



Nadco Sporting Goods Co. photo

British Ryder Cup players begin warming up for their U.S. campaign by practice at the Atlantic City (N.J.) CC prior to their first exhibition match.

Ryder Cup Matches Reflected British Pro Handicaps

By **WILLIE HUNTER**

Professional, Riviera Country Club, Pacific Palisades, Calif.

THE 1955 Ryder Cup matches played at Thunderbird CC, Palm Springs, Cal., were closer than the 8-4 score might indicate but I doubt if anyone thought that the British team had any kind of chance to win even though the golf course is on the easy side and playing conditions well nigh perfect.

The United States probably could have fielded another four teams of about equal strength to the one competing at the desert spa.

Young players* (unless we count Jackie Burke as young) were not included in the United States team because of the qualifying period of five years demanded by the P.G.A. The British included a few newcomers like Jacobs, O'Connor, Fallon and Scott, but otherwise relied on their best tournament players of the past few years.

To attempt an analysis of the reason for the domination of international golf by the United States we must start at the first world war era from 1914-1919 when Great Britain cancelled all tournament play. The period before that was strongly taken care of by the great British triumvirate of Vardon, Braid and Taylor, who between them garnered 16 British Opens from 1894 through 1914 and who were by far the outstanding professionals in the world.

I personally know that during from 1914 into 1919 period there was practically no golf played in Great Britain. All available manpower either was in the armed services

or in war work. There were no easy jobs for anyone. During that time when I got home I played nine holes of golf in just under five years.

With the resumption of golf after the war there was no one amongst the British pros to take the place of the Vardon-Braid-Taylor trio. George Duncan flashed streaks of brilliance but somehow could not attain the same dominance that his illustrious predecessors displayed. Duncan won the British Open in 1920, then the U. S. took over with Hagen, Jones and Sarazen all showing marked superiority over their British cousins.

Cotton Gave British Boost

The Americans won 12 of 13 British Opens from 1922 to 1933 and then came a period when the British improved somewhat, with Henry Cotton leading the way. As a matter of fact Cotton has been the only great British player since Vardon, Braid and Taylor.

Along came World War II with an impact even more vicious than WWI on the tight little isle and golf again closed down; this time from 1940 to 1945. When I state golf closed down it means that there was absolutely no competition and leading pros did not get special assignments.

Taking up in 1946 we find Sam Snead winning his lone Open Championship at St. Andrews and he was the last American to win until Hogan made his one visit successful at Carnoustie. However, the rea-

son why Americans have not won the British Open so much in recent years is because very few now take time out of their money tournaments in the U.S. to play for so small a purse. Maybe Bobby Locke the South Africa player who won three British Opens might have beaten the best of the Americans, but I doubt if any one else could.

Circuit Test Too Much

It is doubtful also if any of the British team who competed in the Ryder Cup Matches could make a go of it in the stern test of American tournament circuit play against the superior experience and shot-making of so many U.S. pros who do nothing but play golf all the year around.

Dai Rees is a strong competitive player who is now getting too advanced in years to try our circuit, but I believe he might have done pretty good if he had taken a shot at it ten years ago. Rees is a surprising player who gets the ball in the hole at the right time without making any effort at looking like an expert. Eric Brown who has been publicised strongly in the old country is not strong enough as a tee shot player. Jacobs might become very good if he gets an opportunity to compete over an extended period with the U.S. pros, but he isn't going to get anywhere against our men unless he plays with them enough and learns how to get the ball in the hole in the simplest possible manner.

Weetman hits the ball very hard and has good scoring potentiality. O'Connor has a good swing. Bradshaw with his unorthodox grip has fine record and is a good competitor. Bousfield one of the best British short game players was unfortunately sick and couldn't compete at Palm Springs.

All in all they are not as good as the Americans in any department of the game but more especially in backspin shots. Show me an American pro who wins money and I shall be looking at an expert wedge player. In this country a player can forget the run-up shot and still fare pretty good if he learns to play the wedge. Our fairways are not generally suitable for run-up shots and our greens are usually soft enough to hold a wedge shot within a few feet.

There is also another club which the tournament players call the 'Texas Wedge' (putter) which they use very effectually off the edges. Anyone can prove the Texas Wedge has a decisive advantage over a lofted club by trying out a dozen balls with each club.

The U.S. professionals average longer and straighter off the tee than the British altho I am not discounting Rees and Weetman who are really long.

Different Pro Game Today

We must face the fact that pro golf today is an entirely different game than of old. Now the high earning incentive brings many very well educated men into the field. They leave very little to instinct, but cultivate by assiduous practice and competition the simple approach to holing out in the least number of strokes. The most striking part of American golf is the directness with which our professionals tackle the problem of each hole and the terrific concentration they develop as if they are shutting out everything else in the world except the one shot they are making.

