

# LITTLER AND THE OPEN FINALLY MAKE MERGER

By

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The prize-giving at the National Open Championship had just ended. The new Champion was whispering a quiet question:

"How much do you think I ought to pay my caddie?"

This was Gene Alec Littler speaking—not a youngster fresh to the tournament circuit but a veteran who will be 31 on July 21.

Still unspoiled, always considerate of others, utterly modest, Gene Littler in the 61st USGA Open had the spotlight thrown full on not only his ability to control a golf ball but also on the fine character which has always distinguished him. The game is fortunate to have such a gentleman as its Champion Golfer.

Gene Littler typifies the modern young man who has found his niche in playing competitive golf as a professional. The pattern is simple:—junior golf, college, military service, major amateur competition, then the professional circuit when wide travel as an amateur became financially difficult.

Littler has long been tabbed for greatness, as witness:

1947-48-49—finalist in the U. S. Junior Chamber of Commerce Junior Championship, and winner in '48.

1953—National Amateur Champion and a star of our Walker Cup Team.

1954—Runner-up in the Open on his first try as a professional, five months after leaving amateur golf.

Winning the Open last month at Oakland Hills Country Club, near Detroit, was a natural sequel for Gene Littler, although long deferred.

But Littler's early promise was gauged not so much by his winnings as by the quality of his swing. His style has long been smooth, uncomplicated, classic. His putting is a thing of beauty. As Champion, he will be a model to try to copy.

"Gene the Machine" turned professional in January, 1954, some four months after winning the National Amateur. The



Gene Littler

letter he wrote the USGA then is worth recalling:

"I am taking this action after many weeks of deliberation, despite the fact my father and many of my closest friends would like to see me remain an amateur.

"To remain an amateur I would be compelled to accept financial assistance from outside sources, which is contrary to the rules governing amateurs. Neither my parents nor myself have the financial means to continually pay my expenses for amateur tournaments . . .

"I hope to be a credit to the game of golf and will do everything possible to uphold this fine sport."

Less than five months later he came to the home hole at Baltusrol, in New Jersey, needing an eight-foot putt to tie Ed Furgol for the Open Championship. He had to wait until last month at Oakland Hills to come all the way through.

In between, Gene was a very successful tournament campaigner, though there were lean times when he had small temptations to quit the tour "in a way, but not seriously—I was too stubborn," he says. "Now I can appreciate it more."

Littler has never smoked or drunk alcoholic beverages. His little family has been on the tour with him until this year, when 7-year-old Curt started school. The Littlers have another child, Suzanne, 3. Gene met his wife, Shirley, when both were students at San Diego State College in his native California.

With his modesty, Littler has a natural friendliness and a delightfully dry sense of humor. He says he doesn't like "all the glory, hand-shaking and general run of things after a tournament." After a round, he likes to refrain from talking golf. "When I play a great round, I feel I have really accomplished something. Golf is the only game where you feel you did it alone."

It was characteristic that he did not know the amount of first prize money in the Open until he accepted a \$14,000 check from John G. Clock, USGA President, who has known Littler from boyhood.

#### Select Company

In the first 59 Open Championships, six of the winners had won or were to win the Amateur Championship also—Francis Ouimet, Jerry Travers, Chick Evans, Bob Jones, Johnny Goodman and Lawson Little. Now the tempo has increased—Arnold Palmer last year, and now Gene Littler. This is select company. The new Champion graces it well.

Oakland Hills' fourth Open was a tremendous competition. Starting the fourth round, there were 13 contenders whose scores ranged from 210 through 214. It was anybody's tournament. Doug Sanders was the leader at 210; Littler had 213.

Amateur Jack Nicklaus set up a 72-hole score of 284, and a few minutes later Mike Souchak matched it. Then Bob Goalby came in with 282. By that time, things had shaken down to the point where the other contenders seemed limited to Littler and Sanders.

Suddenly, for the first time in the Championship, Littler was ahead. He had fourteen pars and three birdies up to the final hole, which he did in 5, one over



Doug Sanders

par. His 68 gave him a grand total of 281, one more than par.

