

# ALL MATCH PLAY OR QUALIFYING

## • For Qualifying •

by **WILLIAM O. BLANEY**

*Former New England and Massachusetts Amateur Champion  
Chairman, USGA Handicap Committee*

“**W**HY DOES THE USGA Amateur Championship lack the lustre of the USGA Open Championship?”

When someone asked me that question, my answer probably was a bit vague, but the question set me to thinking what could be done to increase the lustre of the Amateur Championship.

Today my answer would be that the Championship proper is too much of a scramble, thereby preventing a small number of outstanding amateur players from establishing themselves as top-drawer attractions, similar to the top twenty professionals whose names appear so regularly among the leaders in the Open and other important tournaments.

The reason for this is simple. The present form of the Amateur Championship is all match play, with every match at eighteen holes except the semi-finals and final. This places too many pitfalls along the way for any outstanding player to make a consistently good showing over a period of time. Each year an almost entirely new group of names reaches the quarter- and semi-finals. As a result, no one leaves the Championship with a lasting reputation. Consider how many Champions in the last twenty years have reached the round of four, or the round of eight, when defending their titles. Few there are who ever again attained a semi-finalist ranking.

### **Uncertainties in 18 Holes**

Eighteen-hole matches are too much of a gamble for any player to win consistently. The finest player in the country can play fifteen or sixteen holes in one or two under par and still find himself on the losing end if his opponent happens to hit a hot streak. Almost every contestant can hit

those hot streaks once in awhile, not just the best players. Furthermore, a lot of eighteen-hole matches place so much pressure on a top-notch player that his game is bound to deteriorate on occasions.

On the other hand, the records will reveal players who have reached the quarter- or semi-finals without having come close to low-70 figures. This definitely does not add lustre to our Amateur Championship.

One defense of the present system of all match play is that it permits more players to qualify sectionally and attend the Championship proper. This, to me, is incidental to picking a true Champion. Is our top amateur tournament a social event, or is it to determine who is the best golfer in the country?

Another defense of the present method is that contestants in some previous Championships have been polled as to their preference and have voted overwhelmingly in favor of all match play. This seems quite natural, because players are loath to vote against a method under which they have been successful in reaching the Championship. Perhaps also many players opposed to the present method did not enter the Championships for which polls were taken because they would not risk the expense of traveling to far corners of the land where their stay in the Championship proper might be limited to less than 18 holes if their first-round opponents happened to have unusually good rounds.

It is quite logical that players' polls will favor the method under which the most players are accepted at the scene of the Championship. Almost every entrant wants to go, and the more places available, the

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# For Qualifying in the Amateur Championship

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better he likes it. But this still does not help in selecting the best golfer in the country.

## Double Qualifying Favored

The solution seems to be to return to the former method of conducting the Championship: namely, after 36-hole sectional qualifying to hold a 36-hole qualifying test at the scene of the Championship, with 32 or 64 players (preferably 32) to qualify for match play and with all matches at 36 holes (or, at the most, with two 18-hole matches the first day and the balance at 36 holes).

The 36-hole qualifying at the Championship would separate the boys from the men, and the 36-hole matches would tend to favor the better players over a short, hot stretch of some fly-by-night player. The result would be that the really fine players today would qualify repeatedly and advance in match play to the extent of their true ability.

Just as many players can start in the 36-hole qualifying for the Amateur Championship as can start on the first day of the Open Championship. If a true Open Champion can be determined from a limited field, then a true Amateur Champion can be determined from an amateur field of similar size.

The argument may be proposed that having all matches at 36 holes would extend the tournament another day and make it more of an endurance contest than a golf match. If anyone has played through a major championship, he knows it already is an endurance contest and another day will not make much difference. To play consistently good golf over a period of time requires endurance, and this should be one of the requirements of a true champion.

With 36-hole qualifying at the Championship proper, a qualifier for match play would accomplish something of which he could be justly proud.

Such a player in an all-match-play Championship might play equally as well in his first-round match and still lose to an opponent who played a little bit better. He then might feel obligated to take the first train home because of his "poor" showing. Compare his plight with that of another player who, always struggling to break 80, could not possibly have passed a qualifying test at the Championship but who, through the luck of the draw and his opponents' poor play, advances to the quarter- or semi-finals and then returns home a hero because of his "fine" accomplishment.

Can anyone justify this comparison? With 36-hole qualifying at the Championship proper, those who play poorly at the beginning will be on their way home soon, and properly so, while the real Championship players will continue on into match play where a real Champion will prevail.

## The Blind Draw

If it is desired to have players from different parts of the country compete against one another, pairings during the two 18-hole qualifying rounds could be so arranged. This idea could be further advanced by having the qualifiers play in threes instead of couples. This would increase intersectionalism among Championship contestants much more than the present blind draw, where two players from New York may meet in the first round of a Championship in Seattle, Wash.

Could Bob Jones have won the Amateur as many times as he did if the Championships during his era had been played at all match play? Look at his record in the British Amateur for the answer: many tries but only one win.

A return to 36-hole qualifying at the scene of the Championship would mean the creation of a new group of gallery-appealing players like those of former years, such as the Joneses, the Quimets, the Evanses, the Sweetsers, the Von Elms, the

Voigts, the Willings, the Gardners and many others. Lustre would be restored to the Amateur Championship and galleries would increase. There might be fewer names to consider in Championship play, but they would be bigger and better names. And, incidentally, with fewer names to be considered, the selection of a Walker Cup team might be a much easier and less controversial task.

The above is not intended to cast any aspersions on recent Champions. All have been fine players. But it is possible, maybe probable, that under former Championship methods their names might be more prominent than they are today.

## Public Links

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in the individual competition. Young and his General Chairman, Les A. Stemmons, Jr., proved a remarkably effective team in preparing for this first Amateur Public Links Championship in the Southwest, and all the players and committeemen who enjoyed Dallas' hospitality and efficiency are deeply in their debt.

The Dallas Park Board had Cedar Crest in remarkable condition, considering the long drought and the difficulty of obtaining water, and the kind remarks of the players were a tribute to the wisdom with which the available water had been used.

Cedar Crest has a great tradition, which was completely upheld. It is the course where Sid Cooper once was professional and where his little boy, Harry, grew up and learned to play. And Walter Hagen won his fifth and last Professional Golfers' Association Championship there in 1927.

**You can't help a little child up the hill without getting nearer the top yourself.**

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