

# PLAYING VALUES AT BALTUSROL

by  
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**D**URING the last five years, the USGA Open Championship has been decided on four of America's most famous golf courses that may, in a sense, be compared to the English seaside courses which form that close-knit island's famous championship rota.

Starting in 1950, the Open has been played at Merion, Oakland Hills (1951), Oakmont (1953), and Baltusrol. Each of these courses has passed, or nearly passed, the half-century mark, totaling two hundred years of golf, all devoted to the game's finest traditions. These clubs' main interest is seeing that the game is kept at its highest level. The Northwood Club, in Dallas, Texas, which held the tournament in 1952, has the same interest, of course, but its course was built within the last decade.

In fifty years the game of golf has changed. It has changed most in two particular fields: first, in the equipment used, and second, in the conditioning of the courses. One has only to look at today's precision-made clubs, then contrast them with the crude, wood-shafted, handmade clubs of yesterday, to see what a marked contrast has come to pass, not in fifty, even, but in the last twenty years.

I well remember riding from Atlanta to Augusta with Bob Jones, not long ago, when we were taking the clubs with which he won the Grand Slam in 1930 for permanent residence in the Trophy Room of Augusta National Golf Club. Jones had gleaned, picked, and combed the golf shops of the world to collect a set of clubs which, to him, had the feel and balance of matched clubs. Yet these clubs, when compared with today's precision-made, matched sets,

Reprinted from Open Championship program.

## **A Game for All**

Golf is a game for the many. It suits all sorts and conditions of men—the strong and the weak, the halt and the maimed, the octogenarian and the boy, the rich and the poor, the clergyman and the infidel . . . The later riser can play comfortably and be back for his rubber in the afternoon; the sanguine man can measure himself against those who will beat him; the half-crown seeker can find victims; the gambler can bet; the man of high principle, by playing for nothing, may enjoy himself and yet feel good. You can brag and lose matches; deprecate yourself and win them. Unlike the other Scotch game of whisky-drinking, excess in it is not injurious to the health.

SIR WALTER SIMPSON  
("In Praise of Golf")

were like the Model T Ford compared to a modern automobile. The wooden club with its torque could be twisted almost ninety degrees. The wooden shafts had to be heavy in order to prevent their breaking, to the end result that their balance between shaft and head was totally different from that of modern clubs, where the shafts are thin, made of steel, and the heads can therefore accumulate more weight.

From the coming of the matched set of golf clubs there has been brought about a change in the pattern of the swing. The pros often use the expression "one-piece swing." This can best be explained by saying that they use the same swing from

tee to green, changing only the club which they are using to obtain the required results. With the old-time clubs the better players, having favorite clubs, were more inclined to "finesse" their shots. They would force a mashie iron into a mid-iron, or a mashie into a six-iron, either by easing up the blow or laying back the club. This necessitated a flexibility in their swings which prevented them from becoming well-grooved as the pros groove their swings now. Thus, the execution of the swing twenty years ago was much more conducive to flaws.

### **Sarazen's Example**

In my opinion, the beautiful Jones swing of the twenties, together with the precision tools of today, would make this great champion a consistent winner if he were playing in the same era with the current best. Look, for example, at Gene Sarazen who, at 53, is shooting in the 60's, and hitting the ball farther and better than he ever has before. With the putts dropping as they used to for the Sarazen of the twenties, and with none of the weariness which comes with age, he would still be a serious contender in any championship because his swing and his game have held up remarkably well down through the years.

Suppose an aluminum bat should be developed for baseball which had a weighted end, making it possible for a player to swing faster, and at the same time, to have the bat's massive weight at its hitting end, where it is most effective in propelling the ball. Suppose, in addition, baseball had a livelier ball. Then, surely, a good player would be able to hit 100 home runs a year. Would he, then, be a better player than Babe Ruth, who batted 59 or 60 home runs in a year with the wooden bat and the less lively ball? The only possible way you could make comparisons under such conditions would be to have the fences moved back, according to the distance the better equipment added. *Then* you could make a comparison between baseball's yesterday and today.

