

# FIFTY YEARS OF GOLF

The Eleventh Installment of the Golfing Reminiscences of  
Great Britain's First Amateur Champion

By HORACE G. HUTCHINSON

IN 1904, the Amateur Championship being that year at Sandwich, Frank Penn entertained me for it at Bifrons, near Canterbury, about fifteen miles from the arena of action. He used to motor me in each day, and the driving of a big motor through the streets of Sandwich town appears a very cork screwy business. Nevertheless he accomplished it perfectly and never once bunkered us by the way.

I came across a lot of old friends and enemies at that meeting—first Johnny Laidlay in the international match, then Mure Ferguson, if I remember right, in the first round of the championship; I forget who then, but I know that a few more heats brought me up against Johnny Ball. All these adventures, even that last and worst, I succeeded in getting through with success, and then I had to meet Bobby Maxwell on the last day but one of the play. I was playing fairly well, being much helped by the longer clubs I had taken to since the Muirfield championship where Bobby beat me in the final.

Staying, as I was, with Penn, fifteen miles away, I did not hear much of the gossip going on at this championship, but from time to time I did find one man or the other coming to me and saying "Have you seen that American who is putting with an extraordinary thing like a croquet mallet? He's putting most extraordinary well with it." Of course I had not seen him: I had been too busy myself, putting by no means extraordinarily well. That sort of thing was said, now and then, but no one thought any more about it. It was known that some Americans had come over and had entered for the championship, but if anybody had prophesied that one of them was likely to give trouble or to get into the final heats he would have been looked on as a lunatic. The truth is that we much underrated the American amateur at that time. Partly, I suppose this was our "d——d insular insolence," but partly too it was due to the very successful tour in the States a year or two before, of a team of the Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society. They won their matches so consistently as to give us the idea that the Americans could not play golf. The man with the mallet putter was in process of teaching us better, though even yet we did not realize it. Mr. Harold Reade, the Irishman, ought to have beaten him, for he was two up and either two or three to play, but the American played the final holes very finely and just won. So he survived, until in the heat before the semi-final, wherein I had to meet Bobby, he had Hilton to play.

But Hilton was in no sort of form and Travis beat him as he pleased. Meanwhile I beat Bobby and had revenge for the year before, in the Muirfield final; but it was by no means as I pleased.

I started badly and let Bobby win the first three holes. Then I steadied down and he gave me chances. It is always a different thing playing Bobby anywhere else than at Muirfield. Had he gained this start there I should never have seen the way he went. But he let me get hole after hole back until on the eighteenth green we were all even, we had played three a piece, I was stone dead and my ball laid him a dead stymie. It was not a stymie at all difficult to loft. There was nice room to pitch the ball and let it run on into the hole. Still, at that crisis of the match, it was a fine piece of work on Bobby's part to play it perfectly as he did. Then I holed my unimportant little putt and we had to start out to play extra holes.

My second shot to the first (or nineteenth) hole, I put carefully into the bunker guarding the green. Bobby, I suppose determined to be over, seeing that I was in, rather over-ran the green. A bunker near the hole never had the terrors for me that it has for some people: we were too familiar with them at Westward Ho! Tom Vardon said to me afterwards, respecting the stroke which I played out of that bunker: "That was a plucky shot of yours, to go straight for the hole like that." Of course it is always pleasant to be told one is a hero, but really there was nothing very heroic about this. If the sand were taken at the right point behind the ball there was no trouble about the stroke. If you hit differently from your intention there was bound to be trouble, but that is the case with most golfing strokes.

What happened in this case was that I howked the ball out fairly near the hole, about a couple of yards off, perhaps, and Bobby, playing from the far end of the green, put his just inside it. But whereas I had a straight uphill putt to the hole, he had to come along the curve of the slope, so that my putt was far the easier. I holed it all right. Bobby allowed a little too much for the slope and that was the end of that business. "Now see, Horace," he said, as we walked back to the club-house, "that you don't get beaten by that American."

I started out in the afternoon without the smallest idea in life that I was to be beaten by "that American"; but I had not played two shots before I knew that all the best of the fight had been taken out of

## GOLF ILLUSTRATED

me by that stiff morning match. As Andrew Kirkaldy said to me afterwards: "that," pointing to Bobby, "that was your murderer." He had, in truth, done most of the killing and Travis had but to finish it. He did not really play very well, but he was one up on me going to the thirteenth hole, and gave me every chance of winning it, but I played a very bad shot and followed it with another indifferent one and so let him win that hole which I ought to have won. He gave me no further chances, and beat me by, I think, three and two. But I reckoned things up afterwards and found, by the score of the holes, that if I had played as well as I did in any of the previous matches I should have been up on him, instead of down, at the point where he beat me. That however is what makes an Amateur Champion—that, amongst other things—the ability to "stay" through a long fight and not to suffer reaction after a hard match.

