

PUBLIC LINKS CHAMPIONSHIPS OVER 39 YEARS

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America's biggest major golf championship?

From the standpoints of significance, spectator interest and tradition, the Open Championship is without parallel.

But on a basis of sheer numbers of entries, the vote for the No. 1 adult event must go to the USGA Amateur Public Links Championship.

Public Links outdraws them all—including the Open and the Amateur.

As a matter of fact, a single Public Links Championship has been known to pull more entries than the list for the Open and Amateur in the same year.

In 1959, the Open attracted a record 2,385 and the Amateur hit an all-time peak of 1,696. The Amateur Public Links has averaged 2,300 in its last 17 playings dating from 1939.

In seven successive years starting in 1939, it surpassed the combined entry of the Open and Amateur with sectional qualifying fields, ranging from 2,401 in 1939 to an outsized 3,586 in 1946, for the Championship held at Wellshire Golf Course in Denver, Colo.

The growth of the 39-year-old tourney may be attributed primarily to sectional qualifying rounds, adopted in 1939, and the fact that qualifiers are permitted to accept a nominal portion of their expenses to attend the tournament proper.

Prior to 1939, the preliminary consisted of an unlimited number of city area rounds.

The Public Links, launched by the United States Golf Association in 1922 when golf was becoming a game for the masses, got off to a bang-up start—literally.

Two contestants nearing the finish of a match in 1922 played their approaches to a green at Toledo's Ottawa Park Course when a pistol shot sounded in the rear of the gallery. A thoroughly disinterested spectator had chosen that moment to commit suicide.

Official Washington lent a hand in

1923 at the East Potomac Park Course in the nation's capital. Charles Evans Hughes, Secretary of State, presented the trophies.

The same year President Harding, only two months before his death, donated a trophy for team competition, which remains an annual feature. The trophy is named for the President.

Several Public Links players have become quite well known.

Smiley Quick won the title in 1946, accepted an invitation to play in the Amateur, and went all the way to the final. He ultimately played on the 1947 U. S. Walker Cup team.

In 1947 he filed a tardy entry for the Public Links and it was rejected. He thus was ineligible to defend. This is perhaps the only case of its kind involving the current Champion in a major Championship.

Frank Strafaci, who triumphed in 1935, has gone ahead to accredit himself in a long career in the Amateur. Originally from New York, Frank now lives at Miami Beach, Fla.

Champions in the Public Links come from many walks of life. Joseph Coble (1924) was a Philadelphia waiter, Carl Kauffman (1927-28-29) a Pittsburgh stenographer, Charles Ferrera (1931-33) a San Francisco riveter, Pat Abbott (1936) a Hollywood movie extra.

Reflecting the times, Al Leach (1938) was a WPA worker in Cleveland. Andrew Szwedko (1939) was a Pittsburgh steel worker, Mike Ferentz (1948) a Long Beach bartender and Stanley Bielat (1950) a truck driver from Yonkers, N. Y.

Collegians who excelled include Eddie Held (1922), Les Bolsted (1926), Dave Stanley (1951), Don Essig (1957), Daniel D. Sikes, Jr., (1958) and Bill Wright (1959). Wilfred Crossley (1947) is a Harvard alumnus.

Bill Wright is the first Negro to win a national golf championship.

Many well-known golfers are products of the Public Links. Ed Furgol and Tommy Bolt went ahead to win the Open, Walter Burkemo, the PGA, and Bud Ward, the Amateur Championship.

The Public Links also produced these Walker Cup players: Scotty Campbell, Harry Givan, Bruce McCormick, Quick, Ken Venturi, George Voigt and Ward.

A left-hander turned up in the 1949 final at Los Angeles. He was William Betger from San Francisco, the only left-hander to go so far in a USGA event.

Youngsters have had their innings. Bolstad was 18 when he won at Buffalo in 1926, Dick Walsh (1923) and Eddie Held (1922) were 19 when they succeeded. Joe Nichols, a 15-year-old schoolboy from Long Beach, was runner-up at St. Paul in 1931.

Clark Morse, a 17-year-old from St. Louis, was medalist at Cleveland in 1927,

while Walsh was 18 when he emerged as runner-up in 1922.

Two of the hot spots for America's public course players are Denver and Los Angeles. Denver had a sectional field of 516 in 1941 and more than doubled it (1,280) in 1946.

The Los Angeles area spawned seven champions: Abbott, 1936; McCormack, 1937; Quick, 1946; Dave Stanley, 1951; Pete Bogan, 1952; Ted Richards, 1953; and Gene Andrews, 1954.

Other Californians to win are Ferrera, 1931-33; Ferentz, 1948, and Ken Towns, 1949.

Of the 209 starters in the championship proper in 1949, exactly 45 were from California. Half of the 64 qualifiers at San Francisco in 1937 were from the golden state. There have been four all-California finals.

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