

WEST VIRGINIA'S "MR. GOLF" NEVER PLAYED A STROKE

By
**WILLIAM C.
CAMPBELL**
Member, USGA
Amateur Status and
Conduct Committee

We golfers of the Mountain State are having to adjust this year to the end of an era. After 27 years as Secretary-Treasurer of the West Virginia Golf Association, Mr. Robert James Foley has stepped down. But Uncle Bob is far from being out of golf—even though he has yet to play a stroke himself.

Mr. Foley took over the responsibility of West Virginia golf in the depths of the Depression. He replenished the State Association's empty bank account with his own money, and established what became a familiar pattern of iron-gloved direction of Association affairs—tempered by a warmth of human feeling that his cloak of gruffness could not hide. Several presidents served during Mr. Foley's tenure—all good and able men dedicated to golf, and incidentally all of them players of the game—but none would deny that Mr. Foley "ran things."

Even before, he had promoted the game in various ways. His advice (always free) was essential in the development of several of the Tri-State's early courses and has been sought ever since, because of his extensive professional knowledge of grasses; he is head of the Foley Horticultural Service. He has always given freely of his time and knowledge out of some strangely acquired love of golf. Administrative responsibilities followed naturally; in all of the activities in which he joins his fellow men, he has been the perfect one-man organization.

In 1924 he was elected Secretary-Treasurer of the Guyan Golf and Country Club in his home town of Huntington. The Board of Directors abolished all committees and put everything in his hands. The results were so successful that he didn't shed that burden for 16 years.

Meanwhile Mr. Foley had become affiliated with the USGA—or vice versa, as West Virginians are inclined to view the relationship. In 1936 he became a member of the Green Section, and still is; in '37 he conducted the USGA Open Sec-



Robert J. Foley

tional Qualifying Rounds on the Guyan course (which the young Sam Snead won, with an 8-under par score, to lead the nation); and in '42 he officially joined the Sectional Affairs Committee on which he still serves. USGA club memberships in this area have multiplied five-fold during his tenure.

Mr. Foley has attended a number of National championships and for years never missed an Annual Meeting of the USGA. He may not have volunteered much information or opinion publicly, the only exception being his constant refusal to enforce the stymie in his domain. His attitude was generally expressed by the reply which he reportedly gave to a USGA official inviting his comments: "You fellows adopt the rules, I'll enforce them." Mr. Foley has never lacked the courage of USGA convictions.

Our course superintendents know him through his wise and generous help with

their green and turf problems (in addition to helping to build new courses and rebuild old ones, he personally introduced bent grass to West Virginia); but area golfers have known him more for a loyal and unique service to the USGA, for his efficient conduct of the various (Open, Amateur, and Junior Amateur) Sectional Qualifying Rounds, and for his strict, unwavering enforcement of the Rules of Golf and Amateur Status.

Service Without Play

For years he invited all entrants to breakfast before the qualifying rounds, in order to explain rules, etc. and to get everyone acquainted. In later years, this hospitality has taken the generous form of refreshments for all players (and, only too often, spectators) after the scores are posted. Thus we know Mr. Foley as a stern and gracious supporter of the game which he serves lovingly and self-effacingly but does not play.

As "Mr. Golf" in West Virginia and much of the neighboring Kentucky and Ohio, he has deserved the plaudits of all, but long ago was resigned to handling the gripes on which golfers seem to thrive. So he may have been as privately pleased as he was publicly annoyed three years ago when his club made him an Honorary Life Member and adopted this Resolution:

"Wishing to honor in a singular manner the unselfish service of Mr. R. J. Foley, the Board of Trustees of Guyan Golf and Country Club hereby establish the R. J. Foley Seniors Invitational Handicap Golf Tournament for players of 50 years of age or more. The Board of Trustees are fully cognizant of the fact that the membership of Guyan Golf and Country Club can never fully repay Mr. Foley for his devoted and unselfish efforts on behalf of the Club, but do hope that on the second Saturday of each May, down through the years, this Tournament will serve to recall to our attention his outstanding contributions."

Mr. Foley's organizational talents could hardly be confined to golf, but the extent of his extra-curricular interests is appalling. From 1918 to 1960 he was Sec-

retary of the community's leading dancing club, without ever dancing a step himself; he remains the only secretary-treasurer (there are no other officers) of the town's leading men's luncheon club, which also features games of chance which he personally doesn't try; he has long been secretary of the Cabell County T. B. Association; and, since it began years ago, Assistant Treasurer of the Huntington Junior League!

As with many men of dignity and pride, the best measure of this man may be his interest in people, especially children. Though he and Mrs. Foley are childless, he has attracted successive generations of children, who sense instinctively the warmth and humor behind the severe exterior which he shows to the world. His den is crowded with pictures of nieces, nephews, and assorted young friends who have known and loved him and rejoiced in his visits—all within walking distance, for naturally he never learned to drive a car—and none of his countless favorites would think of a church wedding without asking Uncle Bob to be Master of Ceremonies.

In this man the USGA indeed has a rare gem in its devoted service. But it has no monopoly on his abiding interest, dedicated loyalty, and fierce honesty. Typical may be this tribute which he received from the grateful men of Ritter Park Croquet Club, who practice their art opposite the Foley residence:

"In recognition of his interest in the activities of our Club and as a mark of appreciation for his generosity in furnishing us with very necessary equipment for maintaining our playing field, we the undersigned do hereby enroll Mr. R. J. Foley as an Honorary Life Member in our Club, with unlimited privileges which include heckling, coaching, razzing, kibitzing, or whatever he may choose to do."

Needless to say, Uncle Bob has never played croquet either.

All publishing and other rights—after the USGA JOURNAL—are hereby reserved.