

A Day's Golf With the Guttie Ball
An Experiment Which Yielded Some Interesting Experiences

By Bernard Darwin
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American golfers have lately, I gather, been exercising their minds on the possibility of some reasonable limitations of the golf ball. Mr. Bobby Jones himself has been quoted as saying that he grows weary of playing hole after hole with a mashie niblick. I know, too, that Mr. Fownes, President of the U. S. G. A., is in favor of something's being done to prevent the ever lengthening drives, which bring in their train ever lengthening golf courses. Since, then, the question of limitation is in the American air, I think that some readers may like to hear of an experimental match played here at Woking in Surrey, a few days ago with a newly made guttie ball.

I ought to say that this match was in itself a genuine match and not a piece of propaganda. A certain number of golfers, some twenty I think in all, of whom I am a humble one, have founded the Guttie Ball Club. They were mostly bred on the old ball; they like a game which enables them to use their whole pack of clubs, and they purpose now and again to treat themselves to a game with the guttie ball. The team they put in the field for this, their first match, was certainly a distinguished one. Of professionals— for the Club consists of both professionals and amateurs—there were Braid, Taylor, Herd and Ray. Of amateurs there were Tolley, Wethered, Harris, Torrance, Hezlet, Gillies, Storey, and the rest of the team, if less well known, were more than adequately good players.

Matched against them was a side of competent golfers armed with an ordinary rubber-cored ball. I imagine that man for man the Guttie Ball side was some four or five strokes a round better than their adversaries. Woking is not a very long course but it is by no means a short or easy one. The course of the Country Club at Brookline is the one among American courses of my acquaintance to which I should liken it. It was not stretched by any means to its full extent. What I may call the middle tees were used and the day was practically a windless one. The singles ended all square, the Guttie men won the foursomes and so the whole matter by two points.

The ball used was not quite a guttie in the old sense of the term. It was a solid homogeneous ball made out of the same material as is used for making the cover of the rubber-cored ball of today. It was not at all stony and was a far friendlier, kindlier ball to hit than was the guttie used in the last experimental game some three years ago. Everybody agreed that, as regards the sensation of hitting, it was a delightful ball to play with. Its one fault—and that a remediable one—was that it had been made a little too light. It weighed a barely twenty-four pennyweights, and the old guttie used to be perceptibly heavier than that. In the result it was highly susceptible to the smallest error in striking and was inclined to drift and curl away on small provocation. If there had been a high wind I think it would have become rather unmanageable. The next batch of such balls will be made heavier.

Opinions and memories varied a good deal as to whether this new ball went farther or less far than the old guttie did. Some eminent persons thought one thing and some another, from which I deduce that there was not much in it one way or the other. As to how far it went as compared with the rubber core, I shall say that it was about forty yards behind in the tee shot, and that in two shots the disparity was still more marked, but here again there was some difference of opinion. On some points everyone was agreed. It was a most agreeable ball to hit through the green with a wooden club; it could be picked up sweetly and easily and those who have habitually used lofted wooden clubs through the greens found themselves taking their drivers—a sensation they had never expected to have again on this side of the grave.

It was also very pleasant for pitching. To pitch the ball up to the hole with "stop" on it was perceptibly easier than with the rubber core. Incidentally when it did pitch it did not make a horrid dent in the surface of the putting green. As for putting, it was a little but not very greatly slower than the rubber core. Lack of practice seemed to tell more in this department of the game than in any other; many of the Guttie men never seemed quite happy with their ball on the green, but I do not think this was the ball's fault.

As an interesting and amusing day's golf the match was an unqualified success. Some who came to scoff remained to pray. Conspicuous among them was Sandy Herd who arrived vowing that he was a fool to have promised to play and departed declaring with obvious sincerity that he had not enjoyed a day's golf so much for ever so long.

It will be extremely interesting to see what happens when we get made, as we hope to a ball of similar material but just a little heavier. It was clear that this ball was not perfect but it marked a step on the road. It gave at least some notion of what the game could be with a solid ball. It is perhaps worth adding that nobody thinks— as I imagine at least—that it would ever be either possible or desirable to ask the golfing world in general to play habitually with such a ball. Golf is played primarily for pleasure and for the general run of mankind the game would be less pleasurable with this ball than with the modern rubber core. But it is, I think, possible to dream of championships and other important competitions being played with some such ball.