

The Open Champion: An Appreciation

THE new Open Champion, Mr. Jerome D. Travers, offers another interesting illustration of the peculiar game of golf. We are accustomed to believe our athletic champions in the manly art, in oarsmanship and other sports able to retain their supremacy for some undefined yet fairly extended period. Nobody doubts for example, that if the fight between Jack Johnson and Willard were to come off again next week that the issue would be the same as when the white man proved the victor. Similarly Johnson was long regarded as invincible. When Ned Hanlan, twenty years ago or more, was at the height of his prowess as an oarsman the result of every attempt to oust him from his premiership was confidently and accurately predicted. Not so in golf. Last year the star of Travers had somewhat paled and that of Ouimet was strongly in the ascendant. It was freely predicted that the four-times Amateur Champion had seen his best days, although still a stripling in years, and it was with some misgiving and not without outside criticism that these two fine players were ranked equally in the handicap list of the U. S. Golf Association. Now, lo and behold, Travers, by a splendid effort of skill and determination, leaps to the front again, outstripping handsomely all his brother amateurs, Ouimet, Evans and the rest, together with the notable band of foreign and American professionals

who struggled with him and each other for the blue ribbon of American golf. That Travers will now prove himself the victor in every tournament he may enter would, however, be a rash prediction. For golf is a mental as much as a physical contest. One can never tell, in golf, who, at the moment, is the expertest performer. One can only say who upon general performance ought to be; for, within certain limits, the unexpected may always happen.

The notable victory of Mr. Travers was hardly expected and yet now that he is Open Champion nobody can justly profess surprise. We all knew that he had great golf in him. Could he produce it in such an event as the Open Championship was the question. That he has done so is proof of a splendid temperament for the game and is the reward of diligent study and faithful practice.

Is Mr. Travers a born golfer? This is one of those questions that must be answered Yes and No. The old adage about poets being born not made is now disputed; they must acquire the accomplishment of verse by due study. Similarly, in golf, your champions must be students. Vardon, Taylor and Braid confess to much pondering over the game. Their published books with their modest self-revelations are the proof. Mr. Walter J. Travis is a notable student of the game in this country. Mr. Fownes also and many others doubtless could set down, if they would, their theories, their rules and maxims by which they guide themselves. Mr. Travers also is a close student of the game and has not achieved his honors and distinction without hard work. Moreover he is possessed of much independence of opinion and has not hesitated to set aside traditional use and method in his own game. For example, his grip is flatly opposed to that which Vardon commends. In fact, by making particular use of the smaller fingers of the hand he goes directly against Vardon's advice. So much for his sturdy independence of judgment. As for his diligence in practice, read the following from his Golf Book published by the Macmillan Company. "I practiced this particular shot (a mashie approach) for two or three hours at a stretch about three times a week, for four years. This will give the reader some idea of the amount of practice necessary to become expert in playing the different golf shots." Mr. Travers will perhaps permit me to say that a part of this practice, at least, was probably the enjoyment of skill acquired. Half the delight of golf practice is, not in acquiring proficiency, but in retaining it.

Of course, the speculation cannot be avoided as to what would have happened had the British cracks participated. Would any of them, how many and who would have bettered that splendid score of 297? There was doubtless some serious thinking done when the news reached Ganton, Mid-Surrey, Walton Heath and other places.

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