
SOMMERS, ROBERT. *US. Open: Golf; Ultimate Challenge*, 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp. 398. Illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. \$30.00 cb.

The second edition of this book, first published in 1987, was occasioned by the centennial of the U.S. Open in 1995. Sommers, a former editor of *Golf Journal*, the official publication of the United States Golf Association, gives his readers a walk through the history of the golf tournament that is the highlight of the professional season. Taking each tournament chronologically, he moves through the early years, when British and Scottish golfers dominated, past the era of Walter Hagen and Bobby Jones, through the heroics of Ben Hogan, and into the modern era of Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, and the subsequent generation of Curtis Strange, Payne Stewart, and Ernie Els. Although the index suggests that three Opens are not mentioned (1908, 1964, and 1985), a close examination of the text reveals that only the 1908 event merited no discussion (a curious oversight, since that tournament featured an 18-hole playoff).

A book that did nothing but chronicle 99 out of 100 U.S. Open tournaments would be irredeemably mundane, but Sommers rescues his work from that fate by including a substantial amount of golf history and biography. In segments interspersed among descriptions of the tournaments, the reader learns about such things as the evolution of the golf ball, the growth of tournament golf in the 1920s, the expansion of the professional tour after World War II, and even the development of golf magazines. Profiles of well-known golfers, such as Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen, and Arnold Palmer, add an element of human interest to the book. Appendices list all the champions and runners-up, track the progress of scoring records, and provide other bits of U.S. Open trivia. The bibliography lists secondary works, magazines, and newspapers, and the index, while imperfect, is certainly helpful in a volume that is so full of names and places.

Sommers is an engaging writer, despite a tendency to refer to his favorite players by their first names, and the book is a more interesting read, especially for the casual golf enthusiast, than one might think. While its contributions to the serious study of golf history are fairly modest, its occasional forays into the history and biography behind the tournament elevate it above a fan's account.

—JOHN E. FINDLING
Indiana University Southeast