

HONORS TO MEMPHIS IN PUBLIC LINKS

by

JOHN P. ENGLISH

*USGA Assistant
Executive Director*

THE Harding Park Golf Course, built in 1924 under the guidance of the late Dr. Alister Mackenzie and dedicated to the memory of President Harding, is a San Francisco institution.

Now one of the busiest golf courses in the world, it serves, on the average, 350 players a day every day of the year, and they say it has been played every day since it was built thirty-two years ago.

Two aspects make Harding Park memorable.

One is the excellence of the 6,683-yard course which winds through groves of cypress and pines and along the precipitous banks of the Lakes Merced to beautifully contoured and bunkered greens. Blessed by San Francisco's cool, moist climate, the stand of turf is rich and healthy on tees, fairways and greens in spite of the traffic they bear.

The other is the gang that plays it. They rate their course over all and not only do they play it like mad but they team together to provide unparalleled facilities for a Championship.

One of the beneficiaries of the combination is the USGA's Amateur Public Links Championship, which was played there in 1937 and again last month. Harding Park pulled all stops to surpass the facilities and hospitality of previous Championships, and in flattering words the departing players said they succeeded.

It was fitting and inevitable that a fine Champion should emerge.

Buxbaum Had Edge

James H. (Junie) Buxbaum, of Memphis, Tenn., a most accomplished shot-maker and in streaks a brilliant putter, always had the necessary edge. Although he won three matches by only a hole and two others by only two holes, he defeated

William C. Scarbrough, Jr., of Jacksonville, Fla., by 3 and 2 in the 36-hole final, with two-over-par golf.

The final proved the ability of the man, for Scarbrough had indicated by going to the semi-finals in 1954 and to the quarter-finals in 1955 that he is one of the fine players in public links golf.

However, Buxbaum, a small man of only 128 pounds, has taken the measure of both Cary Middlecoff and Hillman Robbins in Memphis and Tennessee Amateur Championships, and he played as a professional from late 1947 into 1951. But, after three-putting a dozen greens in one round of the 1951 Open Championship, he decided golf as a business was not for him and he was reinstated as an amateur in 1953. This was his first Amateur Public Links Championship.

Second Oldest Winner

At 40, Buxbaum is the second oldest winner. Gene Andrews was also 40 when he won in 1954, but he was within a couple of weeks of being 41, which Buxbaum will not be until the day after Christmas.

Both players were outstanding sportsmen, and it was gratifying to observe their mutual consideration and the camaraderie in which they played. Buxbaum represents a trucking and storage company in sales, and Scarbrough is a Chief Aviation Ordnanceman in the Regular Navy.

Until the final, Scarbrough had pulled his clubs on a cart, and he particularly had attracted attention for the selfless diligence with which he replaced every divot, even during the semi-final when he had to battle the tide of the gallery to do it.

While San Francisco was providing course and courtesies, Memphis actually took substantially all the prizes. Not only



The first step toward a clean sweep of Public Links honors by Memphis, Tenn., golfers is completed as Richard S. Tufts, USGA President, right, awards the Warren G. Harding Trophy to the victorious team champions. From left to right are Gene Frase, Eddie Langert and James H. (Junie) Buxbaum. Buxbaum completed the sweep by subsequently winning the individual championship.

did Buxbaum win the individual Championship for the James D. Standish, Jr., Trophy, but he also contributed to Memphis' victory in the team Championship for the Warren G. Harding Cup. Also, Scarborough, the runner-up, only represents Jacksonville, Fla., by reason of his assignment to the Naval Air Station there. He, too, is a native of Memphis.

However, San Francisco did get two good men into the semi-finals, Ovid Seyler and James R. Wilbert.

There were only seven scores under Harding Park's par of 72 during the 36 holes of qualifying, a procedure which was reinstated in the Championship for the first time since 1947 and which met with general approval.

D. M. (Scotty) McBeath, of Palo Alto, Cal., a salesman of sports equipment who formerly played out of Tacoma, Wash., won the medal with a score of 69-72—141 and thus accounted for one of the sub-par rounds. He was one stroke ahead of Verne Callison, of Sacramento, Cal., a 37-

year-old tavern keeper. Callison was under par in both rounds with matching scores of 71 for 142. Third was Joe Gallardo, Jr., of Los Angeles, a 19 year old who had graduated from high school a month earlier. Gallardo started with a 75 and then played the lowest single round, a 68, for 143.

