

American Opinion on Golf

At a meeting of the American committee, in New York City, to represent the United States in the conference which is to be held on the golf rules in England, President George H. Walker of the United States Golf Association was in the chair. The members of the committee were not instructed as to the policy which should be pursued in the British conference. The meeting was considered to be more for the purpose of hearing the opinions of prominent golfers than for advice to the committee members.

Robert W. Lesley, donor of the famous Lesley Cup and representing the Golf Association of Philadelphia, pointing out the difference between a sport such as fishing and hunting and a game played under fixed conditions and rules, such as tennis and base ball, said: "Our committee should know that the American golfer stands for the sport of golf and not for the game of golf. He doesn't want to be surrounded by elements and rules which would remove nature from the game." Mr. Lesley was attacking the scheme of trying to codify in briefer and simpler rules the game on the links, and it was his idea that rain, sunshine, mud, sand and other natural elements should not be combated.

Along similar lines was the plea for unrestricted golf made by Leighton Calkins of New York, who introduced in 1905 and revised in 1910 the system of handicapping players which is in general use on this side of the Atlantic. Mr. Calkins, speaking as an individual, recalled that in 1908 at St. Andrews it was found impossible to condense the rules, and he declared it a mistake to attempt it at this time. He advanced two arguments against a standardized ball. The first, a practical one, he based on the fact that such a rule would prove futile because men play golf for enjoyment; they will play with the ball they like best, and if necessary will donate funds for reconstructing courses. The second, a mental reason, is that the freedom of choice of playing implements distinguishes golf from other games. The basic definition of golf is "playing a ball (any kind) from a tee to a hole," and the only restriction is that the hole be four and one-quarter inches in diameter, and that the ball therefore cannot be larger than this.

The discussion of the elimination of the stymie called forth an even greater variance of views. President Stephenson of the Massachusetts body would abolish the stymie altogether, a view shared by President Brooks of the Western Golf Association and Mr. Lesley, but others, such as Mr. Walker of the college association and Julian W. Curtiss of Connecticut, favored the optional plan of conceding the putt where the distance to the hole was so short that the nearer player could scarcely miss. President Nugent of the Trans-Mississippi group of golf clubs cited the rule in force there which he urged for consideration by the U.S.G.A. It is that if a player lays himself a stymie it must be played, otherwise the ball nearer the hole must be lifted.

Mr. Burke said there were four alternatives: (1) Abolition of stymie; (2) playing it when self-laid; (3) option of conceding putt, and (4) abolished unless the distance between the nearer player and the hole be two feet or more.