

GOLFERS FROM 26 NATIONS PLAY IN CENTENARY BRITISH OPEN

By

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Kel Nagle, a brawny 39-year-old Australian, won the British Open Golf Championship in a driving finish against the United States' Arnold Palmer and then swapped a thousand handshakes with his left hand.

The British thought the left-handed shake might be a peculiar Australian custom. Nagle knew better. The husky Australian collected the Centenary playing of the British Open virtually one-handed. Throughout a week's play at St. Andrews, Scotland, the cradle of golf, Nagle was troubled by a tendon injury to the little finger of his right hand.

Doctors told him to rest and forget golf. Nagle laughed it all off, received constant treatment for the painful and nagging irritation and played on to win. But, at the end, he still had to exchange handshakes the left-handed way. His right hand was too painful.

Nagle won with a four-round total of 69-67-71-71—278. Arnold Palmer, the 30-year-old reigning United States Open and Masters Champion, finished one stroke behind with 70-71-70-68—279.

It was a finish worthy of the 100th British Open in every way with Palmer maintaining his reputation as a last-round fighter.

Palmer, his white cap pulled low over his eyes and chain-smoking his way around the 6,996-yard Old Course on the edge of the North Sea, started the last two rounds seven strokes behind pacesetter Roberto de Vicenzo of Argentina. That was a familiar spot. He had started the last round in the United States Open exactly seven strokes behind, but went on to win.

Palmer started his desperate drive in the third round. He cut the lead to four strokes. Now, Kel Nagle had moved ahead of de Vicenzo. Nagle had a three-round total of 207, de Vicenzo had 209 and Palmer 211.

Then an awesome thunderstorm broke over St. Andrews. Water even filled the

Valley of Sin—a five foot depression in front of the 18th green. British officials decided that the links of St. Andrews could not soak up all that water in a few hours, so play was called off for the day. The last round, due to be played on Friday afternoon, was postponed until Saturday.

Lots of people argued this was the move that robbed the tough, athletic Palmer of victory. He was all charged up and ready to go in the afternoon. A night's rest was to the advantage of Nagle, argued the experts.

So it turned out—but only after a nerve-tingling finish that had a crowd of about 20,000 describing the end as the finest in history.

Nine holes from the end, the fight was between Nagle, Palmer and de Vicenzo. All other challengers had faded. All three covered the first nine holes in 34—two under par. The fight was still on.

De Vicenzo failed to get his par at the short 11th. Now it was between Palmer and Nagle.

Palmer went to the famous Road Hole—the 17th—only two strokes down on Nagle. He had three putted it in each of the three previous rounds. This time Palmer tamed the Road Hole. He sent his second shot over the green and into deep grass on the edge of the road. He pulled out his putter, bravely stroked the ball through the grass and up a three-foot rise to the green. The ball finished four feet from the hole. Palmer sank the putt for a birdie four.

Then came the 18th. Palmer hit a booming 300-yard drive. He pitched to about six feet and got his birdie three. Cheers echoed over the course. And Nagle, now under pressure of the type he had never known before, was preparing to tackle a difficult eight-footer on the 17th.

He sank it and came to the last hole needing a four to win. He had a fine drive and then sent his second sailing over the Valley of Sin to within three

feet of the pin. That almost perfect nine-iron practically won him the Championship. He missed the first putt with a nervous nudge, then calmly potted the nine-incher for the title.

So the title went to the husky Australian who first learned to play his golf shots in the bush of his native land. Golf balls lay around his farmhouse home in New South Wales—but there were no clubs. Nagle, only seven years old, fashioned his own clubs from tree roots.

Willie Park, winner of the first British Open a century ago at Prestwick, would have been proud of Nagle. Park and the other pioneers came up the hard way, so did Nagle.

The Championship was a fitting centenary anniversary. Nearly 400 golfers from 26 nations came to St. Andrews to do homage. Twenty-two Americans were among them.

Gene Sarazen, the dark-haired 58-year-old from Germantown, N. Y., was one of

the gallery favorites. Gene led the American qualifiers with a two-round score of 141—one stroke better than Palmer. Gary Player of South Africa led the 74 qualifiers with a total of 135.

Gene took an 83 in the first round of the Championship and then announced: "My feet are too heavy. I must withdraw." Everybody sympathized with him, and loved him for his last fling.

Sarazen, winner of the title in 1932, was one of several older champions who played at St. Andrews. Jock Hutchison, now 76 years old and the first American to win the title, was there. So was Henry Cotton, 52-year-old maestro of British golf and three-time winner of the title; Peter Thomson, the Australian who has won the crown four times; and Player, winner in 1959.

Bill Johnston, the only American besides Palmer to reach the last two rounds, finished with a score of 75-74-71-73—291—well down the field.

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