



The two courses at Belleair, Florida, are the scenes of great activity at present. Here are three Belleair regulars: Hugh H. Halsell, former Seniors' champion, Henry Craft of New York, and E. A. Guggenheim of Roslyn, Long Island

G O L F G O S S I P

*The Southland and National Championships*

By O. B. KEELER

**P**RETTY frequently somebody comes along and inquires, usually with an inflection symptomatic of injury, when we are going to have a national golf championship played in that area situated south of the Smith & Wesson Line, and the inquiry almost invariably presages a dialogue involving the following points:

The Dixie climate and its summer temperatures.

The center of golfing population.

The relative merits of Dixie golf layouts and those of the east, north, midwest and extreme west.

The relative merits of Bobby Jones and golfers of other sections.

The number of major championships won by (a) Alexa Stirling and (b) Bobby Jones.

The theory of reciprocity, if any.

The putting surfaces of Dixie golf courses.

Following a fairly regular course, the

debate ordinarily is concluded, so far as I am concerned, with the expression of a very definite opinion that we shall never get a major golfing championship in this section as long as we have only Bermuda putting surfaces to offer. This conclusion may be stretched a bit to exclude the P. G. A. national championship, which, while indubitably a major event, is more likely to go places and try things than either the national open, the national amateur or the women's national.

The interlocutor in the dialogue always appears to consider himself the originator of the idea that it really is about time the south is accorded definite consideration from the golf authorities in the matter of major tournaments. He seems surprised to learn that the matter has been discussed again and again, and thoroughly, for at least a decade. And then, not unnaturally, when he recalls that not only has there never been a major event

in Dixie—Texas, not long ago the scene of a P. G. A. championship, being not regarded as in Dixie—comes the inevitable *pourquoi?*

I suppose it was all of ten years ago that Tom Paine of Atlanta, for many years officially connected with the United States Golf Association, got from the United States Weather Bureau an impressive collection of statistics, to refute the then current objection to a big tournament in Dixie that it was too frightfully hot there, at the time major competitions were held. Mr. Paine's confrères in the U. S. G. A. had told him that until it got on his nerves. Naturally, he was speaking mainly for Atlanta, and the East Lake course. So the statistics dealt comparatively between Atlanta and various other cities at or near which the big tournaments had been held—New York, Boston, Chicago and so on.

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G O L F G O S S I P

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Of course the statistics showed clearly that it never got as hot in Atlanta at any time as it got in these other and more northerly places; and the mean temperature at tournament times proved to be a startling number of degrees cooler. Atlanta, it should be known, is 1050 feet above sea level; and when the thermometer reaches 90, the natives fear the world is coming to an end.

Mr. Paine's statistics laid effectually the ghost of the great solar myth; but there were other considerations.

There was the so-called center of golfing population, which at that era was notably close to the Metropolitan District, stretching out increasingly toward Chicago. But the national amateur at St. Louis in 1921 and the national open at Washington the same year remained, until 1929, the frontier locales of the big shows. Then California asserted herself not that California had not been heard from previously and the national amateur went to Del Monte, and this year the ladies go to Los Angeles.

This gradual broadening of the field now is sufficient, I should think, to include Dixie, considered merely as a geographical problem; the country is shrinking steadily in size, under improved transportation methods; and I fancy the golfing center now is pretty adequately equipped with roller skates.

So it's not that, any more. And I must say that we have some good golf courses, in Dixie. To go no farther, the new course at East Lake to be opened next summer will afford as fine and comprehensive a test as any golf course in America, as golfing layouts go. True, we have mostly inland courses in this section; but the inland courses of the north and middle west have had a steady play in the big championships; and the open this year goes about as far inland as possible, to Minneapolis, while the amateur goes to Philadelphia.

And the question of relativity as between our leading performer, Mr. Jones, and the rest of the golfers may be dismissed at once, for more than a single reason—here is only one of Mr. Jones (and we have plenty of other very good competitors), and obviously this is no rule to disprove by an exception, anyway.

It is a curious little sidelight, however, that two of the very best golfers America has produced, Mrs. Alexa Stirling Fraser and Bobby Jones, learned their game and prepared for all the major championships they have won (a round dozen) on the same Dixie golf course, East Lake.

This brings up the topic or reciprocal.

