

THE FOUR-BALL AND THE LESLEY CUP

GAIN the merits of the foursome and fourball have been under discussion. The Lesley Cup possesses a not inconsiderable virtue outside of the purpose for which it was donated in stimulating a perennial debate upon this subject. Unfortunately a new question has arisen to complicate matters. It is not now sufficient to determine whether foursomes or four-balls shall be played, but further, whether by playing thirty-six hole three-ball matches a result just as satisfactory cannot be obtained and a day's play saved. The question of substituting the four-ball for the foursome has at least the dignity of age to make it worthy of discussion, but to initiate a debate upon a new form of the game that has no standing whatever, and only because it will reduce the play to one day instead of two, seems a belittlement of a match so deserving of respect. The game has undergone sufficient degeneration through the advent of the fourball as a recognized match without proposing a new form of play on the plea of expediency. If match games of so much importance in which the best of our players take part do not uphold in the manner in which they played the highest and best ideals of the game, what can we expect from golfers at large?

What has seemed regrettable about the discussion of this subject in the past is the evident bias of the four-ball enthusiast on the side of personal inclination. That the four-ball is undoubtedly more popular than the foursome is perfectly obvious, but has popularity ever been the final test of merit, and, if not, is it then any argument at all damaging to the foursome that it should not have the general suffrage of golfers? Popularity is an evidence of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm within proper limits is perhaps an enlightening force; but the enthusiasm which accepts

is very like blindness. And in their enthusiasm are not American golfers blind to the merits of the foursome, and wholly so, because in the four-ball they get such a variety of interest they overlook entirely quality of interest in their worship of quantity.

The pleasure gained from recreation is an experience, and it matters not how judicious we may be in the practical affairs of life, we all take our hours of play lightheartedly, and look to experience to guide us. But have the great majority of American golfers had any experience in playing the foursome? No. Is it not time, therefore, if the foursome possesses deserving qualities and virtues, that we should pause before we allow the four-ball to become too deeply rooted in our convictions and prejudices, which its supplanting of the foursome in the Lesley Cup matches would go far to confirm? Let us, therefore, judiciously-if it is at all possible to be judicious in reasoning upon the ways of pleasure-examine the inherent qualities that make the foursome deserve our respect, and point out the weaknesses of the four-ball's profession to be a game. To do so with any chance of success a just basis of comparison must be established and as both lay claim to the principles of a true game, we must come to a clear idea of just what it is that goes to make any form of recreation a game.

Play has not advanced to a stage where it may be called a game until it has acquired certain limits and circumscribed bounds. Nature is not art, nor is unfettered recreation a game. It is only when this recreation comes to have laws which bring with them responsibility that it can be so designated. Laws come into being but for one purpose—that the activity which they circumscribe will be forced toward a definite issue. Therefore, all who place themselves within the law are, first, accountable to it; and, second,

that the whole spirit of a game depends upon the every - free play to our appetites, our lives become a contrast

effort of the one or many forming a side having some effect upon the result. In truth, any evading of responsibilities which a just regard for the law compels, strikes at the very core of what properly constitutes a game.

If this conception of a game is correct, is it not plainly evident that the very form of the four-ball leaves open to chance the degree in which the player is responsible for the result, even to the point of his having been of no assistance whatever to his partner? This very element of chance destroys the possibility of a contest on the merits of two opposing sides, for it is conceivable that a side may be defeated by inferior play from the simple fact that all their good holes fell together, whereas the individual good play of their opponents took place opportunely at differ-This element ent holes. plays its part in every fourball match and is sufficient alone to condemn the fourball as no match for serious business. But in spite of this weakness of the four-ball as a contest, what is it that makes it so popular?

