

A RETURN TO THE GOLDEN YEARS

BY

JOHN P. ENGLISH

USGA Assistant Executive Director

IN the golden years following World War I, when it was feasible to seed a match-play draw, the semi-finals of the Amateur Championship customarily drew together four of the acknowledged best players of the day. It was not unusual for three or even all four to be members of the current Walker Cup Team. Bob Jones, Francis Ouimet, Chick Evans, Jess Sweetser and George Von Elm appeared regularly in the semi-finals—Jones nine times, for example, and Ouimet seven in that era alone.

The growth of the game, however, matched the progress of these appealing Apollos and there came a day when no one any longer had the perception to seed a draw successfully. There were too many fine young players coming up in all parts of the country every year. So after a period of experimentation the all-match-play form and the blind draw were instituted.

During the years following World War II, the quantity of fine players, the increased number of 18-hole matches and the blind draw sometimes gave the round of four a morning-glory quality. Semi-finalists withered as fast as they bloomed, and only such giants as Willie Turnesa, Charley Coe, Harvie Ward and Hillman Robbins could achieve that estate twice in the last eleven years.

A year of Walker Cup competition usually became a particular shambles of form. It seemed a fortunate thing if one Team member made the semi-finals. There was even the debacle of 1951 when Coe, the only surviving member, was beaten not in the semi-finals but in the quarter-finals. In 1953 and 1955, Gene Littler and Harvie Ward again were the only Team members in the quarter-finals, but they did redeem the situation somewhat by going on to win.

There was no reason to think this state



LT. HILLMAN ROBBINS, JR.

of affairs would be improved when this year's fine Walker Cup Team, fresh from its hard-earned, 8-to-3 victory over Great Britain, arrived at The Country Club, in Brookline, Mass., for the 57th Amateur Championship and the fourth at that Club since 1910. If anything, there was suspicion that the situation might worsen, for the famous course where so many great championships had been held in an earlier era now seemed hardly long or severe enough to defend itself completely against modern clubs and balls and present-day skills.

However, The Country Club folk were among those who shared in the suspicion, and they did something about it beforehand. With 27 holes to choose from, they eliminated three par 4s (the first, second and fourth, the latter two of which are quite short) from the first, or Clyde, nine

USGA FILM LIBRARY

Latest addition to the USGA Film Library is a 17½ minute, full color 16 mm. presentation entitled "Golf's Longest Hour." Filmed at the Oak Hill Country Club, Rochester, N. Y., during the 1956 Open Championship, it covers the closing stages when Cary Middlecoff had to wait it out while Ben Hogan, Julius Boros and Ted Kroll were striving in vain to beat his score.

Other films in the Library are:

"Play Them As They Lie," a 16 mm. color production, running for 16½ entertaining minutes in which Johnny Farrell, the Open Champion of 1928, acts as intermediary between Wilbur Mulligan, a beginner of unimpeachable integrity, and Joshua P. Slye, a past master in the art of breaking the Rules. The film was made at the Baltusrol Golf Club, Springfield, N. J., where Farrell is professional.

"Inside Golf House" gives the viewer an opportunity to see the many interesting exhibits in "Golf House," USGA headquarters in New York, and to re-live golf triumphs of the past with many of the game's immortals. The film is a 16 mm. black and white production and runs 28 minutes.

"The Rules of Golf—Etiquette" also has proved popular. The film stresses the importance of etiquette by portrayal of various violations of the code in the course of a family four-ball match. Ben Hogan appears in several scenes, and Robert T. Jones, Jr., makes the introductory statement. A 16 mm. color production, the film has a running time of 17½ minutes.

The distribution of all three prints is handled by National Educational Films, Inc., 165 West 46th Street, New York 36, N. Y., which produced the films in cooperation with the USGA. The rental is \$20 per film; \$35 for two; \$50 for three, or 60 for four, in combination at the same time, including the cost of shipping prints to the renter.

of the traditional Old Course, and in their place substituted three monsters, all of which fell on the second nine, otherwise composed largely of holes from the Squirrel unit. One of the monsters was not a single hole at all but a combination of two which found the visitors playing from the tee of Primrose 1 across the water hazard behind that hole, to the green of Primrose 2. The next two holes were the eighth and ninth of the Primrose unit, not previously a part of the championship course. The finish was, of course, the last five holes of the championship course about as they had

been played since Ouimet beat Vardon and Ray in the 1913 Open.

The addition of these Primrose holes made the second nine Herculean, and many an ambitious youngster who had managed to gain an advantage of a hole or two on an experienced player over the first nine saw it vanish before his eyes as they turned down the home stretch.

Thus, as the eliminations proceeded, the experienced players, the known quantities, kept winning, and when the semi-final was reached four members of the Walker Cup Team remained. They were Dr. Frank M. Taylor, Jr., of Pomona, Cal., Pvt. Mason Rudolph, of Clarksville, Tenn., Lt. Hillman Robbins, of Memphis, Tenn., the eventual winner, and Rex Baxter, Jr., of Amarillo, Texas.

