

What Makes A Senior

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Sandy Herd won the British Professional Match Play Championship when he was 57, and the Hon. Michael Scott won the British Amateur when he was 55. In spite of these phenomena, it is well established by the studies of Dr. Harvey C. Lehman, of Ohio University, as well as by observation, that golfers in their early 50s are normally no longer of championship caliber. Records of the United States and British Amateur, Open and Professional Championships reflect that 169 winners have been between the ages of 20 and 34. Only 57 have been older than 34, and only Herd and Scott were 50 or older.

The increasing popularity of senior golfing organizations is therefore an appropriate development.

The oldest of these is, of course, the United States Seniors' Golf Association, whose forty-eighth Championship is taking place this month at the Apawamis Club, in Rye, N. Y. It was organized in 1917 to conduct a Seniors' Tournament which had been held at the Apawamis Club, since 1905. Membership is limited to those who have reached the age of 55 and are members of golf clubs which belong to the USGA.

There are, too, the Western Seniors' Golf Association, the American Seniors' Golf Association, the North and South Senior competition at Pinehurst, N. C., and numerous sectional and state senior associations. Clubs also are scheduling special events for their senior members, so that a senior now can enjoy a whole series of competitions any season. In some of these, the minimum age is 50 years, rather than 55.

An Intriguing Fact

The present scale of senior golf has, however, developed one intriguing fact.

The champions of thirty years ago are not, generally speaking, the senior champions of today.

In last year's United States Seniors' Golf Association Championship, Thomas C. Robbins, 60, of New York, won for the second year in succession with 73-74—147. Paul H. Hyde, of Buffalo, N. Y., and Noble Miller, of Canandaigua, N. Y., tied for second at 150, in a field which included Francis Ouimet, of Boston, a former Amateur and Open Champion.

In last year's Western Seniors' Golf Association Championship, Frank Justin, Jr., 59, of Harvard, Ill., led with 78-72—150. Allen R. Rankin, of Columbus, Ohio, and Allan M. Loeb, of Chicago, tied for second at 152.

In last year's North and South senior tournament, Judd Brumley, 58, of Greenville, Tenn., defeated Norfleet P. Ray, of Pinehurst, N. C., 5 and 4, in the final. Dr. G. R. Love, of Oconomowoc, Wis., and Charles Evans, Jr., of Chicago also a former Amateur and Open Champion, were the losing semi-finalists. Mr. Robbins was the medalist, with a 69.

In last winter's American Seniors' Golf Association tournament Mr. Robbins, was the medalist with a 73 and defeated Mr. Brumley, 3 and 2, in the final. Mr. Evans was a participant in all of the latter three tournaments.

For purposes of comparison, the members of the Walker Club Team of 1922 were Charles Evans, Jr., William C. Fownes, Jr., Robert A. Gardner, Jesse P. Guilford, Robert T. Jones, Jr., Max R. Marston, Francis D. Ouimet and Jess W. Sweetser.

There is, of course, no single explanation for the emergence of new champions with the passing of the years.

Robinson Murray, of South Duxbury, Mass., the New England Senior Champion, believes that five factors are involved.

"First," he says, "many men are not so circumstanced as to begin the game until their contemporaries are already tournament golfers.

"The second point is enthusiasm. An older man may find he loves the game. He gets his pleasure in making the ball behave. The younger star may well find his enthusiasm waning as he gets older.

"Thirdly, the older man must keep his health. How few senior golfers look their age! Time inevitably weeds out many of those who were splendid golfers in their younger days but who have succumbed to arthritis, misplaced sacroiliacs or any one of a score of nature's handicaps.

"Another factor weeds out others. There must be opportunity to play. Enthusiasm and health are of no use without opportunity. Financial ability, freedom from worry, favorable location—these and many other factors enter into the picture. A precocious athletic youth does not necessarily carry with it the ability to support a country-club standard of living as the years pass by.

"Finally, we find much of the answer in the nature of the game itself. After all, what advantage does the young, enthusiastic par-shooter have over the older man save the ability to pound the living daylight out of the ball. The older men putt as well, they pitch as well to the greens and they have been known to hold their tempers and play more coldly and calculatingly."

Harrison Smith, of Oklahoma City, another prominent senior, suspects a sixth factor:

"Golfers of championship caliber, with a few exceptions, developed their games in their teens. Their youth permitted them to adopt the power swing. On the other hand, the best seniors, with a few exceptions, started to play in their early

or late 20s and adopted a controlled swing. The senior continues to improve his game by more accurate chipping and putting, while the power swinger's game tends to disintegrate with the loss of his lung and accurate wood shots."