Fifteen players tied at 155 for the last fourteen of the sixty-four qualifying places. However, only thirteen of them answered the call for the play-off. Billy Joe Lauer, of Spokane, Wash., and Edward Briegel, of Ann Arbor, Mich., had left the course. As a result, there was no play-off. Lauer was drawn into match play by lot.

Course Toughened

Strangely, the scores tended to be high in comparison with previous Amateur Public Links Championships. When the event was previously held at Harding Park, in 1937, Don Erickson, of Alhambra, Cal., won the medal with 139 and there was a play-off at 152 for the last of the sixty-four qualifying places. While only the

eleventh hole has been changed materially since then—that has been shortened into an excellent one-shotter—nature has toughened the course during the nineteen intervening years. The cypress and pine trees which were only saplings in 1937 are now long-armed giants which ably defend dog-leg bends and snare wild shots.

Sam D. Kocsis, of Detroit, the defender, had to withdraw after the first round of qualifying, when he was informed of the death of his father-in-law. Kocsis had scored 77 in the first round.

The Memphis, Tenn., Section's victory in the Team Championship was its first, and it was done with a three-man score of 445 for 36 holes. The competition was combined with the qualifying play. Members of the winning team were Buxbaum, Eddie Langert, a 20-year-old junior at Lamar Tech, in Beaumont, Texas, who made 72-74—146, and Gene Frase, a 29-year-old salesman of building materials, who did 73-80—153.

It was a decisive victory, although fourteen strokes over the old record. Memphis led by six strokes after the first round and won by eight strokes. The next teams represented Dallas, Texas, and Portland, Ore., which tied at 453. San Francisco scored 454, Los Angeles and Phoenix 456, Indianapolis 457 and Jacksonville 458.

North Attracts Fans

A prime attraction for the galleries in the early rounds was the gigantic Jim North, of the Foster Golf Club, in Seattle, Wash., who appears to be one of the real long hitters. Jim averaged about 280 yards from the tees onto the heavy Harding Park fairways and played all holes up to approximately 400 yards with a drive and #9 iron. On the 166-yard third, the 183-yard eleventh and the 177-yard seventeenth, he used #7 and #8 irons. On the 207-yard eighth, he used a #4 iron. On the 510-yard ninth and the 500-yard twelfth, he reached with #2 and #3 irons respectively. And, again, these strokes were without benefit of roll, after the dripping morning fogs of July, and without appreciable assistance or interference from wind.

North is 36 years old, stands 6 feet, 2½ inches and weighs 265 pounds. He played tackle in 1943 and 1944 for the Washington Redskins in the National Professional Football League. Now he is a teacher of history and physical education (including football) at Mount Si High School in Snoqualmie, Wash., 35 miles east of Seattle.

Friends matched him with George Bayer in an exhibition at the Foster Golf Club last summer, and the consensus was that they were about equal in long hitting. Although he has been trying to qualify sectionally for fifteen years, this is the first time he has made the grade. He qualified again with 80-74—154, and went to the third round before losing to Emil Esposito, of Franklin Park, Ill., at the nineteenth hole.

Roach Impressive

Another who attracted galleries was Joe Roach, of Los Angeles, who had won the Negro amateur championship for the last three years and also was making his first appearance in this event. Roach, who is 37 and owns two confectionery shops, qualified with 79-75—154 and went to the quarter-finals before losing to Scarborough. He was impressive in both skill and deportment and may well be heard from again.

Dick Hermann, of La Canada, Cal., had a frustrating experience in the first round. He holed out from the tee of the 166-yard third hole with a No. 6 iron in his first-round match and still lost, 1 down, to Bob Patterson, of Portland, Ore. Hermann indicated he was satisfied, on balance, however. Charles DeVos, of Lynwood, Wash., also scored a hole in one on the 183-yard eleventh during a practice round before the Championship.

The loyal members of the USGA Public Links Committee turned out to the number of nineteen and conducted the play with their customary efficiency. Joseph S. Dickson, of Louisville, Ky., was attending his twenty-third Championship, Alfred W. Wareham, of Minneapolis, his nineteenth, and Harry Packham, of Los Angeles, his seventeenth in succession.