



FOUR-BALL MATCHES™

By LEIGHTON CALKINS

THE Lesley Cup matches have been responsible for a very good-natured discussion of the relative merits of foursomes and four ball matches. I do not want to be understood as urging a return to four ball matches. The Metropolitan Golf Association consented to foursomes out of deference to the wishes of the other two associations, and is content to play them under any conditions they may name. But I raise my hand in protest against any eulogy of the foursome as a game.

It is argued that the Lesley competition is a team competition and that there is more room for team play in a foursome than in a four ball match. There has been no end of talk along this line, but it never leads anywhere

because no one stops long enough to define what he means by "team play." The fact is that there is no such thing as team play in golf at all, using the term as it applies in other sports, such as football, baseball, lacrosse, or hockey, meaning the simultaneous and harmonious participation of two or more individuals in a given play. In golf, each separate play—that is, each stroke—must be executed from beginning to end by one man alone and not by two or more contestants assisting each other in the play. The foursome stands only for what may be called the combined steadiness of two players playing theoretically as one; but actually playing, each of them, approximately one half of the game and one half of the time. In foursomes,

a victory generally denotes little except an absence of really poor play on the part of either player. Safe, average play is a *sine qua non*, and a better asset than brilliancy mixed with error. Of course, brilliancy is possible in foursomes among experts used to playing that way. But the inducement, nine times out of ten, is in the direction of avoiding mistakes rather than of "making history."

The four ball match stands out in striking contrast. Brilliant play abounds, and a match is seldom won in any other way. With all four players evenly matched, it is generally necessary for one of them to "jump out of the bunch" with a "birdie" in order to capture a hole. The strongest argument for the four ball match is to be found precisely at the point where it is most bitterly censured, namely, that one player may go all to pieces and yet his side may win. Exactly. But how is it done? By his partner playing the best ball of two others, a most difficult thing to do in golf, with the four players fairly evenly matched. Who will gainsay the reward if the trick is done, or decry a match which may produce a record score under the stress of one player holding two? In a foursome, under similar conditions, the match degenerates into a procession. And all this proves nothing as to team play, but merely that if one player is off his game in a foursome, all four players, and the gallery to boot, will have a mighty uninteresting time of it.

The four ball match produces one style of play, the foursome another. It is not a question of team play at all. It is a question of taste. Which game would you rather play, or see? That is all there is to it; and the question

has been answered with no lack of emphasis by golfers everywhere. Why is it that our dear friends from Boston (I trust they will pardon the comment), so earnest and insistent for foursomes in the Lesley competition, are never caught playing that way themselves? Is it really necessary, for the sole purpose of resurrecting a game we don't like, to graft it on the schedule of one of the best golfing events of the year?

The foursome is old fashioned and abundantly abhorred. It is true that it is included in the definition of the game of golf, but we have since enacted rules for four ball matches; and as against the wonderfully venerable age of the foursome, we may with propriety set up its colossal modern unpopularity. Its history proves it to have been preeminently a lazy game for tired old men after luncheon; for overfed nobles and kings, gouty octogenarians, and the like. As they mainly supported the game, long before the discovery of America, they may have had a hand in the first definition of the game, being careful to include the form of competition least calculated to interfere with their gastronomical habits and pleasures.

Finally, a word as to the essence of golf. A distinctive characteristic, compared with many other games of skill and endurance, is the entire absence of physical contact with your opponent, your absolute freedom of choice as to ball and clubs; and the basic principle that in playing your own ball from start to finish you will get, all along the route, exactly that to which your play entitles you. A fine stroke will bring its own sweet reward, and a shot into the bottomless pit of the home hole at Garden City, its swift and sure damnation. Ancient

definitions of the game to the contrary notwithstanding, the foursome is absolutely at variance with the fundamental idea of the game. *In a foursome you never play your own ball!* You are always playing somebody else's ball, which isn't golf. The foursome, though old as the hills, is really a modification of the pure game of golf, and akin to other freak forms of competition, such as one-club matches, obstacle competitions, etc. It is only a step further to a sixsome, three players playing one ball against three

others doing the same. Why not frame the Lesley conditions so that each team of ten players shall have a joint interest and participation in the progress of a single ball? Imagine the Massachusetts and Metropolitan associations in a twentysome, ten men on a side! Team play deific!

My friends, give it up. The foursome isn't doomed. It is dead as a doornail already, and requires more practice than it is getting in the Lesley competition, if it is ever to breathe easily again.

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