The same thing applies to golf's championship courses. The equipment and the

ball have been improved. The maintenance of courses has been brought to fine perfection. Rough is no longer the factor it used to be, because mechanized equipment has made it possible to maintain rough in better condition. However, during all this change the architecture of many courses has remained exactly the same. Naturally, the advantage has been to the player, who has outmoded the values previously set up to penalize him, perplex him, make him maneuver, and above all, to make him play his shots accurately.

For nine years, now, we have made tests at the Open Championships. These tests have been made for a definite purpose: to find out how accurate today's players are, and what should be considered a poor shot or a good shot.

Throughout these tests we have come to two definite conclusions: first, that modern players are hitting the ball farther, and second, that they are hitting the center of the fairway more often. Therefore, it is my contention that values should be tightened to meet the high standards which the great improvements in clubs and balls have made possible. In doing this, traps must be moved out to where they will have the same meaning they had in the Jones era, and fairways must be narrowed to develop a comparable latitude for error as when they were played by wooden-shafted clubs.

In tightening these values we have one sole objective—to test the play of modern golfers, so that the best man wins, and the golfer who has made the least shots and played the most brilliant golf is declared the champion. The tightening of any values must be done fairly. There should be no tricks, nor any trickiness on any part of the course.

### **Baltusrol's Characteristics**

In studying the Lower Course at Baltusrol, one should have an understanding of the general characteristics of the course. It is different from Merion, Oakland Hills, and Oakmont, as it should be. Each course should, and does, have its own individuality.

All four courses are blessed with excellent green contours, and while they vary in

their quality, all must be given careful study and the deft touch. Baltusrol's greens are large. They are filled with soft hollows and imperceptible crowns which make the simplest-looking putt require keen concentration and a delicate touch. The short holes and the pitch holes are trapped in the front, protecting the various pin locations. The longer holes are trapped at the side, with some traps nipped in slightly across the corners of the green. The fairway targets are not nearly as severe as those at Oakland Hills, where double targets were a requirement in the play of the holes: one from the tee and one from the target area to the green. Nonetheless Baltusrol's target areas are well-protected, either in the form of traps (these, while fewer, are nonetheless effective) or in the form of rough which has been brought in to a just width. In addition to these characteristics, there are several holes which have partially blind surfaces, where the golfer can see the pin but not the surface of the green. These surfaces adroitly conceal the guile which lies there, and this lack of openness, or frankness, can often be most deceptive and an insidious stroke-waster.

The terrain of Baltusrol's Lower Course is, for the most part, gently rolling. There are few sidehill lies such as one encounters at Oakmont and Merion. The course for the Open measured 7,027 yards—mostly of the lush fairways one ordinarily finds at Baltusrol in June. Each of these yards measures a full 36 inches—7,027 yards of championship golf.

### **The Key Holes**

The holes contestants had to worry most about were: *Number 1*, for its boundary flanking the left side, while the player was still under the tension of starting out; *Number 4*, which, from its back tee, is one of the great holes of golf, both scenically and in its playing value; *Number 6*, with its crowned target area and its long second into a tightly trapped green; *Number 10*, with its position play from the tee and protected pin positions on either side of the green surface for its second shot; *Number 11*, with its protection at the green, particularly when the pin was at the left-hand

side; *Number 15*, with its tight target trapping, and bold trapping in the face of the green surface and its crowned, uphill slopes; *Number 16* from the back tee, when the pin was at the right; *Number 17* because this is a great par 5 throughout; and *Number 18*, because this is a strong finishing hole, particularly if a 4 is required to tie.

Although the Lower Course's seventh hole is normally played as a par 5, it was reclassified as a par 4 for the Open Championship, and as now designed is one of the most interesting par 4s on the course (however, the original front tee was used in the Open).

