

This is one of a series on the history of the New York State Golf Association taken from the manuscript "The 20th Century NYSGA", written by Frederick W. Box, NYSGA Historian.

NYSGA History: Chapter 1

By Frederick W. Box, NYSGA Historian

Legend has it that famous sports columnist and editor of "The American Golfer", Grantland Rice noted in some of his writings that New York State didn't have a golf association and thus a men's tournament for the growing golf population.

Reports that New York was the only state in the 48 without such an organization cannot be confirmed.

He apparently contacted several upstate golf enthusiasts with the idea. Rice figured that the initiative had to come upstate as the Metropolitan Golf Association had provided tournaments for that area since the late 1890's. The MGA had a role in the formation of the U.S. Golf Association along with Eastern Seaboard clubs.

It was the Country Club of Rochester's invitational in June 1923 that the project was endorsed and the organizational committee was formed. It included Sherrill Sherman of Utica, chairman; Don W. Parker of Garden City, secretary; Ganson DePew of Buffalo, Irving S. Robeson of Rochester, John F. Nash of Garden City and Richard B. Emmett of Schenectady.

It was decided to send invitations to about 150 country clubs across upstate for a meeting at Yahnundasis Golf Club, Utica, August, 9 during its annual invitational. The central location and an opportunity to play a round of golf gave the delegates an opportunity to play as well as work.

The invitation said: "It is intended to foster closer and more intimate relations in and among the great body of golfers in this state than is now possible and create an opportunity for an annual tournament which will have official sanction as a state championship, as this new association will be organized with the full approval of the U.S. Golf Association.

"The organization will interfere in no way with the district associations already in existence," an apparent effort to mollify the Metropolitan Golf Association whose support was needed for success.

The August 9 meeting was well-attended and, after a full and enthusiastic discussion, it was unanimously voted to form the association and hold a (men's) championship tournament in the fall of 1923.

These officers were elected: President, Sherrill Sherman, an attorney whose father was the U.S. vice president from 1909 to October 1912 when he died suddenly; first vice president Robeson; second vice president, DePew; and secretary-treasurer, Parker.

The executive committee consisted of: John M. Ward, Garden City; Grantland Rice, New York City; John F. Nash, Syracuse; Richard B. Emmett, Schenectady; Gardiner White, Glen Cove; Alfred Bourne, Garden City; Clarence Wheeler, Rochester and Harry Davis, no club given and is never mentioned again in association history.

The Garden City Country Club volunteered to host the first tournament and 61 entries teed off on a rainy October 24, 1923, with a majority of the golfers from the metropolitan area. All of the drenched players teed off and finished the 18 holes of the qualifying round. The only restriction on entries was that the player belongs to a New York State club even if it didn't belong to the association.

Eddie Driggs of Cherry Valley CC, a former Princeton halfback, and Gardiner W. White of Nassau Country Club, 1921 winner of the Metropolitan GA title, struggled in with 77's, four over par, to win the medal and qualify for match play—the low 32. Driggs shot 39-38-77, while White recorded 36-41-77 against par of 37-36-73.

The New York Times said this about the weather conditions: "A few who became hopelessly lost in the muck, one of them losing his club when it flew from his hands, or were handicapped when the rain forced them to dispense with their eyeglasses refrained from handing in their cards. But all of them made the round, trudging in with umbrellas, raincoats and rubbers, which had added to the misery of the soaked caddies."

Almost all of the founding fathers were in the field as might be expected, but only White (77), John M. Ward (86), Alfred S. Bourne (88) and Sherrill Sherman (90) made it to the championship flight. It took a score of 92 to do that.

The American Golfer (magazine) Trophy for the lowest score by a duo from the same

club was won by Driggs and R.C. Knapp (88) for 165 edged Nassau's White and W.L. Hicks (89) for 166.

It should be noted that columnist Rice shot a respectable 82 but quickly retired to the sidelines, apparently satisfied that his "baby" would grow and grow into its present seven tournaments for nine titles.

Somehow White and Driggs were placed in the same flight and both survived the two rounds on Thursday, October 25, when weather conditions improved but they were matched in the round of eight. Others to win twice were: Thomas Sherman, brother of the association president; Richard A. Jones, Westchester Hills; S.C. Mabon, Garden City; Kenneth Reid, Ardsley; John M. Ward and C.E. VanVleck, Garden City.

