

FREDDIE McLEOD -FIFTY YEARS A CHAMPION

BY

MERRELL WHITTLESEY
Golf Writer,
Washington Star

Fifty years ago, when Freddie McLeod won the Open Championship, a fellow put his \$300 prize money in his pocket and headed for home.

There were no endorsements, no confabs with managers, no ghost-written stories, no books. Manufacturers were not knocking down the door, and of course radio and television were not of this world, as they were during the 58th Open Championship at the Southern Hills Country Club, Tulsa, Okla.

Neither was there any transmission of pictures by wire, so when the 1908 Open Champion went to Van Cortlandt Park, in New York, for a tournament the day after his Open triumph his was not exactly a household name.

Mr. Mac, keen, sharp, 76 years of age and active as professional at Columbia Country Club, in Chevy Chase, Md., tells this story on himself.

Van Cortlandt Park was humming with activity. In addition to the usual run of golfers, there was a tournament. The bags were racked in a seemingly unending line. There was no preference for tournament players, they waited their turn.

But, as McLeod's group arrived, someone went to the starter and whispered "The Open champion is here." Whereupon the starter waved Freddie and his playing companions to the tee.

Fifty or 75 persons followed the group. At a par-3 hole on the first nine there was a tie-up of several groups. Once again, someone informed each group: "The Open champion is here." The distinguished group was permitted to play through.

Hole by hole the gallery increased, and McLeod and his companions virtually sped around the crowded course as those in front gave way.

Which Is He?

When the round was over, the final putt was greeted with polite applause. But as Freddie was leaving the green he



FREDDIE McLEOD

heard one galleryite ask another: "Which was the Open champion?"

The Open Championship of 1908 was played in August, 36 holes on a Thursday and 36 on a Friday. When McLeod beat Willie Smith in the play-off at Myopia Hunt Club, Hamilton, Mass., the playoff came on a Saturday.

McLeod played the entire championship in a sweater and jacket, the chill winds whipped the greens so fast that three putts were the best he could hope for if the ball was above the hole.

DESCRIPTION OF A GOLFER

Wishing to identify on the links a certain gentleman known to him only by name—should they happen to pass—a golfer once inquired of his caddie, "What kind of a man is So-and-So?" "Eh, well," was the reply, "he's jeest a bull-neckit, big shouthered, hog-backit, bandy-legit chiel; but he shapes fine for a golfer."

From "Stories of Golf," 1894.

Myopia measured about 6,400 yards, had a par of 73 and there was only one par-3 hole on the course.

Freddie shot 82-82-81-77 and 77 in the play-off. He won by six strokes. The rough was about as high as at the Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio, last year, McLeod recalls. The tees were back, and fifty years ago the Texas wedge, or any other kind of wedge, was unknown. Nobody putted out of bunkers with the overhanging grasses. Over a rugged golf course and under extreme weather conditions, there was no need to apologize for the 322 totals that tied for the title.

McLeod was professional at Midlothian Club, near Chicago—and five years away from his native Scotland—when he took the 36-hour train ride to Boston for the 1908 Open.

McLeod loses 10 lbs.

Freddie weighed in at 118 on his departure, 10 pounds heavier than his weight after the play-off. At 108, he still reigns as the lightest Open Champion of all time.

McLeod's equipment included eight clubs: five irons, two woods and a putter. His golf shoes were street shoes with screwed in hobnails. The balls were the larger and lighter type, lacking in uniformity.

The members of Midlothian chipped in to help with his modest expenses. A youngster from the club was his caddie, a boy who was accustomed to receiving from 35 to 50 cents a round.

The entrance fee was \$5, but the Open championship did not require a qualifying round, and admission was free for spectators. Playing time for the 36 holes was about five hours, or a little more than the average time for 18 holes of week-end golf today.

Despite the absence of \$1,000 bills, television and the histrionics of the present-day Open Championship, there was pressure in 1908, Mr. Mac will tell you.

Freddie didn't sleep a wink the night before the play-off. He finally gave up trying, early the next morning, and in dressing for the match with Smith he decided not to wear the shirt he had worn for good luck on Thursday and Friday.

He went to the practice tee, tried two dozen balls and didn't hit any of them over ankle high. Fortunately he had brought the good-luck shirt to his locker, so he changed.

McLeod also made an adjustment in his clubs. He filed the face of his driver "to lay it back a little." One also could file, or punch, irons for backspin. As soon as he hit the first ball, he had his confidence.

Mr. Mac claims the 1908 field knew the Rules much better than the 1958 field. "Although you won't find Gil Nichols' name among the prize winners," Freddie said. "He would have won money, but turned in an incorrect score."

Fred McLeod's record in the Open Championship is one of the best. His highest finish had been fifth before his victory, but in 1910 and 1911 he was only one stroke back of the three-way ties for the title. He was third in 1914, sixth in 1915 and runner-up in 1921 over his home Columbia course.

Freddie also was a runner-up in the PGA, (in 1919), and a two-time North and South Open winner (1909 and 1920).

Still A Competitor

A regular in the Open Championship through 1931, Freddie may have missed a half-dozen since. His title qualifies him for life participation in the Masters, and at Augusta he and Jock Hutchison usually tee off first and play their 18 in a quick two hours, or less.

As professional at Columbia since 1912, he has a full teaching schedule in the season, plays a bit less each year but still more than most home pros. His trips to the Open, the Masters and the PGA Seniors, which he won in 1938, keep Mr. Mac in contact with the game.

When there's a Rules discussion in tournament golf in Washington, it usually is settled by calling Freddie McLeod. His word is gospel to the golf writers. The anniversaries of his birth, his Open triumph and so forth are wonderful occasions for Columbia members to honor their beloved professional.