

## VIEWS OF SPORT

## Memories of Merion and the Bobby Jones Grand Slam

Bobby Jones on his way to the Grand Slam at the Merion Golf Club in 1930.



By JOSEPH C. DEY

**F**OR \$2.50 you could have seen Bobby Jones complete golf's only Grand Slam in 1930. That was the last day's charge for the United States Amateur Championship on a breezy Sept. 27 at the Merion Cricket Club's East Course near Philadelphia. For all six days a ticket cost only \$6; gross gate receipts were a record \$55,319 for 35,350 spectators. This week the United States Open championship will be played at Merion. If you don't already have a ticket, you will not be admitted — it's sold out. A limit of 18,500 paying spectators a day was fixed because Merion is small, but the gross admissions income is \$1,654,516; prices ranged from \$18 daily to \$85 for the tournament.

Changes over a half-century have greatly altered tournament golf, although its essential nature is unaffected. Knickerbockers, long-sleeved shirts and neckties used to be customary. The phantom Grand Slam is another case in point. For Bob Jones it comprised the Open and the Amateur Championships of the United States and Britain. Jones won all four between May 26 and Sept. 27, 1930. Now the two amateur championships have been supplanted by the American PGA championship and the Masters, which Bob Jones created. So the Grand Slam is now professional and mythical; no one has attained it. Ben Hogan won three of the titles in 1953 but did not play for the fourth, the PGA.

The miracle wrought by Bob Jones came during a deep economic depression after a stock market crash in 1929. The championship at Merion gave no hint of depression. Interest was colossal, for Jones's performance in 1930 was as great as anything else accomplished in the history of sport. Earlier in the summer, Jones had come home with the British Amateur and British Open championships — a stupendous bag. New York gave him a Broadway ticker-tape parade. Jones responded by winning the United States Open in July. So for the next two months interest built up as the United States Amateur approached. In that day amateurs were as prominent as professionals.

Jones had fired public imagination. Here was an attractive young Southerner from Atlanta, an amateur 28 years old, a lawyer, so good at golf that in the Open against professionals he was heralded by such headlines as "Jones Against the Field."

He was a man of high intelligence, charm and integrity, with degrees in engineering from Georgia Tech and literature from Harvard before he studied law at Emory. He was very human; earlier, he was a champion club-thrower when disgusted with himself for missing a shot, and was told by the United States Golf Association that he couldn't play in national championships until he controlled his temper. As skilled as he was, golf was not his whole life: in his career he entered only 52 tournaments and won 23, of which 13 were national championships here and in Britain. He was a gentleman who happened to play golf.

In 1930 facilities for spectators favored the athletic. Galleries galloped. Ropes around tees extended some 50 yards in a V, and most putting greens were protected by ropes at sides and rear. But on fairways the only restraint on eager viewers were portable ropes handled by crews of marshals who leap-frogged to anticipate ball landing areas. So there was a good deal of foot-racing for vantage points. Players were often jostled and fairways were not improved by the thundering herds. A detachment of United States Marines was on hand at Merion, primarily to protect Bob Jones. Today's system of roping every hole on the perimeter was a generation away. Grandstands for golf were unheard of. There were no intermediate scoreboards about the course.

Joseph C. Dey was the executive director of the United States Golf Association; commissioner of the PGA Tour, and captain of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews Scotland.

I was in the maelstrom of excitement as a starry-eyed sports buff of 22 who, as golf writer for The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, was assigned to write stroke-by-stroke description of Jones's play. Armed with a pad of paper and two or three messengers, I dashed off the deathless history of what Bob and his opponents did, shot for shot; when a hole was completed, a messenger hustled the report to press quarters in a barn loft next to the clubhouse; there a Morse code telegrapher ticked it off to the newspaper office downtown. What fun it was. No other golf event up to then had wider newspaper coverage. More than two million words were filed over telegraph wires. The Evening Bulletin at times assigned 16 writers and photographers to the proceedings. Television and direct radio coverage didn't exist, nor did mass press interviews of players.

### Jones's performance in 1930 was as great as anything accomplished in sport.

That was the last American championship in which the relatively small ball was permissible; in 1931 the present size arrived, with minimum diameter of 1.68 inches. Clubs were not matched sets. There was not a 14-club limit. Jones carried 18 clubs, and they were a hickory-shafted mongrel set except for the fact that they had been selectively matched by Bob's exquisite sense of feel.

Jones had a worrisome time when he damaged his driver, "Jeanie Deans," in playing from the first tee in a practice round. But Merion's professional, George Sayers, had skilled club-makers who repaired it.

Although a shortish course by championship standards, 6,965 yards, Merion has always demanded position play. That was emphasized in 1930 with lush, severe rough 5 to 6 inches high and 127 bunkers. The greens were fine and very fast. The 13th green, diseased by dollarspot, had its blemishes hidden by dye — the first use of artificial coloring in a U.S.G.A. championship. Then, as now, Merion's holes were indicated not by flags but by pear-shaped woven wicker baskets atop poles.

An almost mystical association had evolved between Jones and Merion. There he played in his first national championship at age 14, the 1916 Amateur; the boy wonder

reached the quarter-finals. There he won his first National Amateur, in 1924. There he was to complete the Grand Slam.

He had a relatively easy time of it. He played the first qualifying round in 69 and added a 73. His 142 won the medal and tied the qualifying record. For the 32 qualifiers, there followed a series of two 18-hole matches in one day and three 36-hole matches. Jones confessed to a vague uneasiness and sleeplessness, yet he won every match by at least five holes.

The pace of play was fast, and no one was faster than Bob Jones. In the qualifying rounds, there were 168 starters and they had no trouble finishing despite shortening daylight in late September. They played in pairs at five-minute intervals, a schedule unthinkable in today's syndrome of incessant ball-handling. Jones was decisive and particularly speedy: he took not more than three seconds from the moment of starting address to the moment of impact of club with ball. So intense was the focus on Jones and the marvelous thing he was trying to accomplish that almost everyone else seemed lost. But the memory will always be clear of Maurice McCarthy Jr., New York Metropolitan champion in 1929 and 1930. He needed a hole-in-one on the 35th hole of the qualifying rounds to tie for last qualifying place. He made the hole-in-one.

Next morning he won a playoff and entered the match-play draw. Immediately he had an extra-hole match with Watts Gunn; McCarthy won on the 19th. That afternoon Mac played George Von Elm, and they went 10 extra holes before McCarthy's birdie 3 ended it over the 28th — the longest overtime match in championship history (tied in the 1960 junior championship).

**Editors Note:** Joe Dey graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1929 and went to work for the Evening Bulletin newspaper. One year later he was one of 16 reporters and photographers from the Bulletin covering Bobby Jones' final leg of his Grand Slam as he won the U.S. Amateur at Merion. Soon after that Dey went to work for the USGA and by 1934 was its Executive Director. After retiring from the USGA he became the first commissioner of the newly organized PGA Tour division of the PGA in 1969.