

DON ESSIG CAPTURES PUBLIC FANCY AND TITLE

*Teenager Wins
at Hershey*

SOME tournaments run their quiet courses without generating heroes or emotional excitement. And then, every so often, a tournament starts on a quiet course and suddenly assumes dramatic values because an individual player captures public fancy. This pleasant biochemical reaction occurred in the Amateur Public Links Championship at the Hershey Park Golf Club, in Hershey, Pa., and lifted the event far above its normal level, which was a fitting reward for the keen galleries and hospitable hosts.

The Public Links is a golfers' golf tournament. As much as any other and perhaps more, it attracts men who love golf for its own sake, make sacrifices to play and have neither achieved nor primarily desire the personal publicity which surrounds so many in the Amateur and Open. When they gather in a different part of the country each year, they are comparative unknowns to the local public—although well-known to each other and on their public courses back home.

It remains for the local public to search for a hero each year, and it developed one to its liking this year in Don Essig, III, of Indianapolis, Ind., an 18-year-old sophomore at Louisiana State University. Don is a very slightly built young man with an attractive boyishness about him, an overwhelming enthusiasm for golf and an extraordinary penchant for laying an iron shot up against a flagstick and holing the putt. The enthusiasm places him on a golf course practically from sunrise to nightfall every day, and the skill stems from the enthusiasm.

It wasn't long, as tournament days go, before spectators arriving at Hershey Park were asking: "How's the kid doing?"

"The kid" was invariably doing fine. After qualifying with 72-72—144, he played below-par golf and went right through



Gene Towry, of Dallas, Texas, (left) clasps the hand of Don Essig, III, of Indianapolis, Ind., in a congratulatory grip after the eighteen-year-old Louisiana State University sophomore beat him for the Amateur Public Links title at Hershey Park Golf Club, Hershey, Pa.

three fine golfers with no appreciable difficulty to meet the defending champion, James H. Buxbaum, of Memphis, Tenn., who also had been playing impressively, in the quarter-finals.

This was a real test, and drew a nice gallery. Don met the test head-on. He played the established distance in 68, two under par, and found Buxbaum still holding on, having cleared the brook and gotten home with his second at the eighteenth to square the match with a birdie 4. On the extra hole, Don, playing the odd to the green, faded a beautiful No. 5 iron around a guarding tree about four feet from the

hole. He won anti-climactically when Buxbaum's second, slightly pulled, bounded off the bank of the elevated green and out of bounds.

After that, Don the giant killer, was not only the chief protagonist but practically the only one. He beat Don Sckrabulis, of Kewanee, Ill., in the semi-final, 4 and 3, and Gene Towry, of Dallas, Texas, in the final, 6 and 5. In the last, Don scored another 68 in the morning and was 4 up at noon. He was even par for the thirteen holes in the afternoon.

Essig is not quite the youngest Champion. Les Bolstad, now professional at the University of Minnesota Golf Course, was born on May 9, 1908 and won on August 7, 1926, at the age of 18 years, 3 months, while a student at Minnesota. Don was born December 6, 1939, and was 18 years, 8 months, at the time of his victory. And despite his rather tender years, Don is now a veteran of seven USGA Championships. He qualified for the Junior Amateur Championship four times without ever going beyond the third round. In his final year of eligibility last year, he lost to Larry Beck, the fine young player who came on to win that title this year. He also qualified for two previous Public Links Championships, in 1954 and 1955, and went to the fourth round in 1955.

His eighth USGA Championship will be the Amateur this year. As Public Links Champion, he is not only invited to play but is exempt from sectional qualifying.

Towry, a fine player and a worthy opponent in the final, is also a college student although on a somewhat different plane. A member of the North Texas State teams which won collegiate championships a few years ago, Towry later toured briefly as a professional, then went into the Navy and acquired an interest in electronics. He is now 28, and reinstated as an amateur and a civilian, back in college at Southern Methodist studying electrical engineering. In the semi-finals, Towry beat J. Paul Popovic, of San Francisco, Cal., 7 and 6.

The Hershey Park course as resurveyed for the Championship measures only 6,055 yards and is one of the shortest on which a men's event has been played. Par is 70. Yet it held up remarkably well both

in the estimation of the players and in the matter of scoring.

The equalizer, to compensate for the shorter distance of the course, is Spring Creek, which winds past or across twelve holes, sometimes more than once, and the wooded, rolling terrain on which the late Maurice McCarthy, Sr., laid out the course. Incidentally, despite the hot, dry summer in the East, its watered fairways were green and beautifully conditioned.

In the 36-hole qualifying to determine the sixty-four qualifiers for match play, the only rounds in which every ball had to be put into every hole, Bud Kivett, of High Point, N. C., won the medal with 72-69—141. Kivett, a 35-year-old mail carrier who was vacationing with his wife and 4-year-old daughter, was in the round of sixteen two years ago, and went to the quarter-finals this year, losing to Towry.

The lowest single score in the qualifying was a 68 on the second day by Jack S. S. Chun, of Honolulu, T. H., a 49-year-old plumber. Chun's total of 142 was matched by Dr. Sam W. Valuck of Denver, Colo., a 34-year-old osteopathic physician and surgeon who recently moved there from Muskegon, Mich., and Buxbaum. Dr. Valuck scored 73-69 and Buxbaum 71-71.

Highest score to qualify was 153, two strokes lower than last year, and only five of the ten who made 153 qualified. The playoff winners were Donald L. Thornton, of Los Angeles, Cal., with a par 4 on the first hole; Ralph Emery, of Salt Lake City, Utah, and Anthony E. Pistorio, of Baltimore, Md., with 25 on the second hole; and John F. Butler, of Atlanta, Ga., and Bill Conroy, of Seattle, Wash., with 35 on the second hole.

The qualifiers, incidentally, represented twenty-four states and Hawaii.

For the first time, Honolulu won over 22 other teams in the championship for the Warren G. Harding Trophy, which is conducted simultaneously with the qualifying play. Its three-man score for 36 holes was 440, five strokes lower than Memphis' winning score a year ago. In addition to Chun's 74-68—142, George Nahale made 71-73—144 and Edward Nakagaki scored 80-74—154. Indianapolis and San Francisco tied for second at 443.