In their wakes lay certainly as strongly balanced a field as has ever sought the Amateur Championship, in spite of the absence of Harvie Ward, of San Francisco, Cal., the 1955 and 1956 Champion, who had been found in violation of the Rules of Amateur Status and was serving a probationary period. The entry of 1,578, only 22 short of last year's record, included Reid Jack, of Scotland, the British Amateur Champion, and all the other members of the British Team, a strong one.

In particular, the semi-finalists had eliminated four other great players in as exciting a series of quarter-final matches as the old championship has ever seen.

For example, Taylor made a brilliant birdie 3 on the home hole for a one-under-par 71 to beat Gene Andrews, of Los Angeles, Cal., the 1954 Public Links Champion and a man who had lost only to Reid Jack in the fifth round of the British Amateur last spring. Andrews had made a run for it by holing a 50-foot putt for a 2 on the sixteenth.

Rudolph dropped an equally fine birdie 3 on the nineteenth to stop Richard L. Yost, of Portland, Ore., a member of the 1955 Walker Cup Team, after Yost had squared the match at the eighteenth. Rudolph also was 71 for the eighteen holes.

Robbins finished with two successive birdies, a 2 on the sixteenth and a 3 on the seventeenth, to oust Richard D. Chapman,

of Osterville, Mass., the former United States, British, Canadian and French Champion, 3 and 1. Robbins, too, needed a par for a 71 when Chapman finally succumbed after another great showing at the age of 46.

Baxter eliminated his fellow-student at the University of Houston, 19-year-old Phil Rodgers, of La Jolla, Cal., by holing a tough eight-footer at the twenty-first hole. Rodgers had holed a fifty-foot downhill putt for a birdie 3 on the seventeenth, only to see Baxter match it from twenty feet, and then a twenty-footer for a birdie 3 on the eighteenth which Baxter could not match. Baxter had, however, played the regulation round in 72.

Unfortunately, the British had not appeared in the quarter-final round and, in fact, stayed nowhere near as long as many had hoped they would. Jack was a third-round victim of Claude L. Wright, of Denver, Colo., and by the fourth of the eight rounds only two had been left, Alan Thirlwell, of England, and Alan F. Bussell, of Scotland, and they were paired against each other. Thirlwell won, but it was his last victory.

It was in a way sad that the eliminations had to continue after these sensational matches, and as a matter of fact the players did display less zest in the semi-finals. Taylor defeated Rudolph, 5 and 4, with one-over-par play; and Robbins barely got away from Baxter with an eight-over-par performance.

Incidentally, Rudolph, Robbins and Baxter, all southerners, came to the championship together and roomed together throughout the week.

In the final, Taylor and Robbins emulated the girl with the curl. Taylor won the very first hole with a smart birdie 3, lost the next five hand-running to four pars and a birdie, then surged back and was 1 up again at noon. Neither player was at his best, however.

The brilliant golf of the earlier rounds did not appear until the short sixth in the afternoon where Robbins in effect stole the hole to draw even. Robbins' iron shot

came to rest in the rough at the base of a steep bank to the left of the green, and Taylor's ball stopped on the front apron. However, Taylor chipped too strongly. Robbins wedged dead to the hole and Taylor missed his putt for the par and the half.

Thereafter, Robbins, a 25-year-old Air Force officer, made four pars and three birdies on the last eight holes to close out the 40-year-old dentist, who obviously tired rapidly.

There were, of course, many other great matches in the early rounds, and not the least appealing of these were the two in which Chick Evans, the 67-year-old winner of the 1916 and 1920 Championships, triumphed by successive scores of 4 and 3, then 4 and 2. The championship was his forty-fifth in succession since 1907; the appearance in match play was his thirty-first; and the victories were his fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth.

Exciting, too, was the fourth-round contest in which Willie Turnesa, of Elmsford, N. Y., the 1938 and 1948 Champion, and Jack Penrose, of Miami Beach, Fla., went to the 24th hole, Penrose finally winning.

These were all sources of keen interest for some of the largest and most golf-minded galleries to attend the Amateur in years. The favorable response indicated that Boston never should have allowed twenty-three years to elapse between Amateur Championships. The last one it had seen was in 1934, also at The Country Club, when Lawson Little won his first Little Slam.

Bostonians, too, seemed to appreciate not only a first-hand look at the new young amateur stars but a chance to see again their own favorites—Jesse P. Guilford, the 1921 Champion, Fred J. Wright, then the Senior Amateur Champion, and Ted Bishop, the 1946 Champion, all of whom were in action, and Francis Ouimet, who was in the gallery.

The response, too, was a tribute to the energetic and conscientious manner in which Charles Devens, the general chairman, and all The Country Club's officers and committees applied themselves to the business of putting on an attractive, hospitable and well-managed event.