

When the Guttie Gave its Last Gasp

By WALTER E. EGAN

RUNNER-UP IN 1901 USGA AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP

Readers of the USGA JOURNAL may be interested in an account of the exit of the gutta percha ball in USGA Amateur competition.

About 1898 a rubber-cored golf ball was invented by a man named Coburn Haskell, of Cleveland. At that time, we were all using the solid gutta percha ball. The new Haskell ball carried considerably farther but had a tendency to drift at the top of its flight and was gradually given up for that reason.¹

In the summer of 1901, Jim Foulis, professional from the Chicago District, found out that some old cut-up Haskell balls flew well, without the objectionable drifting. In those days, all the pros had remolding machines and he remolded these cut-up Haskell balls, with deeper indentations. That was the answer.

I was going to play in the USGA Amateur at the Country Club of Atlantic City in September, 1901, and went down there some ten days ahead of the tournament with a very good friend of mine, an excellent young golfer, Manny Holabird by name. Foulis gave each of us two boxes of the remolded Haskell balls.

On arrival in Atlantic City, we had a four-ball match with Walter Travis and Fred Herreshoff, who was later runner-up in the 1904 Amateur. Herreshoff was a very long driver. Fred was much disturbed to find that Manny and I were outdriving him and finally asked what kind of ball we were using. We laughingly confessed, and within the next week practically all the expectant contenders had telegraphed or telephoned their home clubs, so that when the tournament started Findlay S. Douglas was the only prominent player who stuck to the gutta ball.

The semi-finals were at 36 holes and as I had finished my match early, I followed Walter Travis, the ultimate winner, and Douglas as they played the 37th and

38th holes. When Travis finally won and Douglas picked up his ball on the 38th green, I think I can rightly say that was the last time a gutta percha ball was used in a USGA Amateur Championship.

When Mr. Egan's story was referred to Mr. Douglas, he recalled it as if it were yesterday.

"That ball gave Travis a tremendous advantage," he said. "It bounded along and ran through traps in a way that left my ball behind. I think I might have beaten him that day but for that."

That may truly have been the last appearance of the guttie in the Amateur, although Mr. Douglas did not relinquish it quickly nor very soon embrace the Haskell ball. He did not play in the Amateur in 1902. When he won the Metropolitan Amateur in 1903, two years after the incidents in Mr. Egan's story, he won it playing a pneumatic ball — a ball made of a shell filled with compressed air.

¹ It is interesting to note that the manufacturer? of the new ball had omitted exactly the same important factor as the first makers of the old guttie, which dipped and swerved in flight until caddies discovered by accident that it flew straight when nicked up.

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CAUSE AND EFFECT

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SWING, and all other movements would be EFFECTS. What should we think about then? Why, the clubhead SWINGING.

How did Ernest Jones put it?

"Use the hands to wield the clubhead and to sense control of what is being done with it from first to last. Actions by other body members are responsive to this conscious purpose of maintaining control of the clubhead throughout the stroke."

Notice that last sentence carefully. I think the sun has risen: and I hope we never let it set again.

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