Mr. Evans, who does as well as any of the champions of yesteryear in senior competition, suggests:

"Perhaps the outstanding player of my day is the worker of today and the worker of my day is the outstanding player of senior golf. Many must work hard in their old age because they did not realize that their play-day was ended."

Fred L. Riggan, Sr., of Port Huron, Mich., President of the American Seniors' Golf Association, theorizes that "as the present senior golfers who are really expert grew older, succeeded in their business and had more leisure time, they developed a latent ability at golf which had been there all the time. Those who were top golfers in their younger days may feel that too much is expected of them now. The edge is off their competitive spirit. You and I know that the will to win and confidence in one's game are probably as important factors in victory as real golfing ability."

Former Champions' Thoughts

Speaking for those who were outstanding in their youth, Mr. Gardner, the Amateur Champion in 1909 and 1915, admits that the edge is off his competitive spirit. "Perhaps we who competed in the old days had our fill of competition years ago, when that empty feeling in our stomach was worth-while. I just cannot apply myself and concentrate to the former degree.

"Players who are now prominent in senior competition and were not prominent in earlier days have a competitive spirit, a willingness to take infinite pains on every shot and a serious purpose that I for one cannot match any more.

"My putting and short game have largely gone to pieces, and I find on comparing notes that they have failed

with others in the same way as they have gotten older. Why that should be I don't know. Is it psychological?"

S. Davidson Herron, of Pittsburgh, the 1919 Amateur Champion, feels much the same way. He had his fill of competition and his taste of glory when he defeated Robert T. Jones, Jr., in the Amateur final. He was 21 at the time and Jones 17. The responsibilities of starting a career and raising a family soon overtook him, and now he prefers informal four-balls to tournaments, senior or otherwise.

When They Started

It certainly seems, too, that circumstances did conspire to delay most of our leading seniors in their pursuit of senior golf.

Mr. Robbins first played at the age of 31 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He started as a left-hander, to boot, although he was quickly converted to right-handed play. His talent must have been simply latent. He took thirteen lessons and practiced for hours between each lesson before he ever played a round. Within a month after starting to play, he was in the high 70s.

Mr. Brumley started to play comparatively early, for a top-ranking senior, but he explains: "Thirty years ago I discovered I had been playing the grand game of golf for eight years the wrong way. I went to a professional, and he changed my grip from the baseball type to the overlapping. I improved rapidly after that.

"I have always lived in the delightful but small town of Greeneville. We have a short nine-hole course of nineteen hundred yards. I am certain that not having access to a standard-length course was detrimental to my game."

Dr. Love started to play when he was about 30. He was raised in a small town, and there was no golf course within sixty miles of his home there.

Mr. Smith was playing to a 12 handicap at the age of 30. He was down to a 4 handicap at the age of 60 and by that

time had won several senior tournaments.

C. J. Farley, of Grand Rapids, Mich., began to play when he was about 25, but not until he was 30 did he emerge from the 90s and not until his late 30s was he playing good golf. He felt he was playing the best golf of his life when he was 60.

Mr. Riggin did not take up golf until he was nearly 30. When he was 50, he scored in the 60s four times, and he is sure that was his best year.

Mr. Murray caddied for two or three years as a boy, but the necessities of earning an education prevented him from playing again until he was 25. Then he was caught up in World War I and later the responsibilities of raising a family, so that he was about 40 when the opportunity to play regularly finally presented itself.

Paul H. Hyde, of Buffalo, N. Y., also started as a caddie but points out: "There was no money in my family for traveling in those days, and for many years after, it was school, marriage, children and to an extent lack of money that kept tournament golf out of my reach."

Elfred Beck, of Tulsa, Okla., took up the game at the age of 34. "It took me years," he relates, "to learn how to relax my right hand in the golf swing and almost as long to learn the power of concentration." He believes he played his best golf at the ages of 50 and 51.

Parran C. Jarboe, of Cochoituate, Mass., several times New England Senior Champion, also began to play when he was 34 and did not reach his peak until he became a senior. "All those years, I never had any fixed idea of how to swing or how I hit the ball," he says. "Now I seem to have a clear idea and a grooved swing."

Whenever they started to play, however, they all now have one thing in common. Mr. Hyde phrased it simply when he said: "The enjoyment of the game increases every year. One makes some very fine friends every time he is lucky enough to be able to attend any kind of a senior tournament."