

Merion Course a Thorough Test Of Golf, Declares Bobby Jones

Champion Says Link, Over Which He Will Seek Crown Next Week, One of His Favorites — Greens Among Best in World

BY BOBBY JONES

(American Open, British Open and Amateur
Champion)

IT always means a lot in any competition to play over a course that one recognizes as a good-test and really likes. In these respects, the East Course of the Merion Cricket Club at Haverford, where the National amateur championship is to be played next week, for me, at least, completely fills the bill.

I do not mean to say I think I can win the tournament over this course, for I have played golf long enough to know better than to count on such things, even to my most secret self. I mean simply that playing in a championship which I want to win, I am quite content Merion has been the selected course. It is never disappointing to be beaten by a better golfer over a testing lay-out.

Many people remember with varying degrees of distinctness the amateur championship of 1916, played over this same Merion course, but I venture to say none remember it so well as I. That was my first experience in major competition, and the first time I had played golf out of the South on the keen Eastern greens. It was the first time I had ever seen any really top-notch players engaged in real competition for an important prize.

I had a lot of funny experiences not the least amusing of which was trying to get out of the subway one afternoon on returning from the golf course.

I also had a great shock in my first practice round when I putted straight off one green into a creek and was forced to drop with a penalty behind the stream I had crossed once.

Changes Have Helped Course
MERION was a great course in those days; but in 1924 when the amateur was played there again and I was lucky enough to win it for the first time, it was even better. In 1916 the course was a bit weak in the middle. The tenth required only a drive and a short, blind pitch; the eleventh was of a mongrel length which could on occasions be driven;

By 1924 these four holes had been altered and thereby greatly improved. The new holes are now among the best on the course. I am told now that the first hole too has been recently changed so that the drive instead of being directed squarely at the boundary is played obliquely away from it. I think this is a wise and important alteration.

Probably the most important thing done at Merion in recent years was the installation of a system which made it possible to water the entire stretch of fairway. Particularly is this of value this year when all sections of the country have been afflicted by a severe drought.

Nothing so completely spoils a good golf course as hard parched fairways, not only because they do not afford proper lies, but because by allowing a prodigious run upon the drive they completely destroy the distance values which are so important to make the course a fair test.

We had a taste of this sort of thing there in 1916, when I remember that in my first or second round match I drove completely over the eighth green, a hole which then measured as it does now, 350 yards. In 1924 I was never able to reach it with less than a full mashie-niblic second

One of the great virtues of Merion is one can always count on finding the putting greens in beautiful order. Merion greens are unquestionably among the best in the world, and that is a statement which I should hesitate to make just before a competition about any other course without first rapping on wood. They have trouble there, too, but there is an awful lot in experience, and experience has taught them how to prepare a course for a championship.

"White Faces" Great Hazards

MERION is not a course which requires great length off the tee. There are only two holes where under ordinary conditions wood would be needed for the second shot. On one of these, the second, the ability to hit the ball a bit farther than the other fellow does help, for the very long hitter can get home in two, but the fourth hole, guarded by a brook in front of the green is a three-shot hole for all. No one can reach it in two and anyone should reach it in three.

I shall always remember Chick Evans' remark as a just appraisal of Merion. After the qualifying rounds when Chick had had some trouble but had come through safely enough he said, "A man can get along all right on this course if the white-faces don't get him."

The "white-faces" Chick referred to were the numerous bunkers filled with snow-white sand which was banked neatly against the face of the bunker where a wide stretch of it was plainly visible to the player as he played his shot. A ball pitching into one of these faces promptly buried itself at least half-way and offered a most difficult problem.

Next day the "white-faces" got Chick. Off the tee and through the green he kept popping his shots into these faces of sand, not having the luck, as he might have had with worse shots than he was hitting, to roll into the bunkers where he would have had a chance to recover.

All in all Merion is a great course and a great place for a championship. But even on a great and fair course the man who ultimately wins a golf championship must have plenty of lucky breaks, before he gets through.—(C1930.)