
MATTHEW, SIDNEY L. *Life and Times of Bobby Jones: Portrait of a Gentleman*. Chelsea, Michigan: Sleeping Bear Press, 1995. Pp. vii, 297. Illustrations. \$49.95 cb.

MATTHEW, SIDNEY L. *Secrets of the Master: The Best of Bobby Jones*. Chelsea, Michigan: Sleeping Bear Press, 1996. Pp. xv, 145. Illustrations. \$22.00 cb.

Sidney L. Matthew is a trial lawyer in Tallahassee, Florida, and a golf aficionado extraordinaire. He is especially enamored of the life and career of Robert T. Jones. Indeed, it is probably no exaggeration to describe him as a Bobby Jones groupie. Prior to these two books, he wrote *The History of Bobby Jones Clubs* (1992). In 1996, he produced a film on Jones, narrated by Sean Connery and shown on CBS television prior to the Masters tournament that year. (Matthew even caddied for his friend and client Kenny Knox during the 55th Masters.)

These two books, then, are labors of love and, unfortunately, uncritical panegyrics to Jones and his memory. *Life and Times* is a sumptuous coffee table book, lavishly illustrated and beautifully presented. The text, however, is a mishmash of Matthew's narrative and captions under photographs, along with a substantial number of quotations from Jones's own writing and that of journalists who followed his career. The first half provides a basic chronological account of Jones's life from his birth in 1902 through his remarkable "Grand Slam" victories in 1930, when he won the British Open and Amateur and the U.S. Open and Amateur tournaments. The second half combines some chronological chapters—Jones during World War II, for example—with a topical one like "Bobby Jones's

Greatest Shots.” What the book focuses on, finally, is the ephemeral trivia of Jones’s game: shots missed and, more often, shots made.

Secrets of the Master is a collection of Jones’s newspaper columns from the 1920s. It is very much a “how-to” compendium with advice to players on improving their golf games. Topics range from technical ones like “Judging the Slope and Speed of Long Putts” to more metaphysical chapters like “Controlling the Emotions.” Occasionally, a column of historical interest appears, as when Jones describes the beauties of the Old Course at St. Andrews. There is no controlling organizational pattern in the arrangement of these columns, as the editor leaps from Jones’s discussion of slow play to a brief biographical sketch of golf course architect Alister MacKenzie, then on to getting “In and Out of Trouble.”

In both books, Bobby Jones comes across as a paragon of golfing skill, folksy wisdom, and high moral character. There is scarcely a hint of criticism in *Life and Times*. Even Jones’s most glaring temper tantrum, when he stormed off the course during the 1921 British Open, becomes the occasion for virtue. As Matthew interprets the incident, this “withdrawal . . . perhaps formed the basis for his resolve never again to breach the highest ethics of sportsmanship” (*Life and Times*, p. 121). Jones becomes a kind of living saint in Matthew’s eyes, representing the mythic virtues of nineteenth-century Victorian culture—modesty, self-control, natural honesty. In a paradigmatic anecdote (which Matthew relates twice in different sections of book), Jones assessed himself a penalty stroke in a tournament, even though U.S. Golf Association officials told him he had not in fact sinned! “When praised for his honesty, Jones responded, ‘You just as well praise me for not breaking into banks. There is only one way to play this game’” (*Life and Times*, p. 75).

In this hermetically sealed universe of male virtue, women appear only as occasional spectators in photographs and as helpmeets in marriage. No black faces at all adorn these pages, not even as caddies. And caddies are probably the major working stiffs in Matthew’s vision of Jones’s world. But this is hardly surprising, since golf was almost exclusively a well-to-do white male preserve when Bobby Jones played. It would have been nice if Matthew had at least confronted this fact.

These two books will make wonderful gifts for lovers of golf and denizens of Bobby Jones’s gallery of fans. But for the serious student of sports, they add virtually nothing to the work done by golf historians like Herbert Warren Wind. As a sometimes golfer myself, I must confess that the major insight I got from this reading was some sage practical counsel from the master: “I have seen numbers of mediocre players who were able to obtain fine results by exercising a bit of restraint” (*Secrets of the Master*, p. 9). I can’t wait for spring to arrive so I can try out this bit of Victorian advice. Fore!

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