Sanders bravely tried to match it. In a dramatic moment at the 18th, he chipped his third from just off the front of the putting green and saw the ball miss the left side of the hole by a scant two inches. His 282 tied him with the brilliant Goalby for second.

Nicklaus and Souchak followed at 284. Last year Nicklaus had been runner-up to Arnold Palmer. In the last three years Souchak has tied twice for third and once for fourth. He and Sanders were ailing physically at Oakland Hills.

Littler was the only player in the field who twice broke par, with his rounds of 73-68-72-68—281. He had ten birdies. Of the eleven strokes he lost to par, seven were dropped at the tenth and the 18th holes.

Oakland Hills was a less stringent test than in 1951, when Ben Hogan won with 287, but it was a great test and an eminently fair one. It left little room for slips, and the ridges and depressions of its greens put a high premium on "contour putting." Unlike 1951, when most of the rough was well trampled by spectators, this time the gallery was kept

well back from playing areas by the USGA's system of roping every hole as a unit; thus, the testing qualities of the course were preserved almost intact, except when a ball was splattered beyond the ropes onto trampled grass.

The weather conduced to scoring except for a strong wind the first day. It was always fair and sunny. The first day there was one score below par, a 69 by Bobby Brue. Thereafter the wind died down, the players found the range, and 18 sub par rounds all told were holed. The lowest were 67s by Bob Rosburg, Bob Harris, Doug Sanders, Eric Monti and Jacky Cupit. There were three 68s and ten 69s.

One of the best criteria of a Championship course is the number of clubs it tests. Littler used every club in the bag—"and more than once," he said.

Oakland Hills is wonderfully suited to big golf, not only as a test but also because of its facilities. There are wide open spaces for galleries between holes.

The clubhouse is unusually commodious. The Club's North Hills course, directly across a public highway, provides parking space.

With a wonderful field and all these physical features of Oakland Hills, the Open this year attracted record galleries which were estimated as follows, based on constant gate counts kept by a private police agency (\*indicates new record):

Thursday	12,311
Friday	15,225* (old record 14,751)
Saturday	20,439* (old record 16,527)

Total 47,975\* (old record 43,823)

There was a record entry of 2,476, who were reduced to a starting field of 150 by a double series of qualifying—58 local qualifying rounds and 13 Sectional Qualifying Championships.

For the first time there were no withdrawals from the original qualifying field.

Total prize money for professionals in the Championship proper was \$60,500. In each Sectional event, awards of \$300,

**Littler's final putt at Oakland Hills is seen**



\$200 and \$100 were made to first, second and third professionals. Thus, there was total prize money of \$7,800 in the Sectional Championships which, added to the prizes in the Championship proper, made a grand total of \$68,300—a record prize fund.

The Open is distinctive in many ways but its most meaningful quality is that it is the one true National Championship. Here alone may any professional or any amateur handicapped not over 2 have his opportunity. Here the touring professionals compete with their brethren the club pros and the leading amateurs.

At Oakland Hills, there were 22 club pros and amateurs in the field of 57 who qualified for the Saturday's 36-hole wind-up. Two of the amateurs, Jack Nicklaus, aged 21, and Deane Beman, the 23-year-old Amateur Champion, finished among the first 12. Nicklaus, after an opening 75, played wonderfully with 69-70-70 for his 284.

A surge of youth came about this year.

Nine young men in their twenties were among the lowest 24 scorers, including Jacky Cupit, a convert from amateurism last fall, whose third-round 67 included six 3s, four of them for consecutive birdies; Allen Geiberger and Bobby Brue, the first-round leader.

And what of some of the warmest favorites?

The defending Champion, Arnold Palmer, had a woeful start and barely qualified with 149. Then he holed two grand par 70s on Saturday, including a 32 on the hard second nine, finishing eight strokes away from Littler with 289. Palmer's many business interests doubtless have diverted his attention from his prime business of playing golf. He was a most worthy and most becoming Champion throughout the last year.

Then there was Gary Player, the little South African, who said he never played better golf from tee to green. He, too, scored wonderfully Saturday with 69-71, but his total of 287 tied for ninth.

by most of the record Open Gallery of 20,439.

photo by Rolly Ransom, Detroit News





Bob Goalby sinks a putt during the first round of the Open. He and Doug Sanders tied for second place with 72-hole scores of 282.

