

Rules Are for Sportsmen

By TOTTON P. HEFFELFINGER
PRESIDENT, UNITED STATES GOLF ASSOCIATION

(The following remarks were made by Mr. Heffelfinger on assuming office as USGA President at the 58th Annual Meeting January 26, 1952.)

Golf is a great sport, and is unique in that it is generally a game of sportsmen. Knowing that this is a broad statement, I looked up the definitions of the words "sport" and "sportsman".

"Sport" is, among other things, a pastime, amusement, jest, or pleasantry; an athletic game, outdoor recreation; a gambler or cheap flashy person. Let us say, therefore, that golf is a sport because it is a pastime, an outdoor recreation, and an athletic game.

"Sportsman" is defined as one who engages in sport — and one who exhibits fairness, self-control and is honorable in his game.

I repeat, golf is unique in that it is generally a game of sportsmen.

Let it not be said that there are not sportsmen in all sports, because there are, and many of them. In fact, I love all sports.

But did you ever see a baseball player, when called safe at third base, turn to the umpire and declare himself out? How absurd!

Can you imagine a football tackle telling the referee that his team should be penalized because he had enjoyed slugging the opposing player on the schnozzle? Can you picture one of those Paul Bunyans who get into the roped arena in one of those free-for-all contests, now called wrestling, ever being a sportsman in those contests?

In golf we are inclined to be surprised and disappointed when true sportsmanship is not displayed, and that is good because it is rare. Think of the number of occasions we know of where a golfer has called an infraction of the Rules on himself or herself. Show me any other sport where this fine type of sportsmanship is so prevalent. The Rules of Golf as written require that each player monitor his own game. Referees are not a necessity.

On the negative side of golf and the golfer, it is hard to find a sport where the Rules of play are so nearly universally disregarded. This is bad, because the true sportsman is one who knows the Rules of the game and plays by those Rules.

In a baseball park with a short right-field fence, you have never heard it even suggested that a ball hit over the fence be remitted from a home run to a double. Why? Because it is a rule of baseball.

Why, then, should the individual, the club or an association feel that he, she or it can disregard the international Rules of a great sport like golf to suit the peculiarities of an individual or the fabrications of a few minds who haven't given even a small part of the thought to the Rules that has been given by the ruling bodies of the game in the British Empire and the United States over a long period of time?

Let every one of us here today — and we are here because we love golf — pledge ourselves to see to it that golf is maintained as the greatest sport of the greatest sportsmen by seeing that golf is played according to the Rules wherever we contact the game.

What is it going to be—Croquet or Golf?