

# My Best Round and Some Others

*Wherein the Six-times Winner of the British Open Relates a Few Notable Experiences*

By Harry Vardon

**T**HE disappointed of just one dashed thing after another cannot have been a golfer. On the links, at any rate, he would have found vicissitude to his heart's content.

It is extraordinary how often it happens that, on two consecutive days, we play two utterly different kinds of golf. One day we are in quite an ecstasy of ease and confidence; the shots come off exactly as we desire, and exactly as we feel that they are going to, even before we hit the ball; mastery is ours and this world is the best of all possible worlds. On the other day everything is recalcitration and perversity.

We are convinced that we are not playing really badly—"Where did I make a downright bad stroke? Tell me!" you will hear champions exclaim sometimes when they have taken 80-something for the round—but the ball insists upon catching the tops of bunkers and dropping into the sand, and doing other refractory things. I suppose the truth is that, however harsh we consider the fates, we are not hitting the ball quite so accurately as when it sails triumphantly over all the difficulties and comes to rest at the spot which we have chosen for it.

Every golfer has played rounds which live in his memory—rounds which are an abiding joy. It has been suggested that I should set down what I regard as the best I have ever played, and the lessons that they convey, and I have no hesitation in selecting as my favorite recollection the final of an open professional tournament at Newcastle, County Down, in Ireland, some twenty years ago.

## *Taylor the Victim*

**M**Y opponent was J. H. Taylor. We had come through a strong field; both of us were at the top of our form at the time. In the final I felt that nothing could stop me. I really could hit a ball in those days. Taylor went out in 39, which was the par score for the first nine holes. He said afterward that, he did not make a mistake, which was true.

Newcastle was a long course in the era of the gutta-percha ball, which was then in vogue; and with its big sandhills, its many bunkers large and bold, and its narrow fairway with punishing bents on either side, it tempered its justice with very little mercy. I reached the turn in 32, and my pleasantest phase of the recollection is that the 32 seemed to be easy. Turning seven holes up, I won the match of 36 holes by eleven up and ten to play.

What was the moral of that happy day? Well, I know that, in those times, whenever I was within reach of the green with any club—brassie, cleek, or anything else—I saw only the flag and thought only of the flag. It

is that on occasion—and especially as we grow older and more circumspect—we are disposed to pay too much attention, and to allow our actions to be influenced in too large

focused my attention on the flag and then on the ball, and forgot everything else. I knew that I could put the ball within a yard or two of any place that I wished. And so the game was especially easy for me.



J. H. Taylor, himself five times winner of the British Open championship, who was the victim of Vardon's two most famous rounds

a degree by difficulties that beset the path. To be sure, they have to be given consideration, but when the mind takes so vivid a portrait of them that they live in it, even while the player is addressing the ball for the shot, then they are very likely to cause a faltering blow, born of change of intention during the swing.

Having weighed up the situation, I simply

## *Defeating Taylor Again*

**I**T was just the same in another Irish professional tournament—this time at Portmanock—in which also I happened to meet Taylor in the final. The one was within twelve months of the other, and at Portmanock I did the morning round in 69 strokes, and won by twelve holes up and eleven to play.

I was told recently that the 69 stood as a record for the green until extensive alterations to the links made the old figures valueless, and that it was the only gutta-percha ball record that survived many years of attack with the rubber core.

There was a rather curious incident in that round. As I made my first tee shot, both of my shoes split right across the soles. They had been completely soaked by rain which fell from morning till night during the qualifying competition, and I had asked an attendant at the hotel to get them dried. I suppose he must have put them in front of a furnace; at any rate there was the result directly I subjected them to a little strain.

However, the split soles did not make any difference. They at least afforded the necessary "give" instead of stiffness. Comfortable footgear on the links, and not stiff, unyielding leather that restricts the freedom of the ankles and toe-joints, is highly desirable. It is fatal to turn your left heel out of position at any stage of the swing, but the turn of the body communicates itself through the ankles to the ball of the foot just behind the big toe.

Personally, I like the ankles to be free—that is why I wear shoes instead of boots for golf—and I am certain that if you are turning the hips properly and preserving your balance by not allowing the screwing-around of the body to slacken at the feet, there is a deal of strain on the joints of the feet.

The turn of the body in the up-swing finishes on the ball of the left foot immediately behind the big toe, and comfortable, easy-fitting footgear is essential.

In America the best games I played were against the late Willie Smith, who impressed me during my tour of 1899-1900 as being as fine a golfer as I had met anywhere in the world. He was not quite so good afterward, because he cultivated a little pull on his shots—the lure of distance induced him to forsake the ideal of accuracy.

At St. Augustine, Florida. I had to do the first nine holes in 32, and the eighteen in 71,

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to beat him by two and one. At Wheaton, Chicago, I won by the same margin, and had a round of 74, which was as good as I had hoped to accomplish with the gutta-percha ball

At Midlothian I had a 71, and proved successful by 4 and 3. There were three matches in which I was right on my mettle, and in which I played better than when winning the United States Open Championship.

A good many people have asked me which I regard as my best championship performance. So far as concerns the quality of the golf, I would select the 1899 meeting at Sandwich, England. The score of 312 for four rounds may not look particularly good in these days, but we were using the gutta-percha ball then, and I cannot remember having any slip in the four rounds.

In other respects the most gratifying was at Prestwick, Scotland, in 1903, when we all used the rubber-cored ball for the first time. I was a sick man then; the doctors said that I ought not to play; and, after a glass of stout I went to bed each night at 8 o'clock. It is strange that sometimes when you are low-spirited and out of sorts you can hit the ball astonishingly well; golf seems to lift you out of yourself and cheer you. I know that my only harassment was pushing a way through the big crowds. My rounds were 73, 77, 72 and 78, and I won by six strokes from my brother Tom, who was second in a field of 127 competitors.

In the ordinary run of medal-play rounds my best was 69 on the Lytham and St. Annes links, Lancashire, England, and a 71 at Mid-Surrey, London—both done in qualifying competitions with the gutta ball. In those days I rather reveled in fancy shots, and at the fifteenth hole at Mid-Surrey, where were plenty of trees, I played in each round a sliced shot round the timber which made people say "Isn't he slicing today?"

In point of fact, I might have proceeded cautiously and secured the par figures all right, but, having got a bit off the line, I fancied the fancy shot. And how easy the game was then!

Enough of this egotism; perhaps the one or two little morals that it points may be useful.

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Rudy Wilhelm, one of the shining lights in golfing circles of the Pacific Northwest section, recently turned in a startlingly good record on the links of the Waverley Golf Club of Portland. Playing around in a four-ball match with Russell Smith, John Napier and G. M. Standifer, Wilhelm clipped two strokes off of par for the course with a fine 69. He was out in 35 and home in 34. This is two strokes above the course record held by Dr. O. F. Willing

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Harry Leg winner of many titles in the Middle West, including the Trans-Mississippi and others, recently stepped out and hung up a new course record at his home club Minihakda, turning in a fine 71, which beats any previous card either amateur or professional. Par for the course is 71, and the best previous record was 72, established by Bob Taylor, assistant professional. Legg, with 33, was one under par on the first nine, but ran one over on the second. His card follows:

Out . . . . . 4 4 3 5 4 3 3 4 3—33  
In . . . . . 4 2 5 5 5 5 4 4 4—38—71