



Hagen the PGA GOAT

With the PGA Championship underway this is the perfect time to feature the greatest PGA champion of all, **Walter Hagen**. Hagen was better than **Jack**, you ask? Yep. Better than **Tiger**? Yep.

Nicklaus won five, but never two in a row. Tiger's four championships include back-to-back wins 2006 and '07.

Hagen outshined both of them. Between 1921 and 1927, The Haig won five PGA championships, including four in a row from 1924 to 1927 when the PGA was a match play tournament. He did not defend his 1921 title. Read this edition's feature for that story.

An Unrivaled Record. How dominant was Hagen? He won 22 consecutive matches prior to his defeat at the hands of Leo Diegel in the 1928 quarter-final round. The Haig's PGA match play record in the 1920s was 34-3, winning an astonishing 92 percent of his matches. His only losses were to **Gene Sarazen** in 38 holes in the 1923 finals and twice to Leo Diegel in the quarter-finals, falling 2 & 1 in 1928 and 3 & 2 in 1929. These were all 36-hole matches.

Young Tom Morris is the only other golfer to win the same major championship four consecutive times, taking the British Open in 1868, '69, '70 and '72. Yes, that's a five-year span, but the Open wasn't played in 1871. Why? Because when Morris won three in a row from 1868-70, he retired the championship belt awarded to the winner. Tournament organizers needed a year (continued on next page)

The Haig Bows Out

This is the first in a series of articles about Walter Hagen and his dominance of the PGA Championship in the 1920s.

The PGA Championship is nigh and the talk is all about the defending champion who isn't playing. **Phil Mickelson** is staying home, nursing his self-inflicted wounds.

Previously, the most recent PGA Champion to pass up his title defense was **Tiger Woods** in 2008. After winning the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines in a playoff against **Rocco Mediate**, Woods underwent surgery to repair the ACL in his right leg. Tiger later discovered he had broken his leg in two places. As a result, he missed The Open Championship and was unable to defend his PGA crown.

The '21 Champ. Now let's go way back to the PGA's formative years. **Walter Hagen** won the 1921 PGA Championship, the event's fourth playing, defeating **Long Jim**



Walter Hagen poses with the Wanamaker Trophy, presented to the PGA Champion. The Haig's name is engraved five times, tied with Jack Nicklaus for most PGA wins.

Barnes, the reigning U.S. Open Champion, 3 & 2, in the final match and taking home \$500. Barnes won the first two in 1916 and '19. The event was not played in 1917 and '18 because of the Great War.

The 1922 PGA was played at Oakmont Country Club, near Pittsburgh, August 14 through 18. Western Pennsylvania golf fans were eager to see the headline-making Haig in action at Oakmont. Hagen was the reigning British Open champion, having won the title and £75 at Royal St. George's, June 22 and 23. He was also a two-time U.S. Open champion, 1914 and '19. The Haig's big personality was big news.

Hagen, as was his wont, grabbed the headlines for

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(continued from first page)

to come up with a new trophy, the now-renowned Claret Jug. When the Open returned in 1872, Young Tom added a fourth consecutive win.

The argument is presented that Hagen's feat was more impressive than Morris's. In 1868, Young Tom prevailed over a field of 12 players. In successive years, the field featured 14, 20 and 8 players. The tournaments were played at Prestwick Golf Club, with the golfers traversing the 12-hole course three times in a single day.

So let's give Sir Walter a slight edge over Young Tom and acknowledge that they both set standards that have stood, and will continue to stand, the test of time.



Young Tom Morris, right, with his father, Old Tom. Each won the British Open four times.

what he didn't do, not for what he did. Which was, he did not defend.

Why in the name of Phil Mickelson did Sir Walter distance himself from Oakmont?

What madness was this?

The answer, of course, is money. Hagen earned his living playing golf. It so happened that he and Joe Kirkwood, an

Australian professional, were in the midst of a nation-wide golf tour. The pair were paid \$500 for each 18-hole exhibition match and in some instances, they earned upwards of \$1,000 by taking a percent of the gate receipts. No wonder Hagen passed on the PGA where the winner would earn \$500 for playing as many as 180 holes over five days.

No exemption. Hagen may also have been miffed over the PGA's decision not to grant him a qualifying exemption for the 1920 Championship at Flossmore Country Club, near Chicago. The two-time U.S. Open champion felt deserving of an exemption.

Hagen and Kirkwood also skipped the Western Open, played August 23, 24 and 25 at Oakland Hills, outside of Detroit. The Western had a major championship feel in those years. The duo figured the trip from New England, where they were touring, to Detroit would consume five days that could be better spent playing paid exhibitions. Considering



***"You're only here for a short visit. Don't hurry. Don't worry. And be sure to smell the flowers along the way."* — Walter Hagen**

that Mike Brady earned \$500 for winning the Western Open, Hagen's decision seems right for the times.

Gene Sarazen, golfdom's 20-year-old phenom, won the 1922 PGA over Emmet French, 4 & 3, notching his second of seven major championships. Sarazen won his first major that July, taking the U.S. Open at Skokie Country Club near Chicago. The '22 Open was played over two days, 36 holes each day. The Squire won \$500 for his Open and PGA victories. Hagen finished fifth in the Open, three strokes behind The Squire, and won \$150.

The RCC Connection. In the next Golf Chronicles, we'll examine Hagen's RCC connection. It promises to be a good read.