If (says the interlocutor) a southern golf course is good enough to develop these champions, why isn't it, and other southern golf courses! good enough to determine an occasional championship? And, likewise, if Alexa and Bobby, since 1916, have been going to the east and the north and the midwest to play (with so distinguished a meed of success) in championships, why don't the authorities feel a reasonable obligation to give the Dixie players a shot at some national title on their native heath?

And the answer to that now appears

to be, the native heath is composed of the sturdy and somewhat knotty Bermuda.

I really believe that is the last objection to a national championship in Dixie.

And it may as well be admitted honestly that the objection is decently valid. The admission, however, is not to be taken as a collateral confession that Dixie golf courses necessarily are of a kind inferior of those of other sections. They simply are different—very different. And our beloved Dixie after all is only one of several important sections, and the golf courses of the other sections, so far as the vastly important putting surface is concerned, are pretty much the same, agreeing remarkably well in a pronounced difference from those of the southeast.

Scientifically based and maintained, the summer greens of Bermuda are by no means as dreadful as many outlanders consider them, perhaps having heard or read the 1913 verdict of Ted Ray, playing with Vardon a couple of exhibition matches in Atlanta.

"But it isn't grass," objected Big Ted, lifting his eyebrows. "It's grape-vines!"

We see a deal of excellent golf on many excellent putting surfaces in the southeast; and players brought up on them appear to putt just about as soundly and successfully as do eastern and northern players on their own silkier surfaces. But it is also to be noted that our players, competing in other sections, have plenty of trouble readjusting their touch. And the assumption is proper enough that players from the other sections would have at least as much difficulty, coming down this way for a big tourney.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing in the career of the present open champion has been the fact that he learned his game on Bermuda, and must therefore do nearly all of his preliminary training on Bermuda, and still has been able with considerable success to readjust not only his putting touch but also his play with the other clubs to the keen, fast surfaces and the softer and less substantial fairway turf of other sections. I have seen no turf that provides such pleasant lies for wood and iron shots as that indigenous to the southeast. The hall lies closer, on eastern and northern fairways; and the stroke is correspondingly different from that on Bermuda.

Rut that is that, and we may not take Mr. Jones in his single person as representative of all golfers, either of Dixie or the other sections.

And now, as Mr. W. O. McGeehan loves to say, what about it?

Well, there is a lot of research and experimental work forward at this moment in the southeast, in the effort to develop a grass or grasses for summer greens that will approximate or maybe equal the bents and stolons and other pretty effects of other climes. Bermuda itself has been changed and developed to a far finer surface than of yore, and I suppose it always will be the leading summer green of Dixie. But a number of Dixie golf clubs are ambitious—not especially with any idea of acquiring a major tournament; but with the generous ambition to place

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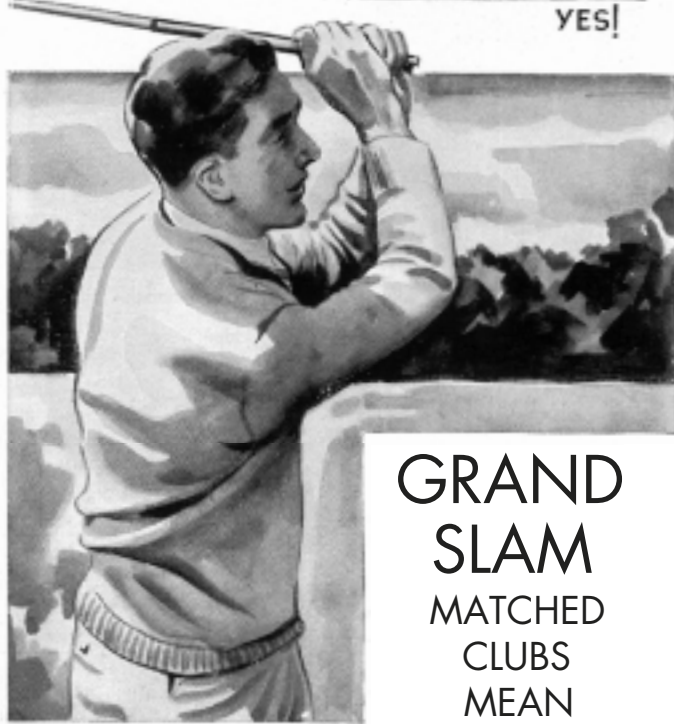
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## G O L F G O S S I P

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their courses on the highest level.