In the final Travis had to meet Ted Blackwell, and I never had great hopes for England as to the result of that encounter. I say this, with all respect for Ted Blackwell's great game as he developed it almost immediately afterwards; but he was not his great self then. At that time he was still putting with a thin bladed little cleek which must have been forged about the date that Tubal Cain was in active work as a smith. Very shortly afterwards someone, who deserves to suffer lingering death at the hands of all Ted Blackwell's later opponents, induced him to take to an aluminium putter. The difference it made in his game was nearer a third than four strokes, as I reckon it. From a really bad putter he became all at once a very good putter indeed. I knew all about him, for I had been playing him and beating him comfortably in several matches at St. Andrews in course of a little party which Lord Dudley took up there. I met him again in an international match at Hoylake only a little later, when he had exchanged the tinkling cleek for the aluminium putter and he beat me—not by length of driving but by length of putting.

As for this final at Sandwich which was played in his pre-aluminium days, Travis has put it on record that he felt confident of winning from the start; and he looked like a winner all through. With the black cigar and the deliberate methods, including the practice swing before each stroke, he was perhaps rather a hard man to play against, but at the same time, and although I have said that he did not play very well when I met him, I think those critics make a great mistake who say that he was not a first class golfer. He was, and is, a wonderful putter. I know that, not only by the wonderful week of putting that he put in over here at that time, but by what Jim Whigham and others who have played a great deal with him in America have told me. Whigham said that you were grateful, thinking that you had a lucky escape, if you were his opponent and he did not hole

the ball from fifteen yards. This was at Garden City where he knows the greens better than his drawing room carpet. Indeed all Travis's record disproves the statement that "he was not fit to win the championship." That he was "lucky to win" we must think. Unless a man is a head and shoulders above his field, he has to have luck if he is to live through a tournament such as our Amateur Championship; and Travis had no such head and shoulders advantage as this. But put him down at a hundred and eighty or any less number of yards from the hole and there was no player, amateur or professional, better than he. Perhaps there was no amateur as good. His weakness was out of bunkers and rough ground, but that was a weakness which troubled him little because he very seldom got into these difficulties. I hardly know whether he would have won our championship if Ted Blackwell and the aluminium putter had been introduced to each other a few years earlier, but it is no use arguing about "ifs." As soon as he had won that final the price of Schenectady putters went up a hundred per cent and Bobby Maxwell, by way of insult, made me a present of one of them with which I often putted till our legislation banned them.

### HOW THE HASKELL BALL AMUSED THE LAWYERS

One night I was going North by one of the sleeping trains, and, having business late in the afternoon in Holborn, I did not return to the civilized parts of the town but dined at the Inns of Court Hotel. There are little tables, for two, and at mine was dining also a man with whom I got into conversation. He told me he came from Glasgow and was in town on a business which he dared say I should think a very curious one—a big lawsuit pending about such a small matter as a ball used in the playing of the game of golf. Did I play golf? I said "A little." I also said that in all the history of coincidences this was just about the most singular, for that I too had been engaged as a witness in the very same case. It was the case that the manufacturers of the Haskell ball were bringing against the manufacturers of the Kite ball. The point was to prove the Haskell patent good for their protection in a monopoly of making rubber-cored balls. The Haskell people had asked me to give evidence because I was the first man to play with these balls in England and because I considered them, and *pace* the law, still consider them, an absolutely new departure in golf ball manufacture.

It would be ungrateful not to think that providence designed this meeting at the Inns of Court Hotel, for my new friend was able to tell me what the right fee was for me to charge as an expert witness. He told me that that was what I was—an expert witness. I did not know it before, although I knew, without his telling me, the ancient divisions of the species "liar," into "liar," "d——d liar," and "expert

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MR. WALTER J. TRAVIS AS HE APPEARED IN 1903  
in his match at Garden City with the late J. A. T. Bramston who was a member of the team of the Oxford-Cambridge Golfing Society that visited America that year

witness." I was prepared to play my part, especially when I heard, with pleased surprise, the large fees paid for witness of this expert and unimpeachable character.

So in due course of time I was summoned up to London to attend the trial. I suppose other trials are sometimes as humorous, but I could not have believed it possible that there could be such good entertainment as I found in that Court where I sat with much enjoyment calculating, between the acts, the sum to which my expert witness fee was mounting up as I waited. The judge, Mr. Justice Buckley, if I remember right, was not a golfer; yet the way in which he kept his eye on the ball during the three days or so of that trial was above all praise. And

the ball took a deal of keeping of the eye on itself, for there were many balls of different sorts brought into Court, and they were constantly running off the Judge's desk and tumbling and jumping about in the body of the Court where learned gentlemen knocked their wigs together as they bent down to search for them. There was an old lady who said she had made balls which were practically identical with those Haskells all her life—balls for boys to play with. So she was commanded to go away and to come back with all her apparatus and to show in Court how the balls were made. She returned, and it appeared that after some winding of thread about a core the next proceeding was to dip the balls into a molten

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solution of some boiling stuff which smelt abominably. She cooked this up in Court, and the whole business was very suggestive of the making of the hell-broth by the witches in "Macbeth," only that perhaps the court of law did not give a striking representation of the "blasted heath." The balls were apt to escape from the old lady when they were half cooked and to go running about the Court where the barristers, retrieving them, got their fingers into the most awful sticky state and their wigs seemed to be the appropriate places on which to rub the stickiness off.