It may be said in general that the danger in the practice of any art is the degree in which the satisfaction derived from the mastery of its difficulties obliterates the object for which this mastery exists. An individual in this world is not valuable for his talents alone but for

his success in making them useful to civilization. In other words, team work-if we may use so small a termis as essential in everyday life as it is in games. To achieve this, what is it we strive to do, if not to attain harmony by subordinating our natural enthusiasms and inclinations in order to secure a foundation from

if the purpose of the law is respected, responsible to which we may the more successfully employ our the object of its being. If this be true, we deduce forces. If we give in to our selfish desires and allow

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to all around us and "Contrast is the joy of the savage, harmony the delight of the civilized man." eminent golfer once stated that the foursome gave only fifty cents on the dollar. So it does if the game is looked upon solely from the satisfaction derived from mastering the difficulties of play. But is not this selfish desire to get a full dollar's worth at the expense of all real harmony and the great human elements that go to create it, and forgetful entirely of the true object of play? If our premises have been correct, in what other light can this selfishness be looked upon? Not only does it bring with it a vacillating responsibility to the result, but with its destruction of a real contest a weakening of the character and spirit of the game; for the minute responsibility becomes inconstant it becomes degrading. The question naturally arises, if golf exists for pleasure, what does it matter if it is played in one fashion or another so long as this one point is gained? It matters this much, that inconstancy of responsibility is always a hindrance to the best in us, which means the cultivation and improvement of our play. When little depends upon a stroke, how easy it is for the average golfer to play his best. It is only when every mistake meets with



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Who sailed with Mr. Jerome D. Travers on the Baltic March twelfth to take part in the British Amateur Championship

punishment that solid advance is possible. Our strokes must undergo this test again and again before any semblance of permanent ability can result.

We do not wish to imply that those who play the four-ball do so to shirk responsibility. On the contrary, realizing the indifferent contest involved, they stroke telling. To safeguard their interests over those attributed to the popularity or the four-ball? longer or shorter periods when their play does not

enter in the contest proper they adopt one, or even all of the following expedients: individual scores are kept: a match is made with partner or opponent, to even a round robin of matches; then how much do not "eagles," "birdies" and "crows" play their part. Is not the creation of all these outside interests damning to the fourball? Does it not show in this weakness the characteristics of a hybrid, an unnatural creation without forces sufficient to command any sustained respect?

It is only recently that a vote was taken on the merits of the four-ball and the foursome among the leading golfers of England, which was practically unanimous in favor of the foursome. It excited Mr. Hilton to an editorial in "Golf Illustrated," of which periodical he is editor. He discussed the four-ball in a very dispassionate manner and expressed the belief that "it is the predilection for fourball foursome play which is in a goodly degree responsible for the decadence of amateur golf in Great Brittain." He explained America's seeming escapement from this decadence as due to the American amateur taking his game more seriously, and, "in between his matches studiously practising the individual strokes with an extraordinary amount of pertinacity." He forgot, however, the observation he made of our amateurs

when here, that their game was exceedingly erratic, and whereas one day they might break the record of the course, the next day's play was as likely as not to be ten or even fifteen strokes worse. With the exception of a few who stand at the top of the game in this country, this criticism is a very just

seek through other channels to make their every one; and how much of this erratic play cannot be

He has, however, a good word to say in its favor:

But there is more in the playing of a four-ball match than the average golfer appreciates, although it may appear a somewhat haphazard and casual form of game. On the other hand, there are very great possibilities for successful combination; and the two men who realise these possibilities will invariably prove more than a match for the two who do not. Two players who play a happy-

go-lucky game, in which much is left to chance and probable brilliant efforts, may on individual occasions prove a wonderful combination, but two men who will set to work and play the game in the spirit of true combination must prevail in the end.

Although such a combination day in and day out will no doubt prevail against two players who play a happygo-lucky game, how about their success when pitted against two who strive to play the game in the same spirit of "true combination" so far as combination is possible under the conditions? Will not the iniquities resulting from the lessening of responsibility tend to destroy a decision on the merits of individual play? Two players do as much as is possible by playing the fourball in this way but with all the forethought in the world. the uncertainty of carrying out their predetermined plans is a weakness in the four-ball they are laid open to and cannot overcome.

We have been severe in our condemnation of the four-ball as a recognized match but from the stand-

point of its catholicity of interests and the lessening of responsibility involved it has its good qualities from a social standpoint and will continue for these reasons to be played. But let us remember that it is these social qualities and not its merits as a contest that gives it a license to exist.



MR. CHARLES B. MACDONALD From a portrait in plaster by Prince Paul Troubetzkoy to be presented to the National Golf Links of America of which Mr. Macdonald is the founder