

Joe Davis — Dean of Golf

Retired Tribune Veteran Recalls Sports of Old

● I have always held the view that the boy who takes an interest in athletics is less likely to go wrong. And the man who plays fair in his sports will play fair in his business. It's a test.

● "He was a good sportsman." I think that is the finest epitaph we can put on a man's tombstone.—JOE DAVIS, Dean of Golf.

By JAMES O'DONNELL BENNETT

JOE DAVIS, beloved dean of golf, is 75 years old today, and many a Chicago golfer will be waiting for him the words, "Happy birthday to you!"

This honored Tribune veteran is a historic figure in American golf, but, unlike most historic figures, he still is active, walking his seven miles a day when refereeing a championship game, and, as secretary of the Chicago District Golf association, keeping office hours from 9 in the morning until 5 in the evening.

More than a third of his long life Mr. Davis gave to The Tribune. He became the best commentator on billiards that Chicago ever produced and one of the best golf reporters in the world.

As a reporter of championship matches in the days when billiards was the most popular indoor sport he vividly took his readers along the whole route traveled by a master play. In his account of a momentous three-cushion game he never had recourse to a superficial trick phrase like "Schaefer gathered a cluster of eight." He would explain how shots were made and which English was applied, and he would make as clear as a map the route traveled by the cue ball from cushion to cushion

been fifty-three years in America. At 75 he looks well, is well, talks well, and works to good purpose in his favorite field—golf. As secretary of the District Golf association he is counselor to thousands of players in Chicagoland, and as editor of the Chicago Golfer, which he helped found and for fifteen years successfully carried on, he was read by golfers throughout the country. Hence his birthday story of the growth of golf in the middle west is an authentic contribution to the annals of American sport.

"Forty-five years ago," he said, "seven Chicagoans who had homes in Lake Forest began playing golf on a seven-hole course on the Farwell estate. They were our golf pioneers."

"Rivalry was their portion. 'Now, what pleasure,' asked people who briefly looked on, 'can grown men find in knocking a ball around a forty-acre lot?'"

"But rivalry evaporated."

"And today there are 200,000 golfers in the Chicago area and 210 courses, of which about seventy-five are open to the public. The Knollwood club has a locker room that cost \$100,000."

"Chicago is the greatest golf center in the world. That is



The Wanderers Cricket club of thirty-five years ago, of which Joe Davis was a member. Mr. Davis is fourth from the left in the upper row.

man look after his diet, get plenty of rest, and keep his teeth in order. Neglected teeth can do a great deal of harm."

In 1893 there were only about fifty golf players in the Chicago area. In that year the Chicago Golf club was organized, with a membership charge of \$50. That charge in the flush times went as high as \$2,000, an increase which prompted Mr. Davis to make some significant contrasts between American and British ways of financing amateur sports.

"In our area," he said, "it is the vast and luxurious clubhouse that make golf a costly game for the player who belongs to a club and that run him into dues of \$200 a year, a fee which would be half that sum if clubhouses were not palaces."

"It is different in Britain. In Epping forest there is a fine course on which the duke of

singles! Bowling has become very popular with women, more than 4,000 competing in a tournament held in Chicago last season.

"Major baseball has improved greatly because of the influx of college players. Many of the old-time players came from the sand lots, and their code of ethics led off with the slogan, 'Win at any cost.'"

"Intercollegiate football, too, is on a much higher plane, due, I think to the far superior class of coaches and athletic directors and a truer spirit of sportsmanship."

"Semi-professional football, which flourished in the early years of this century, has been supplanted by the big professional leagues. Semi-pro baseball, which once had a large following, has lost ground and many of the old parks have vanished before the march of the builder."

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"Boxing has undergone a great transition since the nineties, the huge purses of the present championships overshadowing those of the days of John L. Sullivan, Jim Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, Kid McCoy, Tom Sharkey, and Tom Ryan. We old-timers recall many a famous match at old Tattersall's on 16th street, where Fitzsimmons, Sharkey, McCoy, Terry McGovern, Eddie Santry, Tommy White, and Joe Gans fought. At the long-vanished Exposition building on the lake front, where you could see anything from a symphony orchestra to a beef slaughtering contest, Young Griffo, the eccentric Australian; Spider Weir, Joe Walcott, and Joe Choynski fought battles that distinctly were not commercialized stunts. There were weekly bouts at the old Star theater on North Clark street, with Malachy Hogan and George Siler as referees, and at the Haymarket theater on West Madison street Paddy Carroll gave his shows."

"Those old-time fighters lose nothing in comparison with the moderns. It is regrettable that the big fights of today have become so commercialized. Today a champion is made and then kept out of the ring as long as possible."