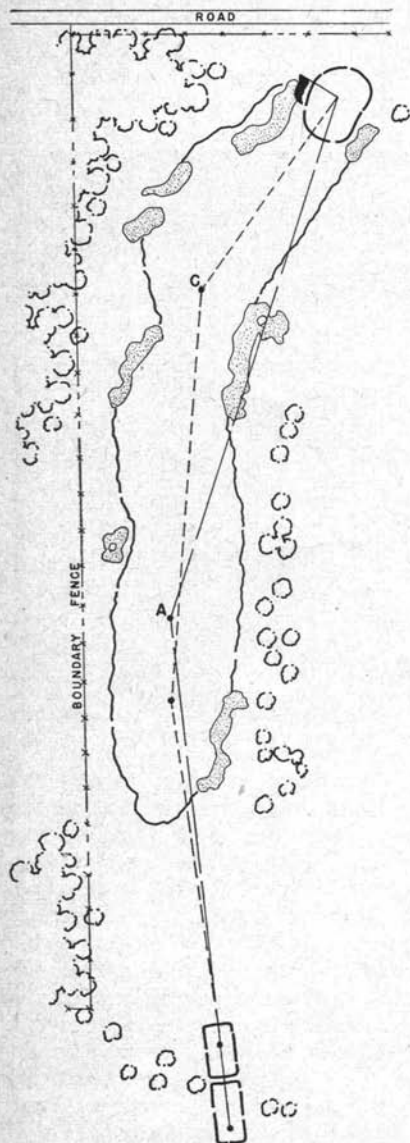
### **An Example**

The two drawings illustrate how the redesign of a golf hole can sharply increase the challenge it offers to top-flight golfers.

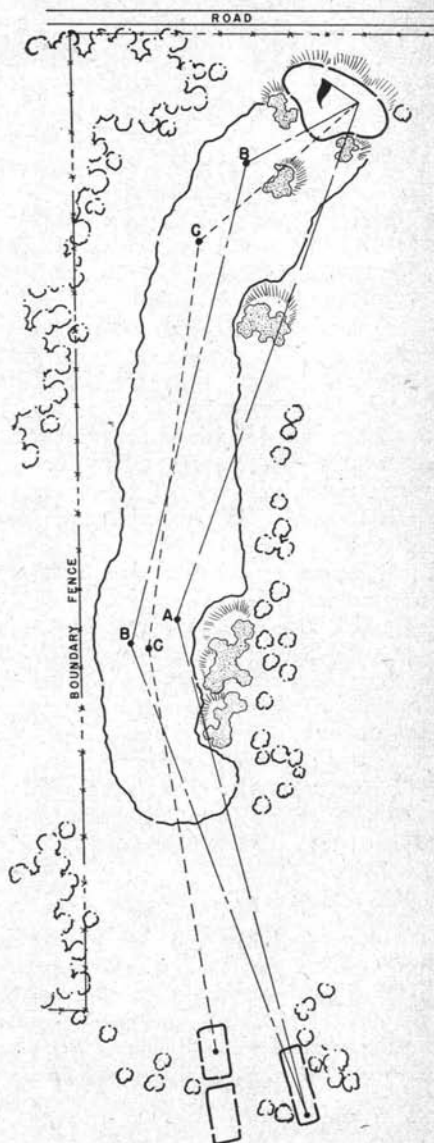
As originally designed the expert golfer, with his drive landing at *A* in the diagram, could hit his second shot boldly for the green with only one trap (approximately half way to the green from his hitting position) available to catch a badly hit second. Note, too, that the traps on each side of the green, as the seventh was originally designed, provided a wide-open approach. Route *C* is shown to indicate the approximate play of the original seventh by an average golfer, content to seek his 5.

As redesigned, the seventh hole presents a player with considerably more hazards. His alternative routes are indicated as *A* and *B* in the right-hand diagram. If he elects route *A* he must hit long and accurately, over troublesome traps, on his drive, and his long second to the green must cross not only a mid-way trap, but one directly in his line of approach at the green's edge. Only two perfectly hit shots, with his second able to hold the fast green, will do the trick for him. The expert in a less gambling frame of mind can also choose route *B*, in which case he must play his second shot without hope of reaching the green, but with the chance that he can chip closely enough on his third shot to be in position for one putt. Route *C* is shown to indicate the way in which an average player can be expected to play this seventh hole as now laid out.

## How Baltusrol's Seventh Hole Was Toughened



ORIGINAL DESIGN



REVISED DESIGN

*Drawings from the office of Robert Trent Jones*