British players were noticeably pleasant and quite willing to converse with anyone who wished to talk but the Americans, although affable off the course, do not allow anyone to interrupt them while they're at their work. Frankly, I believe that the British lack the deadly determination and concentration of the good American players.

British players were noticeably pleaser-severe numerical handicap on the basis of population but may be able to offset some of that disadvantage by adopting American policies and methods of encouraging younger players and making expert instruction cheerfully and easily available to youngsters.

Shake Psychological Handicap

There are some indications of the British professionals breaking free from the psychological drag of a long record of defeats by Americans and making a fresh start by looking at competitive golf as a harshly demanding business that asks a lot but which will give a lot to the one who can compete successfully in Britain and the United States. The British professional possibly has been penalized by tardiness in distinguishing between golf as a game and golf as a business.

Some American professionals considered the British Ryder Cup team definitely handicapped by superiority of American equipment. I believe that the British have to a noticeable degree overcome the inferiority of their equipment evident for many years after clubmaking changed from a bench craft to factory precision.

The U.S. players used the regulation American ball and the British players the

small ball as manufactured and used in Great Britain. The rules state it is optional for British players to use either ball when playing in America. It also is optional for U.S. players to use either ball when the matches are played in Great Britain, so there is no hardship to either side.

Records Favor Small Ball

In my opinion facts and records demonstrate clearly that there is an advantage in using the smaller ball on most occasions. It is longer and it putts better on fast greens, and added to that is its greater boring capacity in head winds. Countering these advantages is the tendency for the larger ball to sit up on the fairway and making the play of fast stopping shots to greens noticeably easier. We must not confuse the present day American ball with the large floater which was used for some time because whereas the modern American ball bores into the wind, the old floater did not and required a maximum of skill to control.

The United States players have always changed to the small ball in Great Britain in the Open Championship. All American triumphs over there have been with the small ball. The British players could have played with the larger American ball but chose their own smaller ball.

Milt Woodard Elected by PGA Sponsors

Milton Woodard, executive vp, Western Golf Assn., was elected pres., Association of PGA Tournament Sponsors, at the group's annual meeting held during the PGA convention at Atlantic City.

Other officers also elected for one year terms: Ed Jones, San Diego, vp; Earl Lanning, Jr., Greensboro, N. C., sec.; and Richard Bancroft, Jr., St. Paul, Minn.

The Sponsors' association awarded the 1956 Sponsors' Classic to San Diego, probably for an October date. It turned over \$7000 to assist the PGA Tournament Bureau. The sponsors recommended that the PGA revamp its advance promotion of tournaments. They were very strongly in favor of the PGA enlivening its tournament promotion by engaging Paul Hahn as an advance promotion man and conductor of tournament clinics.

The Sponsors' group requested that it be consulted in the selection of the commissioner proposed to take command of PGA tournament activities.

Bill Gordon Selected "Golf Pro of Year"

W. C. (Bill) Gordon, for 17 years pro at Tam O'Shanter CC (Chicago dist.) was selected by a committee of prominent amateurs to receive the first Bob Harlow memorial award as PGA Golf Professional of the Year.

Qualifications of the sectional winners of the award were of such high character the committee required four weeks in deliberation before it could make its choice.

Gordon, a native of Whitinsville, Mass., is the son of a professional. He served as Illinois PGA president for seven years, and as a PGA National vp for three terms. The "PGA Golf Pro of the Year" award was made on the basis of 11 points of service to a pro's community, his club, and the game.

The Special Awards committee of the PGA, of which Dugan Aycock is chmn., inaugurated the new award as a means of directing national attention to the services of club professionals. The award was presented to Gordon by PGA Pres. Harry Moffitt at the PGA President's dinner.

Pro Seniors Plan Busy Championship Week

Mart Cromb, pres. of the PGA Seniors, and his teammates have planned a busy week beginning Jan. 23, at the PGA National course, Dunedin, Fla., and at meetings and social events of the seniors and their wives.

On Monday, Jan. 23, the Senior-Junior pro-pro event will be played. On the 24th the Seniors' annual meeting will be held, starting at 8 p. m., at the Ft. Harrison hotel, Clearwater. On the 25th the Senior 4-ball affair is scheduled. The annual banquet will be held that evening.

The Seniors will have Jan. 26 for practice. On the 27th play begins in the Seniors championship for the A. K. Bourne trophy, for the Teacher's trophy which is awarded the winner of the US-British senior pro-contest, and the Quarter Century Club competition.

Western Senior Tournament Set for June 20-22

Western Senior Golf Assn. will hold its eighth annual championship golf tournament at the Highland G & CC, Indianapolis, Ind., June 20-22.