

# Impressions of Golf in America

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This short article is an attempt to put down some impressions of golf in the United States as seen in a short visit of about three weeks. During that time I saw only three courses and took part in the Walker Cup Match at the Kittansett Club, in Marion, Mass., and the Amateur Championship at the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club, in Oklahoma City, Okla. In addition I had a most enjoyable day at the Pine Valley Golf Club in Clementon, N. J. Bearing in mind this limited background of golf in a large country, I intend to set down some random thoughts on the courses, the players, the officials and the general attitude towards the game that struck me most and to draw any necessary comparisons with golf in Great Britain.

My first impression of the three courses I saw, that is, Kittansett, Pine Valley and Oklahoma City, was that they were much more like our own courses than I expected them to be. I have always been given to understand that United States greens have a lot of nap and that nearly all are heavily watered and all shots must be pitched right up to the hole. I found relatively no nap at all—it was very slight at Kittansett and I thought of no significance at all at Pine Valley or Oklahoma. The greens on all three courses did hold the shots well, but not to the extent that I expected. Oklahoma City, in particular, reacted extremely well to the pitch and run, and on occasions I saw few players able to stop their second shots at the eleventh hole from flying over the back!

Kittansett is a fine test of golf. I would describe it as a thoroughly exacting inland course by the sea. It is a penal course and a severe examination to the golfer. We have in Surrey several courses of a similar type, but on less exacting lines. It is not in British eyes a seaside course, as although it is by the sea it has none of the characteristics of a links.

## NEW MEMBERS OF THE USGA

### REGULAR

Apple Valley Country Club, Cal.  
Beatrice Country Club, Neb.  
Boiling Springs Country Club, Ky.  
Boulder Country Club, Colo.  
Cold Spring Golf Club, N. Y.  
Columbus Country Club, Miss.  
Columbus Golf Club, Ind.  
Dubuque Golf and Country Club, Iowa  
El Reno Country Club, Okla.  
Fairway Golf Club, Ohio  
Four Lakes Country Club, Mich.  
Hillcrest Country Club, Mass.  
Hillcrest Country Club, Texas  
Junction City Country Club, Kans.  
Lacon Country Club, Ill.  
Lake Wales Golf Club, Fla.  
Ludlow Country Club, Mass.  
Mohawk Golf Club, Okla.  
Newnan Country Club, Ga.  
San Juan Country Club, New Mex.  
Sidney Golf and Country Club, Mont.  
Troy Country Club, Ohio  
Wing Point Golf Club, Wash.  
Worland Country Club, Wyo.

### ASSOCIATE

Boothbay Region Country Club, Maine  
Circle R. Ranch Golf Course, Cal.  
Green Valley Golf Course, N. Y.  
Sewart Air Force Base Golf Club, Tenn.  
Tuscumbia Country Club, Wis.  
Vermilion Country Club, Ohio

This does not, of course, prevent it from being a great golf course, which it undoubtedly is.

Pine Valley impressed me enormously. After all one has read about its legends, one comes to expect some sort of trick course. I did not find it that way at all. It is a tough course and *absolutely fair*. The fairways being reasonably wide and the greens very large, the hazards are nearly all mental. You know that a bad shot means bad trouble, and so you hit plenty of bad shots. Its layout is outstanding and it has a very high percentage of classical holes.

Oklahoma City is the most English course on which we played. The greens are fast and tricky, with a great deal of

borrow. They resemble many good English greens that I know. The fairways are the best I have ever seen, without exception. They are so good that they give the wretched golfer no excuse whatever for his bad shots. The ball sits up and asks to be hit and the turf is soft underneath, so that a squeezed iron shot is very easy to play. In addition, this bermudagrass, surprisingly enough, takes the pitch and run quite beautifully.

Now I come to the players and the general standard of play. We have come in our country to expect Americans to play very well indeed, and there is no doubt that the general standard is very high. The United States Walker Cup Team is a superb advertisement for the United States golf, all high-class players and delightful people. When we went to Oklahoma City, I was most interested to study the general form outside the Walker Cup Team.

I came to the following conclusions: There are a number of players outside the Walker Cup Team of Walker Cup class, but this number is not so high as I had previously thought. It is only a dozen or so, making a total of about thirty in this, the highest class. The standard then drops appreciably (it is still a high standard!), but having dropped once, it does not drop again. Therefore, all the players who have qualified for the Amateur, outside the top thirty, are highly competent performers who will give anyone an awful time over eighteen holes. The top-class Walker Cup standard, however, is confined to the comparatively limited number of about thirty.

To compare this with the entry for the British Amateur Championship, you have more of the Walker Cup class than we do (not as many more as I thought), but your bottom standard is far higher than ours. We drop to a much lower standard than the lowest qualifiers for your Championship, and you no doubt have many competent performers who fail to qualify!

Before leaving the standard of play I would like to say what impressed me most in the rank and file of the competitors at Oklahoma City. There were

two outstanding points. Firstly, all seemed to be powerful hitters; today one must be *long and accurate*, and all the young Americans seem to give that ball a mighty good crack. Secondly, the holing out from ten feet and under was most impressive. Time and again I saw saving putts of this length holed and very, very seldom missed.

#### Attitude Toward Game

I would like to say something on the general attitude towards the game.

Firstly, I believe the American mental approach is more aggressive than the British. The American golfing population is very birdie conscious. We are not! Many times at Oklahoma City when a player put his second shot some twenty-five feet from the pin, I heard murmurs in the crowd, "A chance of a bird here!" I believe our general attitude to this situation is, "Ought to get a par here." We are definitely not so birdie conscious.

Secondly, I believe in this highly competitive age that it is important to maintain the correct attitude towards amateur golf and to be very zealous of the spirit in which we play. This can only be achieved, if the example comes from the best players. I can only say that during my visit to the United States I saw no finer example of how amateur golf should be played than that given in the Harvie Ward-Charles Coe match at Oklahoma City. That example is a shining light for all to follow.

No article on this subject would be complete without reference to the officials of the USGA. The success and the future of any game in any country must depend upon its ruling body. While in the United States I saw a good deal of the working of the officials of the USGA, and without hesitation I would say that the future of golf in the United States could not rest in better hands.

Finally, as a golfing visitor to the United States, I would like to thank a multitude of hosts for their kindness and generosity both to myself and to all members of the 1953 British Walker Cup Team.