Willie Fernie was there, enjoying himself hugely too. He, it seems, had long ago made a ball resembling the Haskell. There too was Commander Stewart, whom I had known in the early eighties at St. Andrews. He was the maker of the "Stewart patent" balls which had a vogue for a time, though they had not the least resemblance to the Haskell balls. They were of some composition, quite solid, and with iron filings in them. Nevertheless Commander Stewart, as it appeared, had made a ball similar to the Haskell, though it could not have been the one known as his patent. All these were testimony to what the lawyers call "previous user."

Then an old gentleman was called who said that he had played at ball as a boy with another old gentleman, whose name he gave, with a ball similar in all its essentials to the Haskell golf ball. The other old gentleman was called then and he was asked whether his memory corroborated this, and it was in essentials the same ball. To which he answered, to the delight of the Court, that it was not the same ball at all. "What then," asked the Counsel, in a profoundly shocked voice, "do you mean to say that you think your old friend is a liar?" "No," he replied quite readily, "I don't think so, I know it." I looked out to see those two old friends going out of Court, to discover whether they were quite as good friends as they had been before, but I could not see them.

I do not remember much about my own testimony. I think what I said was true, but I am nearly sure that it was quite unimportant. The present Lord Moulton, I remember, examined, or cross-examined me, but he did not turn me inside out very badly and I believe I left the Court "without a stain on my character" according to the stereotyped phrase. At all events the conclusion of the whole matter was that we lost our case very handsomely. The Judge, considering the evidence of the old lady, of Commander Stewart, of Willie Fernie and so on, said that he thought there was sufficient witness to "previous user," and no doubt "Messrs. Hutchison Maine and Co."—I think this was the name of the firm opposing them—fought a good fight in the best interest of the golfer, for it would have been a bad job for us if there had been a monopoly in the hands of one firm of the manufacture of the rubber-cored balls. They put the prices up against us fairly high as it was, without

that. Had there been a monopoly of manufacture we might now be paying five shillings each perhaps, instead of half a crown, for the balls—a very solemn thought. They carried this case to the Court of Appeal, but that Court only confirmed the finding of the Court below, and thereto added this further comment, that whether there were "previous user" or no, they did not think that the invention in itself had sufficient novelty for the patent to be good. So that "put the lid on," to use homely phrase.

A while afterwards I met the American manager of a big athletic outfitting house, and he told me that in his opinion, looking at the thing with the commercial eye of the manufacturer, if the Kite people had been "real cute" they would not have driven this fight to a finish. Instead, they would have gone to the Haskell people, when the case seemed likely to go in favor of the defendants, and come to a compromise with them. They would then have chucked the case, as if despairing of success, under a secret agreement with the Haskell people to allow them to make balls on certain agreed terms. The effect of that would have been that the chucking of the case would have frightened other companies out of ever bringing the like case again against the Haskell people, and the two might have gone on merrily working their monopoly, at the expense of the ball-buyer, "till the cows came home." That, as my friend the manager said, would have been "real smart," but I think we have to congratulate ourselves that this real smartness did not commend itself to the Scottish firm that fought and won this historic battle. We pay enough for our golf balls even now, even under the relatively blessed conditions of competition.

Surely it is not for me, who went no further in study of the law than to eat, though seldom to digest, those singular dinners at the singular hour of six o'clock at the Inner Temple, to criticize the high findings of the law, but it does seem to my un-instructed wisdom that if ever there were a substantially new invention, making a new departure, it was this of these that we then called Haskells and now call India-rubber-cored balls. Nobody, before Haskell, had ever given them to us as reasonable things with which to play the game of golf. He gave them to us as the best balls hitherto invented. They spoilt the game in a sense, it is true. The ability to hit the ball absolutely exactly has not the same value now as in the days of the solid gutty ball; nor does forceful hitting count for as much. On the other hand the greater resiliency of the ball makes the game more pleasant, especially for weak muscles. But that, the quality of the ball, is another story. The story the Court had to sit in judgment on was whether substantially the ball was a novelty. They found it was not, and we all should be very thankful they found it so; but at the same time it is quite possible that we may think it a queer finding.