ball wedged in the hole but not all below the rim of the cup.

"'It's a hole in one,' my companions said.

"'It is not,' I said. 'It's an unplay-

able lie and I have to take it out for a penalty of two strokes and then putt it into the hole.' We sent a description of the incident to the USGA and my ruling was upheld."

Mr. Kennedy beamed, a somewhat chronic condition.

"I liked that better than an ordinary hole-in-one," he said pleasedly.

At Indian Run, near Grand Rapids, Mich., as he addressed his ball on a 110-yard hole, he proclaimed: "Have any of you fellows ever seen a hole-in-one? If not, stand back and watch."

He thereupon knocked the ball into the hole.

Mr. Kennedy was introduced to golf in 1910 by a neighbor whose brother had been a college mate at Amherst. Against his wishes he was persuaded to go up and play Van Cortlandt Park.

"I got around in 146," he said. "After that I played there quite often. It was a fine course in those days and it didn't cost you a cent to play it. I became fascinated by the game."

Mr. Kennedy has played golf ever since. He introduced Mrs. Kennedy to it the very next week. She has played more than 600 courses, and was several times champion of Dunwoodie, the club at Yonkers where they used to play.

#### How It Started

Charles Fletcher, an English music hall actor, started Mr. Kennedy on his hobby of collecting courses. He heard Fletcher saying that he held the world record with 240 in 1919. Mr. Kennedy reflected that he had played quite a few courses himself and had attested cards to show for them. He dug them up and discovered they represented 176 different layouts.

From that point, he really went in for variety. He passed Fletcher a few years later at 445. He played his 1,000th course on his 50th birthday in 1932; his 2,000th in 1940; his 2,500th was Pebble Beach in 1946, and in September this year he made it 3,000.

Mr. Kennedy's record is completely authenticated, for he always made it a point to have his card at every course

dated and attested by an official of the club. He has this collection of cards in a safe deposit box. He intends to present the St. Andrews card for his 3,000th course to the USGA.

Mr. Kennedy finds a pronounced difference in architecture between courses in the United States and Great Britain.

"Over here, our courses are comparatively easy until we are within 75 to 100 yards of the greens," he said. "Then they are severely trapped and it takes a well-played shot to get home. The British courses are terrific until you are within about the same distance of the green. Then they are relatively easy; you can roll the ball up to the pin."

No matter how many courses he sees, however, he remains loyal to Winged Foot.

"I don't know any course less taxing for the man of advancing age," he explained. "There are no hills to climb. Yet, nobody ever murders our par."



#### THE TRAGEDY OF JOHN SMITH, ESQ.

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that even though the former chairman of the committee had done an excellent job and was willing to continue to serve, it was more efficient to follow the well-established policy of making frequent changes.

Fortunately, Mr. Smith's Saturday at the Fairway Country Club is not typical of what happens at the majority of clubs; unfortunately, however, it is no more than a slight exaggeration of the conditions that exist in many. And the lesson, which save for the sake of emphasis could have been expressed in far fewer words, is simply this:

No club can afford to neglect its golf course superintendent. His is a hard job requiring considerable technical knowledge and a wide variety of skills. Support him with the best equipment and all the supplies that the club can afford. Back him up with a strong chairman, and if they make a strong team, don't change horses. Under such a policy, Mr. Smith and his fellow-members will find far greater enjoyment in their play.