

Let the Competition Begin!

Monday September 19th, 1904 – The Qualifying Rounds

After a rather lengthy speech welcoming the 73 participants, spectators and news reporters to Glen Echo Country Club, Colonel McGrew held his breath and prayed that these games, for which he had worked so hard, would start with some respectable golf. He prayed that his dream would be realized over the next six days. In fact, he had already written his speech for the presentation of the trophy and gold medal to the eventual Champion and ordered champagne that would be his gift to the competitors. He was a generous man but also a proud man.

The honour of hitting the opening drive of the 1904 Golf Olympics fell to Mr. Raymond Havemeyer of Deal, New York. He stepped nervously to the tee and quickly hit a modest 150 yard drive down the left side of the first fairway on Lilac Way. The gallery showed its appreciation with an enthusiastic burst of applause. The competition was finally underway. As Colonel McGrew let out a sigh of relief and raised his megaphone to announce the next golfer, his assistant tugged at his sleeve and whispered something in his ear. He frowned, stood up straight and called out.

“Dr. Shaw. Will Dr. Shaw please make his way to the first tee? You are away sir.”

He repeated it firmly for good measure turning his megaphone toward the Clubhouse.

There was no response. Members of the gallery began to mutter and murmurs repeating Shaw’s name spread through the crowd. Suddenly, from around the corner of the clubhouse, came a man running, suitcase in one hand and golf bag in the other.

“I’m here. I’m here.” The poor man was breathless as he arrived at the first tee. *“I’m sorry...”* he puffed *“... the train was delayed and I have just arrived.”* He dropped his bag and began to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief. *“I’ve been on the train continuously since Friday afternoon. It was a dreadful trip. I am so sorry...”*

“Mind the gentleman’s luggage. Doctor, you are scheduled to tee off. Take a moment to compose yourself and please join the competition.” With that he raised the megaphone one more time and called out. *“Next on the tee Dr. Wallace Shaw of Westfield, Massachusetts from Tekoa Golf Club.”*

Shaw fumbled through his bag for a ball, pulled a club and walked to the tee. With a tug on his vest and a pull on his cap he took his stance. Those close to him could readily see that Dr. Shaw had really not quite caught his breath and was sweating profusely. George Westlake a reporter for the Evening Post scribbled notes as the doctor set his ball on a small mound of sand. Two slow and graceful practice swings followed and the gallery held its collective breath.

However, any sense of grace disappeared as Dr. Shaw took his first swing. It was more akin to a violent lash than a stroke. The ball shot hard right over Westlake’s head, striking a large tree and bouncing into a hedge on the right side of the fairway. The crowd let out a groan.

Olympic Lyon – The untold story of the last (and lost) Gold Medal for Golf

The doctor looked to the heavens and then walked quickly to the hedge. The ball was at the edge and playable. Barely. He took his stance. The next lash sent the ball to the tennis courts adjacent to the clubhouse. The crowd let out a sympathetic groan and a few laughs as the doctor again looked to the heavens. McGrew stared at the ground, embarrassed by this display.

More lashes followed and Dr. Shaw was now 10 yards in front of where he had originally stood on the first tee. He was lying seven. His 8th shot would find the rough and draw even more laughs from the gallery. And so it went. To his credit Dr. Shaw would not be deterred. He carried on, shooting 107 on his first 18 holes that morning and 102 on his second 18, after a good lunch and a stiff drink. His qualifying 36 holes of 209 would not be good enough to allow him to move forward into Match Play on Tuesday. He would need to settle for the so called consolation rounds.

But there would be no true consolation for the poor doctor because that night, as he opened the newspaper, to his eternal shame and embarrassment, he found that his first hole was considered newsworthy. He stared at the headline in despair.

“Olympian Golf Is On”

George Westlake Special to the Evening Post.

“Dr. W.F. Shaw of Westfield Mass. developed the worst case of hard luck ever seen at a big tourney...”

It was not the kind of press that Colonel McGrew had hoped for and he would need to have a word with Westlake.