

## FOURSOMES

By JOHN M. WARD

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DEAR SIR :—Complying with your request for a letter "on the subject of foursomes, pointing out the fine points of the game and all the arguments you [I] can muster in its support," requires, first, a word of explanation in order to clear the way.

This question, as to the relative merits of the foursome as compared with the four-ball match, has arisen in connection with the playing of the matches between New York, Philadelphia and Boston for the Lesley Cup; and I assume that it is in that same connection you wish me to discuss it.

Last year for the first time, when the matches were played in Boston, the foursome was substituted for the four-ball match and it was continued this year at Garden City.

None of us, who attended the banquet after the matches at the Brookline Club last year, will ever forget the great forensic twosome which took place, after the dinner, between Mr. W. J. Travis, advocating the four-ball match, and Mr. Findlay Douglas championing the foursome. Mr. Douglas on that memorable occasion developed a power of lung and rhetoric theretofore little suspected in him; and his eloquence and enthusiasm rose to such height that, it will be recalled, the floor, his chair and finally the festal board itself served for a rostrum. And yet, from the bristling attitude of Mr. Travis and one or two others, at the recent dinner at Garden City, it is apparent that the advocates of the four-ball match have not yet been entirely con-

verted. Nevertheless, the foursome has made some friends, and there are now other members of the New York team who are willing not only to admit that it possesses merit for the purpose of the Lesley Cup competition but even has inherent attractions of its own.

Much has been said and can be said for and against the foursome. It has been sarcastically referred to as "an old man's game," presumably because the players, playing alternate strokes on the same ball, play but one-half of the time. For the same reason it has been referred to as only "a half a game of golf," etc.; all of which is entirely beside the question.

The foursome has age, custom and authority on its side. It is the original game of golf, as played by four players, and there are records to show that it is almost as old as the twosome itself. Indeed, under the Rules of Golf, it is said, "The game of golf is played by two sides, each playing its own *ball*. A side consists either of one or of two players. . . ." The four-ball match is a comparatively recent modification of the game, designed to meet the nervous requirements of the modern player; and it has attained its greatest vogue in this country, where the chief aim of most of us is to play as many holes or rounds as possible every day out. If the two players on each side are fairly well matched, the game may be quite interesting; but where they are not evenly matched, or where one of the players on one side happens to be off his game, the result is anything but a pleasure to the weaker player. He

flounders along as best he can, unconsciously ignored or politely tolerated by his partner. His sense of weakness and consequent humiliation become so oppressive that he fails to render any help even when the opportunity is offered. Such good strokes as he may make are completely overshadowed by his partner's superior play and he concludes the unhappy round knowing that he has figured not at all in the result. It is all well enough for players of the first class, self-reliant and accustomed to "the centre of the stage," to play the four-ball match; but for *nous autres*, the players of lesser skill, the foursome offers at least some chance to appear as factors in the result.

Moreover, the foursome has always seemed to me to offer many more opportunities for the friendly interchange of advice, encouragement and sympathy between the partners, which goes so far to make up that sociable feature that should be a part of every game of golf. In the four-ball match one is of necessity almost entirely engrossed with his own game. Golf is so constituted that the player, playing one ball himself, must concentrate his entire attention upon that ball; and, if he happens to be paired with a weaker player, he soon unconsciously but surely loses interest in his partner's game. His ball may be on one side of the course while his partner's is on the other, and they each go about their own play with little opportunity for the interchange of any advice or encouragement. If only his own play be correct it matters little in the final result to one partner what the other may do.

On the other hand, in the foursome, each partner is, necessarily, vitally interested in every stroke of

the other. They are following the same ball and their course through the green lies along the same path. They are constantly together, advising, encouraging and consoling each other, and thus are united by the strongest bonds of interest and sympathy. Every good play your partner makes calls for a word of heartfelt praise; and what a joy it is, when misfortune overtakes him, if you can show your appreciation and save the play by a sterling recovery! There is nothing so admirable in the field of athletics as red blood; and when you have gone through a hard match, under the conditions offered by a foursome, with a partner whose heart-beats were right, win or lose, you have added something to your love of mankind.

Getting still nearer to the point of view indicated at the outset, the foursome seems to me, in these Lesley matches, to be the fairer test. This annual competition<sup>™</sup> is a departure from the original game of golf in which the unit is the individual player. Ten men are selected from each Association and play together to determine, not who are the strongest individual players, but which is the strongest team. The unit, therefore, is no longer the individual but the team. Now it is perfectly possible in a four-ball match for the losing side to have played the better golf. If one of the partners plays par golf, it matters little what the other does, even though both opponents play par golf or nearly so; and yet the *combined* play of the opponents is better and should entitle them to win.

Then, too, it may even happen that two partners, *both* playing good golf, are beaten by their opponents with a much inferior score. This was illustrated, in a remarkable way, in a re-

cent four-ball match at Garden City in which Messrs. Travers and Travis were opposed by Messrs. Stevenson and Claflin. In the morning Mr. Travis scored 75 and Mr. Travers 78, while Messrs. Stevenson and Claflin scored 85 and 82 respectively; and yet Messrs. Travers and Travis were but one up on the morning round. And in the afternoon they were actually beaten three and two, though the medal scores showed much the same disparity in play. Such a result cannot possibly occur in a foursome. It is true that even in a twosome the lower medal score does not always win the hole-play; but it certainly would win where there was such a difference as occurred in the instance just mentioned. In other words, in foursome

play every stroke of each partner necessarily counts in the result, which is not, and never can be, true of a four-ball match. So that as a means of determining the relative skill of two teams the foursome registers all the faults as well as the merits of *every* player and is therefore the fairer test.

There is a practical consideration, likewise, in favor of the foursome. It moves along much more rapidly than a four-ball match and, in the fall of the year, when this contest takes place, this becomes important on account of the early coming of twilight.

These are not "all the arguments" I could muster in support of the foursome, but they have been enough to persuade me in its favor.

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