George Livingston, professional at the beautiful Belle Meade Country Club, Nashville, showed us a set of greens for the 1929 southern amateur championship which looked to me, unsophisticated in such matters, to be much the same in texture, speed and reliability as the best of the eastern and northern greens. But George, a canny Scot, declines to inform anybody as to the mixture or elements.

Here in Atlanta, where the double Bermuda greens—one for winter play and one for summer—may have got their start (they are becoming vastly popular all through the south now), Dr. Thomas P. Hinman of the Druid Hills Golf Club, and a member of the U. S. G. A. Green Section advisory committee, is conducting some vitally important experiments with *Poa annua*, or annual bluegrass, with high hope that it eventually will supply the surfaces of all his course, and perhaps many other courses in this area. And no less an authority than Mrs. Dorothy Campbell Hurd (who never has loved the bent greens) has expressed the opinion that of all putting surfaces in the world, properly conditioned *Poa annua* is the finest.

Here also, at the Capital City Country Club, Howard Beckett, professional there for many years, not only has improved vastly the texture of the Bermuda turf in his greens, but also is

working away grasses similar to those in sections heretofore supposed to be climatically more favorable in Dixie, where a combination of soil and water and climate was popularly believed to make the bents impossible.

And there are others, working away patiently and intelligently and with no great idea of getting a national championship to develop putting surfaces that will match the undoubted excellence of the other features of southern courses. Scott Hudson, president of the Atlanta Athletic Club, at this moment indubitably has something up his sleeve in regard to the greens of his great new course at East Lake.

The October and November issues of *The Bulletin*, that priceless little journal of the U. S. G. A. Green Section, contained singularly valuable articles on southern greens by Howard Beckett and Dr. Hinman, and will offer others from time to time, as the work of research and experimentation progresses. More than in any other district, I should say, our golf clubs of the south need *The Bulletin* and intimate contact with the Green Section; for upon the discovery and development of putting surfaces approximating those of other parts of the country depends in a vast degree the development of competitive golfers in the south, able to take care of themselves and the high reputation of Dixie when called to far fields of glory.

## WINTER GOLF AND THE ELIXIR OF STEEL

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Rex Hartley, who will certainly, I think, be in our next Walker Cup team. He beat me at the nineteenth. After it was all over I heard a colleague of the press telephoning to London "Bernard Darwin rejuvenated by the steel shaft—" I did not eavesdrop any more but passed on feeling a foot taller at least. I am too old a golfer now to entertain frantic illusions, but I do think that steel is going to make long courses much better fun for many of us in our declining years.

On one point most people were agreed, that it was easier to get the ball up into the air and keep it there with steel. Rye is a good test for the ball lies very close there and wooden clubs played through the green present a distinct problem. It seems to me far less formidable than ever before. Why this should be I do not know and being unscientific I do not greatly care. The fact is enough. The terror of the half topped or half smothered shot has de-

creased and of course the less one is afraid the less one heaves laboriously at a brassie shot which is the most effective way in the world of missing it.

We were all so new at the steel game that most of us have so far only embarked on drivers and spoons, steel shafted irons were comparatively rare. I have an impression that we shall come to them too because our old friends feel a little lumpy and clumsy and dead by comparison. That is, however, only a bow at a venture and may prove a bad shot. There docs seem to be something mildly ironic about the whole affair. A little while ago we were trying to reduce the terrific driving by modifying the ball. Now we have given up that attempt and have allowed a weapon which will in my judgment hit further still. However with the source of my "rejuvenated" drives tingling pleasantly in my memory I cannot at the moment feel too gloomy about it.

## A GOLFING PARADISE

(Continued from page 15)

such figures. The round he played that day would have broken 70 on any course in the world.

The membership at Boca Raton, drawn from selected lists, has been coming along extremely well, in spite of the recent market upheaval which is said to have benefited very few in any financial way.

The addition of a nine-hole putting green and a short, well-trapped nine-

hole course has rounded out the golf situation completely, and has set in motion one of the finest all around club projects in the country. The North Course, while not as difficult as the South Course, is still a high class test with an interesting layout that will provide the golfer with all the variety he can want. Complete accommodations for golf and swimming cover most of the winter needs.