"In refreshing contrast are such organizations as the Chicago Golden Gloves and the Catholic Youth. Their object is the development of healthy bodies coupled with good, honest sportsmanship. The influence of the men directing them has been of incalculable value. They are helping to put what we used to call 'the manly art of self-defense' back among the decencies."

"Billiards is fading, one of the reasons being that boys under 18 years of age are not allowed to play in halls. Hence no new blood is coming into the game. But it had its brilliant days in Chicago, the days of Jake Schaefer, Frank Ives, George Slosson, and G. Butler Sutton. Thousands of dollars were wagered on their matches. Later came Willie Hoppe, Cochran, and the younger Schaefer. They and a few others carried the records higher than their predecessors ever dreamed of. For fifteen years Chicago was the leading center for three-cushion billiards and was the scene of many famous tournaments. But the game sagged. In the tournament championship of last year there were only twelve players, and their average age was 42."

"No billiard player who does

not begin young becomes great."

At 75 Joe Davis is keeping in step with the years and is no morose yerner for "the good old times."

"Looking back on my forty-seven years in sportdom," he said, "I cheerfully acknowledge that in the main there has been progress. Almost all the old sport marks have been bettered by the athletes of the present. Pole vaulting is an interesting illustration because two members of the same family, competing a quarter of a century apart, set new records in that sport. In 1909 Bob Gardner, now an important man in La Salle street, won the intercollegiate championship with a record vault of 13 feet 1 inch. About three years ago his nephew, Keith Brown, set a record with a vault of 14 feet 4 inches. The vaulters have gone higher since then."

"As to sporting ethics, the morale of the players in the majority of sports has improved greatly, but the real amateur sportsmen of today—the men in sport for the love of it—are not different from those of the nineties."

"In those days the sports staffs of the newspapers were small and most of the writers had to double in brass. James Keeley used to say that no man could cover more than three sports well. I agree with that."

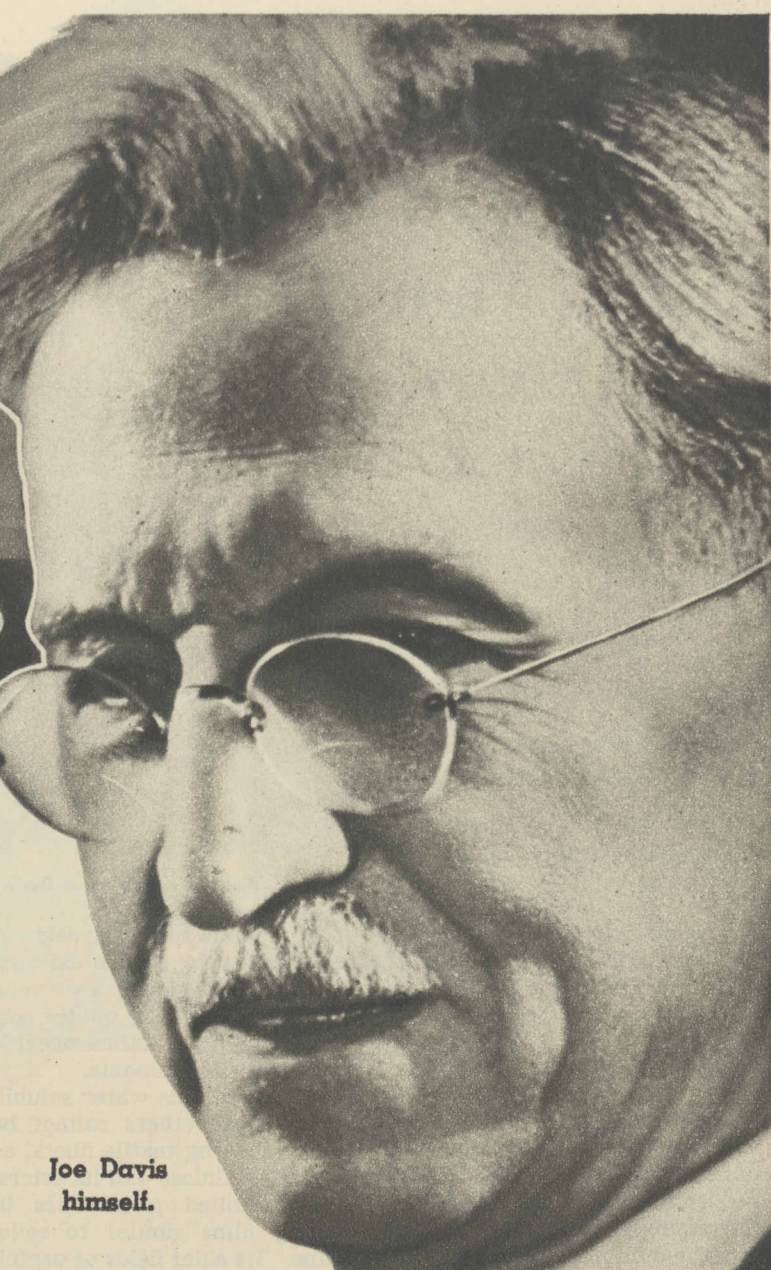
"Most of the old writers wrote straight stuff. Leonard Washburn and Charley Seymour, brother of the great Horatio, were pioneers in the colorful and