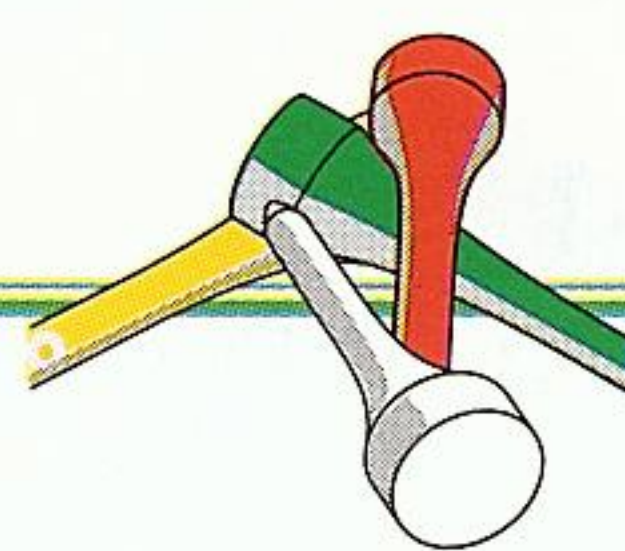
The featured match was White's elimination of Arthur (Ducky) Yates of Rochester, a former North-South tournament champion and, later, a state winner in 1927, in the second round. Yates missed a two-foot putt at 17 and a chance to square the match and they tied the 18th so White won 1 up.

On a windy Friday Driggs upset the favored White 7 and 6 in what the Times called, "in the face of a strong, cold wind that was almost a gale, played a round of golf that was even more marvelous than his performance in the qualifying round." He did the nine holes going out in two under par. In doing so he got 3's on four holes in succession—the second, third fourth and fifth—getting birdies on the third and fifth and an eagle on the fourth. So far as is known the four threes are without parallel in the history of the course.

Driggs had no easy match with Thomas Sherman in the semi-finals, trailing by two holes at the turn but getting even at number 12, winning 14 and losing 16 for an even 18. But he birdied 19 to close out Sherman and won the right to play S. Clifton Mabon, the home course surprising contender.

The former football star repeated his hot start against Mabon, birdying two of the first three holes and ending the morning round at 8 up without losing a hole. Mabon played Driggs even in the afternoon but could not gain ground, losing 8 and 7. Driggs was two over 75 in the morning compared to 85 for Mabon and they each had 39's on the front nine in the afternoon. Driggs ended the agony with a birdie on the 29th.

The Times writer noted: "the local player's biggest asset was his straightness down the fairway; but once he had lost that and began to find the rough and the traps with his wood and iron shots, he was outclassed. He could not hope to beat Driggs on distance or with the putter, the



way the Cherry Valley man has been going for the four days of the tournament.”

Driggs was to win again in 1933 and 1934 to become the first to repeat and the first three-time winner.

In the early years, flights of 16 were played with the losers in the first round of the championship making up the first flight and other flights of 16 based on qualifying scores. The 1923 flight winners were: first, H.K. Kerr, Garden City, 4 and 3 over Ray Thompson of Rye, and second, Donald McKellar, North Hempstead, 6 and 4 over R. Rothenburg, N.Y.G.C., and third, P. Stevenson, Meadow Brook, defeated Dr. J.B. Kopf, St. Albans, 3 and 2.

In reviewing the first tournament, **The New York Times** wrote:

“The first championship tournament of the newly organized New York State Golf Association more than justified itself. The criticism to which it was subjected and the unfavorable weather that attended its opening alike failed to interfere with the carrying of the tournament to a successful conclusion. A strong entry, in respect both to numbers and class, although not as strong as that which might have been attracted under more favorable circumstances, contended for the title.

“The establishment of the first champion marked the rise to a position of prominence of an amateur, who is likely, within another season of play, to make it interesting for the best in the ranks. Eddie Driggs is not a new name in golf. The former Princeton halfback is a familiar figure on metropolitan links. But it took this state championship to bring out the promise of his game.

“Remembering the circumstances under which he made his 77 in the qualifying round in a heavy downpour on a thoroughly soaked course, and his unequalled quartet of 3's made against Gardiner White, two of them birdies and one an eagle, made in the face of a strong, cold wind, here is a player who, with development, would fare better on the bleak dunes of Troon than have some of the representatives of this country on the Walker Cup team.

