



By OUR BRITISH CORRESPONDENT

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The evidence increases that so far as Great Britain is concerned this is going to be the greatest boom year that the game of golf has ever known. Money is being poured into the game by thousands and tens of thousands, and new courses are being made all over the country. There were five new ones announced in one week lately, and it is noteworthy that many new clubs and courses are being started on a much more expensive scale than used to be the case. The advance of golf is noticeably strong in Ireland. The climate there is specially good for producing the right kind of turf and maintaining it in good condition, and it will cause little surprise if in a few years Ireland comes to be regarded as the ideal golfing ground for holiday makers.

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In the meantime there are loud complaints being made in some quarters about the increase in the cost of the game in the London district. In many respects this is now the greatest center of the game. There are more players constantly playing and far more money is spent on it here than anywhere else. The tendency throughout Metropolitan golf is to make it more and more expensive. Fifteen pound entrance fees and six pound subscriptions are becoming common, and luxurious clubhouses and the most scientifically constructed

courses are demanded. There are now 20,000 golfers in the London district, and it is reckoned that among them they spend £300,000 a year on the game. The turnover of the popular Mid-Surrey Club down at Richmond, about eight miles from the center of the city is £30,000 a year, and at this establishment 20,000 lunches are served to the members in the same space of time. In such circumstances it is not surprising that the big social clubs of the West End of London are complaining bitterly of want of patronage and even suggesting that if things don't improve they may have to shut up shop. Also the golf habit is making its mark on men's dress even about the fashionable parts of London. The man who once on a time would as soon have thought of committing suicide as of walking down Piccadilly in anything but a silk hat and frock or morning coat now strolls down about the town in Irish tweeds and a soft hat.

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Municipal golf is also on the increase in this country, but there is a feeling that in England at any rate it will not catch on with the lower classes, being too expensive for them, even under the best of municipal circumstances. The London County Council, being the governing authority of the metropolis is starting a public course, but its future is doubtful. On the other hand the returns

show that 172,251 players played on the three municipal courses at Edinburgh last year, and that at twopence a round the income was over £1,000. One of these three courses, being that on the Braid Hills, is as good an inland course as anyone need wish to play upon, and the scenery all about is magnificent.

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At the present time large numbers of our leading amateurs are out at the French Riviera where the season is nearly at its height. Plenty of fuss is made about this Riviera season, and the different competitions are talked about as if they were small championships. It is expensive, and it is somewhat fashionable; that's all, or very nearly. The ex-Prime Minister, Mr. Balfour, has been playing every day at Biarritz. One of the newspaper correspondents telegraphed home that "he was doing good scores *every day*." Evidently then great statesmen are exempt from the worry of the ordinary golfer, in going off his game occasionally.

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The best performance done on the links this season so far goes to the credit of good old Andrew Kirkaldy who knows just as much about his dear old course at St. Andrews as it is possible for any man to know. Just lately when the course was frozen and most difficult to play upon, he played one round one day and two the next, and made scores of 75, 75 and 77 respectively. He had only one 6 in all the three rounds and nothing worse. This was very fine going. Andrew generally does something of this sort once a year, but not usually quite so early in the season as on this occasion.

Everybody is still wrangling about where the amateur championship shall be played in the future. As I have intimated previously, the question as to whether the existing arrangement, by which it is played on one of five courses in turn, shall continue, is to come up for full consideration at Muirfield in May. There are now three strong parties. One of them wants things to remain as they are, another wants the rota abolished altogether, and a third would like to see the number of championship courses reduced. This is the order of the parties' strength, and the people who want things to remain just as they have been are most likely to win the day.

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I suppose that over in America you have been experimenting with the little or "baby" ball as we have been doing here. It was introduced by one firm towards the end of last season. It is appreciably smaller than the balls of the standard size, and looks quite a tiny thing. After first putting it on the market the firm introducing it altered it by making it heavier, inserting a quantity of steel filings in the center of the core. My own experience with the ball is that it takes harder hitting to drive it a decent length, but that, when you get used to it, it is a wonderfully steady ball on the green, and the best thing going for pitching up short approaches when a very minimum amount of run is wanted at the finish. The point of this note, however, is that though the little ball is not by any means in common use it has evidently obtained a fair body of adherents, for this season two other leading firms are putting on the market balls of reduced size, supplementary to the others.