How a sports writer dressed forty-one years ago. Joe Davis beneath a tall top hat and equipped with a walking stick.

whimsical reporting of baseball. Later came Charley Dryden, who made a whimsical feature with his 'Visits to the Homes of Ball Players.' Every article in that series carried the same picture—a little hut and a tree."

"The sports writers of forty years ago can be likened to the old-time family doctor, who had to treat all kinds of ailments. Fortunately for them, sports were fewer in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The major outdoor sports were



Joe Davis himself.

baseball, horse racing, track and field events, tennis, swimming, bicycling, trapshooting, ice skating, and football. Among major indoor sports, boxing and billiards led.

"Many of the sports writers in Chicago at the turn of the century were men of extraordinarily vivid personalities, a fact which makes them still fondly recalled. They were witty and companionable, and what a privilege it was to work with them! The names come trooping back to me—Hugh Keough of the Times and later of The Tribune, who founded 'In the Wake of the News,' which the lamented Harvey Woodruff carried on; Drury Underwood, son of the Atlantic Monthly's Underwood, who was the intimate of Longfellow, Lowell, and Autocrat Holmes; Lou Houseman, the ever-cheerful, who probably knew more of his fellow townsmen than did any other Chicagoan not a politician; Ed Smith, another beaming individuality; Frank Brunell, who founded the Daily Racing Form; Joe Murphy, now a racing judge, and Martin Nathanson, also a racing expert."

"Later notables were the beloved Ed Sheridan of The Tribune, who if he could not say a kindly word said nothing; Dick Carey and Jack Dempsey, famous turf writers; George Siler, Eddie Westlake, Gus Axelson, Sy Sanborn, and P. P. Pomeroy, the last named being one of the few survivors of a great group."

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Of the present generation of sports writers the dean said that they do their work intelligently, but that too often in the fields of baseball and boxing prophecy is their pitfall. "May I," he added mildly, "suggest the Dempsey-Tunney and Louis-Farr fights as examples?" His admonition to the younger writers is, "Don't be as funny as you think you are."

In 1925, after twenty-six years of service on The Tribune, during twenty years of which he lost only one afternoon, Mr. Davis retired at the age of 63 on his well deserved pension.

But he still is active.

In 1922, while with The Tribune, he became secretary of the Chicago District Golf association, and at his desk in the association's extensive quarters on the eighteenth floor of the Hotel La Salle you will find him every workday save when duties as recorder and referee take him to the links, where a day that keeps him on his feet from 8 in the morning until 9 at night is not unusual at the season's height."

"The Chicago District Golf association," he said, "was founded in 1914 with a membership of twenty-five clubs. It now has an enrollment of sixty clubs, with 15,000 members, and sells 3,500 handicap cards a year at a dollar each. Every club pays a membership fee of \$50. We direct club activi-

ties and supervise championship games. Above all, we foster competitions, because without competition golf would become purely recreational and would have no glamor or character. Nobody would be keyed up. Golf would go flat, partly because, as in the case of billiards, not enough new blood would be coming in."

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Briefly sketching his career, Mr. Davis said:

"I came to America in 1884 at the age of 22 to work for the East Florida Land and Produce company, an English concern that owned land near St. Augustine."

"I came north about 1887 to work in my cousin's cement company in New York; then to Chicago in 1890 to be secretary of the Chicago Cricket club, which, besides fostering cricket, played baseball, lawn bowls, and tennis and which maintained a third-of-a-mile cinder path and a quarter-mile bicycle track at 71st street and Selpp avenue, near the Illinois Central tracks. It had 200 members, mostly Englishmen, but the bicycle track brought in Americans, among them A. G. Spalding, Charlie Counsellman, Robert Stuart, and Dr. E. J. Ogden, who was president. Finally it ended in a fight over club finances and nearly all the cricketers joined the Wanderers, who had a clubhouse on land at 39th street near Wentworth avenue which later became Comiskey's first ball park."

