

The Americanization of Golf

By CHARLES EVANS, Jr.

(an excerpt from a longer article by Mr. Evans titled, "The Royal and Ancient Game")

GOLF seemed a gift from on high. Across the water it came and our best people took it up. They had discovered it in their travels abroad. It is true that poor people played it in Britain, but it seemed very sure that they would not do so in America. It took time to learn to love it and to play it. Land was too high, and the many, many expenses. No one would pay a high price for an unknown game, except society people who wanted something a little different. And for a delightful period it was a very different and very exclusive game. To say that you played golf, however badly, and Heaven knows most of the early golfers played very badly, was in a manner of declaring yourself a member of the best American society. The right sort of people were playing golf, and most of them were wearing the right sort of clothes.

Really, this was a very good way for the game to begin in America. Only rich people hunting novelty would have provided the expensive courses and clubhouses necessary to the new game. It would take time for the ordinary run of men to learn to play it and to love it.

So golf began in this country at the top; among the idle rich who craved novelty in their pleasures. They imported all the paraphernalia, and they had their tournaments, and their trophies, and queer-sounding words rolled trippingly off their tongues. It is a pleasant period to dwell upon. A game played among a small group of people can have a social, friendly air unknown to more popular pastimes. The present day golfers owe them a debt that can never be paid. We can say that we admire their work, and I am afraid that they would object to the word.

From the idle rich the game passed largely into the hands of the great middle class—professional and business men who sought health. They knew that they needed something out of doors, and not too strenuous, to counteract the long hours spent in offices and counting rooms. They liked the royal idea, too, and the exclusiveness, and imitated both at discreet distances. General public interest and curiosity began to be aroused. Part of it spent itself in ridicule, but another part wondered if there might not be some thing in it. How few, after all, are the games for middle-aged men! And it did not take long to discover that golf was about the only game that met the needs of those no longer in their first youth. And it was also discovered that the new game was specially suited to many, young or old, who did not care for the other games. Psychologically it belonged to certain people.

When it had reached the hardworking professional man, and the many men of moderate means then golf could be said to have arrived. But this was merely a step from a pleasant, but insecure spot, to solid ground. From a fad golf was becoming an institution and the quality of the game itself was improving. Scores grew better, and the 19th hole was not so overwhelmingly important. Some of these golfers had sons who played more or less, and some of them played well; for, with notably few exceptions, the good golfer must be caught young, and he must take his game seriously.

