



A FOURSOME AT BALTURSOL
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Photo—Golf Illustr.

FOURSOMES

By R. STANLEY WEIR

FOURSOMES, we are in danger of forgetting, are of two kinds—the two-ball game and the four-ball. The latter we are all familiar with. The two-ball game with partners playing alternate instead of successive strokes is sometimes styled the Scotch foursome. And, so slight is its vogue in America, may soon be with us little more than a tradition. Certain conservative authorities (Mr. J. L. Lowe and others) have often proclaimed the two ball game to be the purest form of golf—the competition being, as they say, between two *sides*, each of which is interested in the success of one-ball which is manipulated in alternate strokes. Of course in the four-ball game which is in the vogue on this continent, the element of side or at least team play is absent or, at least, inconspicuous, for it takes at least two to make a team. But there are other and deeper considerations which give the two-ball game a claim for a wider adoption than opinion as to competitive merits.

For reasons that may presently be touched upon, the Scotch foursome has never been very popular in this country, although I well remember in Canada in the eighties when I first saw golf played (upon the slopes of Mount Royal) that the Scotch foursome was a very frequently practised form of the game. The four-ball game was then unknown. I can recall the figures of the late Sir George Drummond, Colonel Dennistoun, the Sidley Brothers, John Taylor, relative of James Taylor, of Ekwanok, and others, who greatly enjoyed this form of the game. Wednesdays and Saturdays were, as I recall, the club days and it was *de rigueur* for the players

to present themselves in red coats and white unmentionables. Players who dared to present themselves in the negligé habiliments of later and more decadent days would certainly have been sent to Coventry. The Captain of the club added an extra touch to his toilette on special days by wearing a pair of white gloves. I distinctly recall the stalwart figure of John Taylor in spick and span golfing attire dispatching the first ball on some special field day. There was none of the "start as you please" style of modern club fixtures. Rather the order and decorum of tournament was observed bi-weekly. Certainly the players stood on the order of their going and late-comers went to the foot of the list.

There was a certain essential ceremoniousness, too, in the conduct of the Scotch foursome which somehow added to its interest. While one pair of competitors were preparing to drive from the tee, the other two walked down the fair green to where the balls were expected to alight ready to play the second stroke. And while this was being done, the first players proceeded to where the third stroke might be expected to land the ball. There was, of course, a reunion of all four players upon the green. Those who played the tee-shot in the first instance now gave way to their companions who played the second tee-shot and proceeded down the fairway in readiness for the second stroke. In this manner the game proceeded; competitors being continuously thrown together in pairs for play with opportunity for casual friendly talk, and for general chaffing or remark as each hole was won or lost.

In the four-ball game the varieties of which, it must be confessed, now greatly outnumber those of the Scotch foursome on American and Canadian courses, the feature of side or team play is not so conspicuous. Is it rather a game of every man for himself, a game in which every player gets or fancies he gets, the maximum amount of play. Even when sides are nominally arranged in the four-ball game there is no appearance of it; there is none of that pairing-off between the strokes and reunion at the green which marks the Scotch foursome and is somehow one of its pleasantest features.

It must be confessed, however, that the Scotch foursome needs cultivation if the player is to do justice to himself; for the rhythm of the play, so to speak, when alternate strokes only are played differs from that of single or four-ball play; but the habit is soon acquired.

This division of play is very necessary to the proper performance of the Scotch foursome. In a recent game of this sort I experienced the greatest difficulty in getting my companion and competitor, who was new to the game, to walk down the field in advance of the tee-shots. Long habit in the four-ball game constantly inclined him to linger at the tee until the balls were dispatched. As only two balls were played it was small wonder that he experienced a sense of disappointment at being merely a spectator; but when, after several holes I had succeeded in dragging him along with me while our friends were playing, he began to have a glimmering of the sense of the thing. I must confess however, that it was rather uphill work and it was painfully evident that his golfing education had been regrettably limited in its range.

As a matter of fact the Scotch players can get in quite as much play as the four-ballers in the same space of time and the tax upon strength is considerably less. But to do the Scotch foursome justice it should be played in the Scotch manner.

Certainly no better school for players who are learning the game can be devised. No more democratic form of the game can be practised. There is perhaps in this country too great a habit for class players to play exclusively with each other with four balls almost completely ignoring those who have not yet come within sight of scratch? Yet, it is very easy, by matching, say, two scratch players and two others with higher handicaps, to arrange excellent games that will call for continuous effort and interesting golf, thoroughly educational all round.

But it is well worth repeating that the finest feature of the Scotch or two-ball foursome is the pairing-off of competitors for alternative strokes from the tee and through the green. What other game, indeed, presents so fine a spectacle of friendly competition—with rivals walking down the course together, hole after hole, to play opposing balls with all possible keenness and yet with most amicable converse (or silence) as befits the changing situations, assuming the virtue of camaraderie even if they have it not to begin with, thereby learning to wear that pleasant virtue with ease until it becomes as to the manner born. All honor to the social genius of Scotchmen which has devised and perpetuated in a form so fascinating and civilizing this illustration of what might be called co-operative competition in which each side does its best for itself and yet, with a consummation of courtesy, disguises or conceals its effort as representatives of each proceed along the green sward together in the attitudes and spirit of the truest friendship! What other game or occupation so strikingly proclaims the ideal human relation of each man doing his best while also encouraging his competitor, with fair brotherly words and by his best example. One has no hesitation, therefore, in saying that the practise of golf in its finest form, with its delightfully insidious teaching of the virtues of co-operation, of the most friendly rivalry, of the chivalric custom that congratulates opponents in spoken words, that mitigates every appearance of asperity—all under the healing and blessed influence of the green out-of-doors, is to be found in the Scotch foursome and that it deserves a more cordial practise and recognition than it at present obtains in America.

In the four-ball game individualism is very assertive. But the Scotch foursome reminds us that we live, or should be living in a co-operative world—that championship is a much more blessed word than competition, and that, if the best game is that which is the best epitome of life—life as it should be—then should the Scotch foursome come into its own on cis-Atlantic courses and find more frequent place in our club schedules.

If the foregoing has taken on a rather unaccustomed tone of homily or preachment the kindly golfer will not be tardy with his pardon. It will not detract from the pleasure of his game to be told that he may make of his favorite pastime a civilizing influence.

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