

THIS IS YOUR LIFE —

COLONEL BOGEY

by

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"B is the Bogey, whose luck
is infernal,
And happy is he who can win
from the Colonel".*

Dictionaries define "bogey" as a "goblin or bugbear—an imaginary object of terror."

Every golfer is familiar with the term and to golfers in the United States it means, in colloquial usage, a score of one more than par on a hole.

Probably no present day junior golfer ever heard of "Colonel" Bogey. In fact, not much is heard of him any more but at one time he was well known at every club and course.

Colonel Bogey, and his uncanny skill as a golfer, has been mentioned in countless stories and poems. Some pictured him as a kindly old gentleman and others as a tyrant. However, all agreed that he was a good golfer. He was never in the rough or a bunker. No matter how bad the weather or how strong the wind, he was always on the green in regulation strokes and down in two putts.

An Interesting Story

The story of Colonel Bogey is an interesting bit of Golf-lore, well worth knowing.

To golfers, particularly in this country, a bogey score is not to be desired, although every golfer has experienced times when he would have gladly settled for it.

Bogey was not always an undesirable score. Originally it was the standard score. In the United States we know the standard score as "par", the number of strokes a good player should require for the hole,

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*From *The Golfer's Alphabet*,
by W. G. Van T. Sutphen, 1898.

always allowing two putts on the green. Prior to 1890 there was no such term as "par". No course had a standard or fixed score for each hole.

For centuries Golf had consisted entirely of match play. The score per hole made no difference, just so long as it was less than the opponent's total. No one even thought of keeping the total score for a round since no competition was based on it. In 1759, stroke play, sometimes called medal play, was invented as a form of golf competition. The total number of strokes per round then became important, but only in comparison with other scores. There was no standard score to compare one's score with and the score of a player only reflected his skill as compared with those he played against.

In 1890, Mr. Hugh Rotherham, of the Coventry Golf Club, England, originated a form of stroke competition in which each player competed at handicap against a fixed score for each hole. This fixed score was the number of strokes it was considered a good golfer should take for the hole. This was called the "ground score". There being no rules for such a competition, the club devised rules.

The first such competition took place in 1891 and proved very popular. Other clubs soon established ground scores for their courses and competitions against such fixed scores spread.

About this time a song entitled "The Bogey Man" was very popular in England. Someone referred to the ground score of a course as a "bogey", in other words, something to be feared. The term caught on and ground scores soon became known everywhere as "Bogey Scores".

The theoretically good golfer, whose standard score for each hole was the fixed

score, became quickly known as the "Bogey Man". One inspired golfer thought the "Bogey Man"—the good golfer—should have a title, so the honorary title of "Colonel" was duly conferred upon him.

Bogey competitions became so popular that there was a need for uniform rules to cover this type of play. The USGA, in 1900, adopted special rules for it and the Royal & Ancient Golf Club followed suit a few years later. Those rules still exist—see Rule 39 of the Rules of Golf.

The golf ball used in those days was solid rubber, known as the gutta percha. In 1900, or approximately that date, Mr. Haskell invented the rubber core ball. The new ball would go farther than the old gutta and, as a result, virtually every club and course had several holes which, with the new ball, could be reached in one stroke less than required with the old ball.

The new ball was not at once universally accepted and it was some time before it completely displaced the old gutta percha ball. For quite a time both balls were used, and the clubs and courses did not immediately reduce the bogey score on those holes which could be reached in one stroke with the new ball. On these holes the bogey score became one stroke more than the standard score with the new ball. On the remainder of the holes the standard score was the same with either ball. In this manner, Bogey came to be known and referred to in the United States as one stroke more than the standard score, which then became known as "par". However, in many places, particularly in England, Bogey remained the standard score.

The "Colonel" thus slipped from his place of esteem as the good golfer and his scores were no longer feared. It might be reasoned that he was stubborn and refused to give up playing with the old gutta percha ball, or that due to advancing years he was unable to score as well. In any event, "Coloney Bogey" occupies an interesting and unique niche in the history and lore of Golf. With his passing he took with him some of the color of that era in Golf history.

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