

# TWO CENTURIES OF GOLFING FASHIONS

*Efforts of Early  
Golfers  
Determined by Dress*

**B**EHOLD the well-dressed golfer of today clad in light weight slacks, an open neck sports shirt, two-tone shoes, and a feather weight cap or visor. In his bag he probably carries an alpaca or cashmere sweater in case it turns chilly. All told, he is dressed for comfort and, incidentally or accidentally, looks well groomed.

Yet every golfer in his time has been a "modern" golfer, and no doubt, while following the current fashion, has thought himself a dandy.

But current fashions of the olden days were hardly conducive to good golf, and it was not until the 'twenties, with the advent of plus fours, gay sweaters and matching stockings, which in turn gave way to slacks, to shorts and carnival colors, that freedom of movement came into its own.

Let's study the first picture taken of America's pioneer golfers with their tweed trousers or breeches, waistcoats and tailored jackets. They later adopted a uniform of the traditional British red jacket with brass buttons, blue checked cap and waistcoat, grey knickers, long stockings and grey gaiters, and starched wing collar and tie.

Dress Dick Mayer or Ben Hogan in similar garb and it would be interesting to speculate by how many strokes their scores would mount. Try to picture Hogan's full, wide arc and tremendous delayed wrist action. One practice swing in a tight waistcoat and jacket, and the left sleeve would be straining at the seam. A couple of shots and it would be well on its way to severing connection with the rest of the garment.

## **The Bent Left Elbow**

It is an interesting fact that old photographs of famous golfers at the top of the swing show them invariably with a bent left elbow. They had no alternative; fashion decreed that it was impossible to swing otherwise.

The evolution of the golfing dress has been fascinating. British players in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries treated their sartorial problems seriously and they were often the topic of long and heated debates.

## **Uniforms in Vogue**

During the latter half of the eighteenth century players were content to turn out in the accepted red coat, cut long at the back, knee breeches, white stockings and buckled shoes. For headgear they had the choice of a tam o'shanter or a top hat. But with the advent of the nineteenth century clubs began to grow individualistic and to design their own uniforms, and woe betide any member who appeared in civilian dress—he was fined in dozens of claret, much to the delectation of his fellow members.

In the main the red coat remained the golfers' symbol, but it dropped the epaulets and substituted the clubs' determining facings and insignia.

Among the most capricious and fastidious golfers were the members of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland. In the fifty years from 1780 they changed their garb five times, varying from the traditional to a buff-colored coat and red cap, to a red coat with dark blue velvet cape, to a plain blue coat with club buttons, and back to the original red.

The red tail coat gradually faded from the British golfing scene during the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was retained solely for social functions to be worn by captains and ex-captains. During the evolution the coat was shortened to blazer length and as such was retained to act as a signal to pedestrians until about 1890 and even later at English courses laid out on common land.

Some ancient golfers had a further



*Courtesy "Fifty Years of American Golf"*

**Originators of golf in America and founder members of the St. Andrews Golf Club, Yonkers, N. Y., playing on their first crude lay-out in a cowpasture in 1888. They are Harry Holbrook, A. W. Kinnan, John B. Upham and John Reid. Mr. Holbrook's sons, Warren and Fred, are the pioneer caddies.**

hazard to contend with besides the restricting clothing—a thick, swarthy beard. Like Santa Claus, they had to decide whether to swing under or over the fungus. The former would undoubtedly have obstructed their view at the top of the swing, the latter would probably have got entangled on the backswing!

#### **The Woman's Lot**

But if men had their troubles, the lot of the women was even worse.

Imagine the fragile Mary, Queen of Scots, trying to play in the court dress of the Tudor era. The voluminous sleeves must have made it impossible to take a full swing; the ruffle or stand-up collar would have added to the discomfort of the ill-fated queen, and her reputed seventeen-inch waist would hardly have given much impetus to her efforts.

Nothing further is heard of women's golf until 1810 when the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club, Scotland, offered a new creel and skull (fishbaskets carried on the back with a strap coming over the forehead) for competition to the Fish Ladies of Musselburgh.

No doubt the fishwives, as they were



**The well dressed woman golfer of the roaring twenties, the era of short skirts, low waists, shapeless garments and cloche hats.**

usually called, played in their traditional costume of three or more heavy flannel petticoats in navy/white, red/white, yellow/white stripes—the top two caught up at one side to show the under one. A blouse with lace cuffs and a woollen shawl wrapped around the head and falling to a long point at the back would complete the ensemble.

A picturesque costume, yes, but heavy in the extreme and cumbersome. Any women who pivoted well on the back swing would never be able to transfer the weight of her petticoats again by the moment of impact!

When women began to form their own clubs in the late Victorian era clothes were as restricting as etiquette. Large hats, often held on by a chiffon scarf tied under the chin, were liable to be knocked askew on the follow through. Whale boning, too, was apt to make itself felt at inconvenient moments.

The Edwardian boaters, pinned to pad-

ded coiffeurs and set off by deep starched collars, did little to alleviate the ediscomfiture of the pioneer lady golfers who busied themselves on what would now be regarded as pitch and putt courses.

### The Roaring Twenties

Golf's most hideous decade was surely the roaring twenties. While skirts went up above the knees and waists fell almost to meet them, the ladies clad their most redeeming feature in diced woollen stockings, chose drab tweed skirts and equally nondescript and shapeless cardigans.

Their crowning glory, now bobbed or shingled, was discreetly hidden beneath a woollen cap or "pudding basin" hat.

Emancipation in women's dress first came through the introduction of slacks. In southern climes shorts became inevitable on the golf course, and today Bermuda shorts appear to be the uniform even for grandmother. I wonder, however, if grandfather approves?

### HARRY PACKHAM

*A memorial to Harry Packham, of Los Angeles, Cal., member of the USGA Public Links Committee since 1934, reprinted in part from the Rancho Golf Club Round-Up.*

He loved golf. He fought for it, worked for it, talked for it; spent time, money, energy, and heart for it, and had enough bullheaded courage left to yell 'Fore!' at the Devil himself.

Most men are hills and valleys, but he was a mountain of a man; a moving mountain, capped by a volcano, ready to erupt and pour the lava of his love for golf over all those who stood in his way. And like a mountain, he is best seen in perspective, the view unobscured by the mists of sentimentality.

What would he want of us?

He would probably squirm at the idea, but whether he liked it or not, he left us a legacy. It was in every act of his life:

To respect the game of golf.

To see it whole; acknowledging its principles, recognizing its purpose, and accepting its eternal challenge. For it is the only game on the face of the earth

in which man plays the toughest opponent there is—himself. Whether he is alone on the course, walking on greens still wet with the new morning, or surrounded by twenty-five thousand people during a major tournament, the golfer who hovers over a ball, a primitive club in his hand, is expressing man's ultimate faith in his own skill and in his own purity of dedication.

For Harry, this dedication was greater than health, greater than wealth, greater even than friendship, and unworthy to be sullied by self-interest or something as shabby as a preferred starting time.

One likes to think of him as part of a current Threesome; with Charley hitting those beautiful irons, Harry muttering at his putter, and Scotty hacking along until they reach the Eighteenth, when Scotty—in tones loud and clear—will call out the final score.

That's one we'd like to gallery. . . .