Ben Hogan was a sentimental favorite over the course where he had gained one of his greatest victories ten years before. This time he was 71-72-73-73—289. Not since 1939 had he failed to finish in the first ten (except when sickness prevented him from starting in 1949 and 1957).

Sam Snead, another who always attracts crowds, flew into this Open on the wings of a remarkable record in the spring when he seemed to be at the crest of his powers. But he took one stroke more than Hogan.

The tournament was graced by the British Open Champion, Kel Nagle, of Australia, who did valiantly for awhile with a pair of 71s, then had two 74s for 290. Jay Hebert, the PGA Champion, just could not get his good game going. Bob Rosburg, after sharing the 36-hole lead with Sanders at 139, was unable to hold the pace.

Among those who failed to make the cut at 149 were Cary Middlecoff, twice Champion; Julius Boros, Walter Burkemo, Peter Thomson, Bill Collins, Don

## HOW THE LEADERS STOOD AFTER EACH ROUND:

### 18 HOLES

Bobby Brue .....	69
Tommy Bolt .....	70
Bob Goalby .....	70
Paul Harney .....	71
Ben Hogan .....	71
Allen Geiberger .....	71
Bruce Crampton .....	71
Marty Furgol .....	71
Rex Baxter, Jr. ....	71
Kel Nagle .....	71

### 36 HOLES

Bob Rosburg .....	139
Doug Sanders .....	139
Doug Ford .....	141
Allen Geiberger .....	141
Eric Monti .....	141
Gene Littler .....	141
Bobby Brue .....	141
Gardner Dickinson, Jr. ....	141
Bob Harris .....	142
Kel Nagle .....	142
Bruce Crampton .....	142
Bob Goalby .....	142

### 54 HOLES

Doug Sanders .....	210
Jacky Cupit .....	211
Mike Souchak .....	211
Bob Goalby .....	211
Gardner Dickinson, Jr. ....	212
Doug Ford .....	212
Eric Monti .....	213
Bob Rosburg .....	213
Gene Littler .....	213
*Jack Nicklaus .....	214
Allen Geiberger .....	214
Bobby Brue .....	214
Dow Finsterwald .....	214

### 72 HOLES

Gene Littler .....	281
Bob Goalby .....	282
Doug Sanders .....	282
*Jack Nicklaus .....	284
Mike Souchak .....	284
Dow Finsterwald .....	286
Doug Ford .....	286
Eric Monti .....	286
Jacky Cupit .....	287
Gardner Dickinson, Jr. ....	287
Gary Player .....	287
* Amateur.	

Fairfield, Johnny Pott, Fred Hawkins and Ernie Vossler. Ken Venturi did not qualify in the Sectional tryouts. Amateur Charles Coe did not file entry.

Oakland Hills has always been a gracious, efficient host and, tested by this best-attended of Opens, the Club's committees and staff met the challenge. It should be appreciated that a big tournament cannot be staged successfully unless amateur golfers voluntarily give thousands upon thousands of man-hours to the work.

Little's hole-by-hole scores, with par:

Par .....	4 5 3 4 4 4 4 3—35	4 4 5 3 4 4 4 3 4—35—70
1st .....	5 5 3 5 4 3 4 4 3—36	5 5 4 3 4 4 4 3 5—37—73
2nd .....	5 4 2 4 4 3 4 4 3—33	5 4 4 3 4 4 4 3 4—35—68—141
3rd .....	4 5 3 4 4 4 4 4 2—34	6 4 5 3 4 4 4 3 5—38—72—213
4th .....	4 5 3 4 4 4 3 4 3—34	4 3 5 2 4 4 4 3 5—34—68—281

Oakland Hills was especially fortunate in having Judge John P. O'Hara for its General Chairman. This was his third Open as a leading force—in 1937 he was the Club's President and in 1951 he was General Chairman.

The USGA records its grateful appreciation of the hospitality and the labors of all of Oakland Hills' good people, from Joseph Carey, President, to the newest member of the staff so ably directed by Manager Clyde Cyphers.

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