"Thus began my forty-seven years in sports. I experimented in the free lance reporting of cricket, soccer, curling, and football, finally joining The Tribune in 1899 for a service of twenty-six happy years. My first big assignment was the national amateur championship games at Onwentsla in July, 1899, in which the winner was Herbert Harri-man of the New York banking family, the first American-born player to win the championship. Curious about him, for he dropped out of sight soon after, I have been told that he went to Ireland and became a gentleman farmer."

In 1912 Mr. Davis married Miss Mabel Gilbert of Chicago, daughter of an Englishman."

In 1921, while he still was active on The Tribune, he founded the Chicago Golfer, a good monthly magazine that flourished under his editorship for fifteen years. In 1932 it became the Midwest Golfer and Sports Review, but as such it lasted only four years."

"The fact in my professional career," said the dean, "that I think I have a right to be proud of is that, in recognition of what they were so kind as to describe as 'service to golf,' friends of mine established the Joe Davis trophy. And so I can enjoy my memorial not only while I am alive but afterward, for it is a perpetual trophy."



The Chicago Tribune sports department of eighteen years ago, with Mr. Davis at the extreme left of the lower row. The late Harvey Woodruff (second from right in lower row) was sports editor at the time. At right in upper row is the late Walter Eckersall, famous football player and official.

until its journey ended with the carom on the third ball.

That was classic reporting of billiards, and it delighted Tribune readers. It made them understand and respect the mental vision which figured a way out of what apparently was an impossible situation.

The same vividness, the same exactitude, Mr. Davis brought and still brings to his chronicles of golf.

Everybody conspicuous in American golf calls him "the dean." Down the five decades of the game in Chicago he came with David and James B. Forgan, Dennis F. Kelly, John H. Wood, Alexander Revell, Charles F. Thompson, A. G. Spalding, Charles Counsellman, Robert Stuart, Mel Traylor, and Samuel T. Chase. "All of them my intimates and representative of the highest class of American sportsmen," the dean says, and among dozens of good stories about them he recalls the day when Arthur Aldis floored Samuel Chase with six words. Arthur was a pioneer in foxhunting in these parts, and his manner tended toward the ducal. To him his distracted neighbor Chase moaned, "Those foxhounds of yours, Arthur, make an awful lot of noise!"

"Yes," replied Arthur in his most ducal tone of detachment, "they do give tongue somewhat."

There was no further argument.

London born, Joe Davis has

largely due to our many easily accessible daily fee courses. We have more facilities for daily fee play than any other three cities in this country have. The courses in Lincoln, Jackson, Columbus, and Marquette parks take care of 2,000 players daily, and the five courses in the forest preserves had a record attendance of 2,545 players on June 6 of this year. Our daily fee courses also make us the largest sales area in the world for golf equipment."

Joe Davis is a walking bookful of the amazing contrasts in the story of Chicago golf. "Walking" is the word. Cheerfully he does those seven miles on the links when refereeing a championship game—taking notes the while. "Make no mistake about that," he said. "A thirty-six-hole match means a walk of seven miles."

"Perhaps you have a health secret, dean," said I. "A secret that makes you at 75 look as if you were in your sixties."

"I have a rule of reason. I never overdo my athletics. After the age of 25 or 30 be careful! Not only am I a good walker. In football I was a good kicker. When I was 18 years old my legs were like iron, and even when I was 35 I established, in 1897, a record of 127 wickets for the Chicago season's play in cricket. That record stood for forty years—until this year, when C. W. Knights took 128 wickets. He is about 40 years old."

"Athlete or no athlete, let a

Windsor played when he was prince of Wales. The clubhouse is a neat little cottage where the players find a tea urn and a couple of joints of beef. There is no raft of servants."

"Weather, too, works for British golfers. Abundant rain saves them a great deal of trouble and expense in keeping the grass in order. With us a dry spell will run a club into expenditure that would make a farmer groan."

Of outstanding changes and developments in the field of American sports since the dawn of the twentieth century the dean said:

"Of the sports originating in the last decade of the nineteenth century, basketball and bowling have, next to golf, made the greatest strides. Basketball was first played in 1892 at the Garfield Boulevard Y. M. C. A., and when the Central Y. M. C. A. was built it became the home of a team that won the championship several times."

"The first regulation bowling alleys were laid in 1896 in the Plaza hotel, North Clark street and Lincoln park. And here is a striking contrast: In the first tournament of the American Bowling congress, held in Chicago in 1901, forty-one five-man teams contested. Last year in the tournament of the American Bowling congress, held in New York, there were 4,017 five-man teams, 5,883 doubles, and 11,775