

Over

here . . .

and

there . . .

Arthur Lacey, former Captain of a British Ryder Cup team and now living in America, makes some interesting comparisons between golf as played in U.S.A. and Britain.

TO compare American golf and British, is like trying to compare baseball and cricket. This is rather a drastic statement, but the following will give an indication of the differences.

It is rare for a match to be played unless there are four. Even when it is match play singles, the usual procedure is to play foursomes. I have seen

matches where two successive rounds are played together. That is your score is matched against the winner of the other pair if you happen to beat your man. It can happen that you win your game, lose to the other man when cards are matched, and your opponent would have beaten the man who wins from you, if their cards had been compared.

Everybody keeps scores meticulously, and all players hole out every putt, no matter how short. There may be as many as six games, or more running at the same time, and from time to time during the game adjustments are liable to be made and new matches started. This tends to slow play terribly. A fair time for a round of golf is four hours. At busy times, it can be nearer five. In fact most players resent a fast player, and say so too.

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Handicaps vary up to 30, and all competitions are actively played in by a big proportion of the members. There is usually no entrance fee, and one can always have a voucher on the pros. shop for your prize. Prizes are quite valuable too, and perhaps the most popular form of competition is the best of four. Usual form is par bogey or medal. Score cards here give par and bogey for the hole. Where a hole is an easy three or four, par and bogey are the same. In this kind of event the winning score is generally close to 100 points, counting four for par, six for birdie, eight for an eagle, bogey two.

This type of play slows things up terribly. The reason for all scores being kept is for handicap purposes. Generally, if you fail to hand in cards your handicap stays down until you show figures, but the usual practice is to give very generous handicaps when you are not winning. The difference

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in our attitudes here is most marked. I can recall golfers who gave up the game when we adopted strict par, making their excuse the fact that as they could no longer play down to a certain handicap, they were no longer interested in playing. Here, a man will think it a huge joke or triumph, if he scores a gross birdie at a hole, and finds he has two strokes to deduct. I started off in an event with a two (birdie), opponent a two (stroke), next hole I had a birdie four, opponent birdie four (two strokes) Nett one, nett two, par was eight for the two holes. Electric carts are the general rule now. It is rare to see a game without at least one. This also slows play, even if the cart can travel at 20/25 m.p.h. Have you ever heard of two players hitting their balls in the same direction. The same thing with caddies. It is normal for the caddy to take two bags, and again he is always where it takes most time to get the club.



All golfers here tend to take more instruction than in G.B. While better play should speed up the game, thinking too much of what you are told to do for certain shots can delay things a lot. The standard of play around the greens is far superior amongst Americans than with Britishers. Many players who are in-

capable of playing any sort of long game are quite good scorers by virtue of good chipping and putting. There is always a good putting green or sometimes more around the clubhouse, and every player spends long hours there. The pro shop always has a big selection of putters and the fact that so many games are putting matches makes it imperative that when the putter sours on a player, he hies off to the shop to get another. Always the club at fault.



An infinity of time is spent by most people on the green, and I will say, the places holes are put on some courses, would make Colonel Bogey turn in his grave, and some of our more temperamental players blast the secretary and all his committee into eternity. Cleaning the ball is more or less a general rule. Not a lick and wipe on seat of the pants as I recall, but a wet bath towel tied to the bag for this purpose. This can waste time. All players tend to mark their ball too, even when a tap would tumble it into the hole. There seems to be a feeling that to step up and hole out might cause same dire calamity, so they just don't do it. It is all a question of habit.

Few players even think of playing two rounds and any golfer who tries a third round is liable to get his name in the local paper.

Yet the U.S. Open has 36 holes on the final day, though there is a strong feeling that this will be changed. Spectators will come whether it is one or two rounds, and this would bring extra gate

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money. The P.G.A. match-play championship was changed to medal play, as it was found that fewer spectators came for just one pair, and more often than not, unknowns knocked out the stars early, so leading players did not enter until conditions were altered, and sponsors able to raise the prize money. There is no professional event where match play is the rule, and this is rather sad. Golf is so essentially a personal combat test, rather than a marathon nerve test.



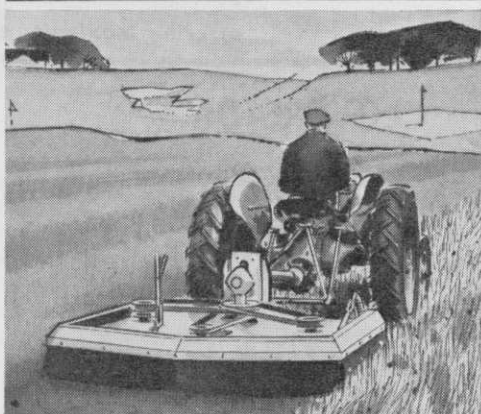
Another noticeable point is the fact that the biggest bags seem to be used by the biggest duffers. They carry everything likely to be needed. Umbrella, regardless of the weather, complete waterproof outfit, caps, towels, gloves, occasionally a bag of practise balls too, but I am not suggesting that they indulge in practise half way round, much as some would like I'm sure.

All this sounds grim. It isn't. After every player has been as tough as you can imagine, they settle down at the nineteenth, pay up, drink up, reminisce, just like we do, fix another game for the next day, when you have assumed they will never speak to one another again, and all is well.

I almost forgot. The refreshment hut halfway is on every course. The popular starting time is between twelve and one o'clock, so you stop for boiled eggs, hot chocolate, coffee, milk, various forms, biscuits, etc., etc., and usually roll dice to see who pays, then slip on to the next tee, just as the following match is rushing to jump the claim.

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