

# BRITISH AND AMERICAN GOLF COMPARED

IN TWO ARTICLES

By HAROLD H. HILTON

JUDGING from American press comments upon the play at Sandwich and in a lesser degree at Prestwick which have appeared in our papers, it seems you in America have arrived at the opinion that your golf is as yet, not of quite the same standard as ours. This is a conclusion which we, who have enjoyed the game as played on both Continents, had already arrived at some time ago, and in the light of more recent events we have seen no reason to alter this opinion. Although Francis Ouimet had defeated two of our very best professional players, a feat which we thought an amateur player was not capable of accomplishing, still we were inclined to somewhat discount this performance when it was considered in relation to the relative form of American and British Amateur golf, in the belief that your young crack, with all the confidence of youth and little of the experience of disappointments and defeats, had played as one inspired, and that he would probably not play with anything approaching the same degree of confidence when he once realized that he had a reputation to carry on his shoulders. There are two species of confidence in the game of golf: the one is the confidence of youth which knows not fear and realizes not the possibilities of defeat, and the other is the confidence gained by the long experience of continued success, and in an eighteen hole scramble such as that played at Brookline in the famous play off, I am inclined to think that the youthful stamp of confidence is the more useful asset, and that it was Francis Ouimet's very inexperience which carried him through against Vardon and Ray.

Having myself been through the various stages of confidence from the very youthful buoyant stage, to the matured veteran's stage, I am perhaps in a good position to form an estimate of the relative value of your young player at Brookline. I can well remember the time when I won the British Open Championship at a very early age, and that I felt the strain less on that occasion than in that of any important event I have ever taken part in. I now realize that my very inexperience was responsible for the lack of nervous tension, which enabled me to play a free natural game to the very end, without the question of responsibility ever entering. I have many a time wished that I could again approach a championship contest in the same "free from care" spirit in which I approached the Open Championship of the year 1892. But having once attained success and pleasing notoriety, the days of youthful confidence had gone for ever, and from that time forth I played the game weighted with all the responsibilities attached to a golfer who had won

an Open Championship, and at first the result was in no way satisfactory.

In the light of these memories of the past I never for a moment anticipated that Francis Ouimet would succeed in confirming his Brookline form when over on this side, and in this opinion I was far from being alone. Even before any of your players arrived on British soil there was a strong impression amongst those who are really conversant with the game, that if our Amateur Championship trophy did travel across the Atlantic once again, that it would be through the instrumentality of Metropolitan golf in the person of Jerome Travers. In saying this you must not think that we were in any way inclined to underestimate the brilliant performance of Francis Ouimet. We simply arrived at the conclusion that for various reasons he would most probably fail to reproduce the Brookline form, and the result proved that we were justified in this belief.

Of Jerry Travers we were admittedly sorely afraid, mainly for the reason that he has so very seldom failed in match play, and there had never been an authenticated instance of his nerve failing at a critical moment. Of his wonderful match playing abilities, we were all fully aware, and the British critics who had seen him engaged in these hand to hand encounters were almost louder in singing his praises than even his home worshippers, and personally I put him down as the most doughty and imperturbable player of matches I had ever come across. This was the reason why we feared him, and we did not forget that his world-wide reputation was that of a golfer, who could by sheer domination of will power extract himself from the most hopeless looking situations and that this would probably not fail to influence many of the British players he might have to meet. Such a reputation as Jerry Travers enjoyed is often a very telling factor in a game. In this country John Ball enjoys a reputation somewhat similar to that of Jerry Travers, and the effects of this reputation has been in evidence in many an Amateur Championship contest in the past. Time after time we have seen Johnnie Ball in an apparently hopeless position, and what is more a position due to the fact that he had been outplayed up to that point, but directly his opponent gets in sight of victory one will witness the latter crumple up as if all the back bone had departed from him, much as if a magician has played a spell upon him and his works. The spell that is apparently cast about the player is really that which emanates from the reputation of Johnnie Ball, which reads that he is never beaten and the more hopeless the task

## G O L F I L L U S T R A T E D

the better is he likely to play. And as it often happens, he may not play the remaining holes with exceeding brilliancy, but the spell of the reputation has already done its fell work, and his opponent beats himself. We well knew the effect John Ball's personality and pluck is prone to produce on players on this side, and we were quite prepared to see that Jerry Travers and his reputation would have much the same effect upon the opponents he would have to meet, and we accordingly feared him exceedingly. That he should prove himself but very mortal, was in a sense a relief, but at the same time a somewhat sad disappointment. As a nation we should have admittedly preferred to see him die the death, but at the same time would have preferred that the death he did die should have been a glorious one.

The disparity between amateur golf as played in Great Britain and amateur golf as played in the United States is mainly marked in the respect that we have a very great number of players who are quite capable of occasionally playing a game which is quite equal to that which the recognized cracks are in the habit of playing. There are numberless players in this country of whom American golfers have never heard of. They do not win championships, as their game fails in the all essential matter of consistency. They are in the habit of playing one or two good rounds and then failing sadly in attempt number three, but on the other hand they may produce of their best when opposed to one of the big men, and the result is that a complete surprise is sprung upon the golfing world. Young Tubbs who defeated Ouimet is a typical example of the class of player I am speaking of. He is a big powerful young fellow who may

be termed a natural golfer. There is no very strong evidence of scientific finesse in the game he plays. It is straight forward golf of the hard hitting type, and when he is prevailing upon the centre of the face of his club to hit the ball, he is an extremely difficult man to defeat, and on these occasions he is capable in an eighteen hole contest of defeating any amateur in the world. Although American golfers may have naturally felt a little humiliated, in that their Open Champion was defeated by a player they had never even heard of, still these unexpected incidents happen every year in our championship and they do not in any way surprise us, because we realize the number of men of the Tubbs class, who annually make their appearance in the event, and recognize the possibilities in their game in an eighteen hole scramble.

As regards the comparative standard of amateur golf in the two countries, there is as regards the play of the best class men, nothing in it. Travers, Ouimet and Evans are probably quite as good as the very best of our amateurs but on the other hand in the matter of numerical strength the advantage lies with the old country, as we could place in the field three separate teams of three players each who would have an even chance of success against your three young cracks. We have so to speak *more* dreadnoughts in our fleet of players than you have, although our very finest in the fleet are no better than *your* best. Our superior strength lies in numbers and not in the point of individual merit, and this opinion was confirmed at championship time by the fact that Jerry Travers was backed to win the event at as short a rate of odds as anyone in the field, which emphasizes the belief the British public had in his powers as a golfer.

*(To be concluded next month)*