“While the strength of the upstate representation in the tournament was gratifying to the committee in charge of the championship, it is hoped that next year the representation will be wider. The idea has been proposed of holding the championship in rotation in various large cities of the state. Not only would better fields be attracted, but the holding of the championship would serve to awaken greater interest in golf in the various cities upstate. The lateness of the date of this year's tournament was a handicap but in view of the recent organization of the state association, the

The New York State Golf Association has grown from a single tournament in 1923 to seven competitions for nine championships, and from little more than a dozen committeemen to more than a hundred men and women dedicated to promotion of state golf.

After the Men's Amateur was played in late October, 1923, various other tournaments were added, some unsuccessfully including a New York State Open.

Surviving are:

- 1923—Men's Amateur
- 1930—Women's Amateur
- 1931—Junior Boys
- 1940—Senior Men, 50 and older
- 1953—Senior Women, 50 and older
- 1957—Boys (under 16) played with Juniors tourney
- 1963—Junior Girls
- 1984—Mid-Amateur, men over 25
- 1996—Super-Seniors, 60 and older played with Men's Senior tourney

The Association represents 477 courses (2003) of the 883 clubs across the state.

About 2,000 golfers play in the seven tournaments of the qualifying events annually.

Only two are paid executives: The Executive Director, who conducts all tournaments and other business; and the Director of Handicapping and Club Services.

date could not, of course, be improved. Next year, undoubtedly, the championship will be held earlier in the season.

“It is interesting to note that of the four semi-finalists in the championship, three were players who may be classified as veterans. S. Clifton Mabon, finalist with Driggs; John M. Ward and Thomas Sherman were left in the running, after Gardiner White, Capt. M.C.C. Trippett, A.C. Gregson and Richard A. Jones, Jr. had been eliminated.”

Here is a summary of the tournament:
First round: D. Dana, Belleclair, (88) d. J.H. VanBuren, Buffalo, (87) 2 up; Thomas Sherman, Utica, (90) d. Donald Carr, Ardsley, (87) 1 up; R.C. Knapp, Cherry Valley, (88), d. F.M. Gould, Lido, (91) 6 and 4; R. A. Jones Jr., Westchester Hills, (84), d. Sherrill Sherman, Utica, 4 and 3; Arthur Yates, Rochester, (83), d. Ray Thompson, Westchester Biltmore, (87), 1 up; Gardiner White, Nassau, (77) d. Don McKellar, Hempstead, (90), 3 and 1; R.F. Stevens, Lake Placid, (92) d. W.D. Peterson, Sound View, (90), 2 and 1.

Also E.D. Driggs, Cherry Valley, (77), d. E.W. Nash, Rockaway, (86), 1 up; A.C. Gregson, Lido, (84), d. H.C.C. Tippet, Lido, (84), 2 and 1; S.C. Mabon, Garden City, (88), d. R. Rothenburg, NYGC, (86), 5 and 4; Kenneth Reid, Ardsley, (89), d. A.S. Bourne, Garden City, (88), 6 and 4; H.W. Shaffer, Piping Rock, (82), d. Kenneth

Bourne, Westbrook, (92), 3 and 2; Hugh Halsell, Sleepy Hollow, (92), d. H.K. Kerr, Garden City, (89), 1 up.

Also John W. Ward, Garden City, (86), d. Adrian Schlias, Garden City, (88), 6 and 4; C.E. VanVleck, Garden City, (83), d. S.E. McKean, Oneonta, (79), 4 and 3; S.G. McMahon, Sleepy Hollow, (81), d. W.L. Hicks, Nassau, (89), 3 and 2.

Second round: T. Sherman d. Dana, 6 and 4; Jones d. Knapp, 5 and 4; White d. Yates, 1 up; Driggs d. Stevens, 4 and 3; Mabon d. Gregson, 5 and 4; Reid d. Shaffer, 5 and 4; Ward d. Halsell, 4 and 2; and VanVleck d. McMahon, 1 up.

Third round: Driggs d. White, 7 and 6; Sherman d. Jones, 19 holes; Mabon d. Reid, 2 up; Ward d. VanVleck, 2 and 1.

Semi-finals: Driggs d. Sherman, 19 holes; Mabon d. Ward, 4 and 2;

Finals: Driggs d. Mabon, 8 and 7.

Driggs was awarded the Ganson DePew Trophy donated by the second vice president from Buffalo, who also became the association's delegate to the U.S. Golf Association. The trophy remains in competition.

The committee voted to rotate the tournament from the metropolitan district to upstate venues every other year and this continued until the World War II years.

Next: Entries gradually increase in the rest of the roaring 20's; the New York State Open comes and goes.

