

The Golf Chronicles

Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland

Byron Nelson
Reading CC Pro
1937-39



Number 106 • December 2, 2023

Meet the Met

First played in 1905, The Metropolitan Open is the country's third oldest open tournament, behind the U.S. Open, 1895, and the Western Open, 1899.

Until World War 2, the Met was a big deal and some considered it one of the "major tournaments" on the professional circuit, in part because it offered one of the richest purses.

During those glory years, the Met attracted virtually every top player and the winner was almost guaranteed a spot on the Ryder Cup team.

The greats of the game won the Met. The Smith brothers, Alex and Macdonald, took a combined seven titles. Alex won the first Met in 1905 and followed with wins in '09, '10 and '13. He also won the National Open in '06 and '10. Macdonald kept the family tradition alive by winning in '14, '26 and '31. Macdonald had more tour wins than Alex, 26 vs. 8, but he never won a major championship. The Smith brothers were born to the game, having greeted the world in Scotland's Carnoustie.

Walter Hagen won three Met's in a row, 1916 to '20. The Met took a hiatus in 1917 and '18 because of the Great War. When the Met resumed, the Haig won in '19 and '20.

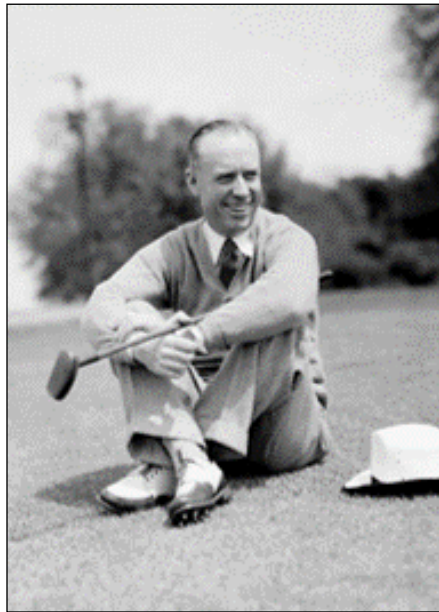
Other notable winners include Gene Sarazen, Johnny Farrell, Tommy Armour, Olin Dutra, Paul Runyan, Byron Nelson, Henry Picard, Jackie Burke, Jr., Claude Harmon, Doug Ford and Miller Barber.

Craig Wood won the Met in 1940, defeating Ben Hogan by an amazing 11 strokes at Forrest Hill Field Club in New Jersey. This was before Bantam Ben started winning all those major championships.

This Cheater Didn't Win

Here's a great golf story told by a man with the coolest golf name ever: Wiffy Cox. That's a real person. Wiffy—Wilfred Hiram Cox, 1896—1969—was a prominent golf pro from Brooklyn.

Wiffy enjoyed his greatest success in the 1930s, winning nine PGA tournaments and posting four top 5 finishes in the U.S. Open Championship. Wiffy played the Masters Tournament four times, with a 12th place in 1937 his best showing. He is best effort in five PGA Championship appearances was two trips to the round of 32. Those were the PGA's match play years. Wiffy also represented his country as a member of the victorious 1931 U.S. Ryder Cup team, winning both of this matches at Scioto Country Club, Columbus, Ohio.



Wiffy Cox relaxes in this undated photo taken at Augusta National Golf Club during Masters week.

Wiffy had the reputation of being hot tempered and foul-mouthed, swearing like a drunken sailor. That's because he was a drunken sailor. Wiffy served on the battleship *Nevada* during the Great War. The *Nevada* saw action in both world wars and was the only battleship to sail away during the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. The *Nevada* was damaged by enemy fire, ran aground and sank. The ship was salvaged and put back into service as a convoy escort in the Atlantic Ocean.

The Golf Chronicles' editor thought it great fun to tell this story the way Wiffy would have, without the cuss words. Wiffy was no stranger to the written word. In 1931, he penned a series of 12 golf lessons for the Brooklyn *Times Union*. His prose graced the pages of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* with his weekly column Dyker Divots in 1934. Further, he wrote his autobiography, *Wiffy, by Wiffy Himself*, a self-published limited edition. It's a good read.

From here on, we are channeling Wiffy.

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One of my favorite tournaments was the Metropolitan Open, the Met as we called it.

The Met is put on by the MGA, the Metropolitan Golf Association, which takes in the metropolitan New York City area. The MGA was founded in 1897, making it the second-oldest golf association in the country only behind the United States Golf Association, 1894.

I tried real hard to win the Met but never pulled it off. For me, the Met was a home game, contested in my backyard. I traveled the country chasing golf riches and the one constant was that the Met would always be played near my home in Brooklyn.

I came close in 1929, finishing second to Wild Bill Mehlhorn for my best finish. That was about a wacky a tournament as I ever played and I think most of the golfers would agree.



Wiffy Cox hits an iron shot during the 1934 U.S. Open at Merion Golf Club, Ardmore, Pa. Wiffy shared the first round lead at 71, one over par. He finished tied third, two strokes behind Olin Dutra.

Lido hosted the Met in 1922 when Marty O'Laughlin won, despite a final round 83 in blustery conditions with rock-hard greens. His 309 total was an astonishing 21

Here's what happened. The Met was played at the Lido Club, July 15 through 17. The Lido was a tough bird. It was short by today's standards, only about 6,400 yards. But the course sat hard by a bay in Nassau County, Long Island, which meant your shots were always at the mercy of the wind and even sea spray coming off the churning water. Walter Hagen, the Haig himself, listed the Lido right up there with Pine Valley as the country's most severe test of golf.

strokes over par. Heck, Gene Sarazen shot 84 in the third round. The best score of the week was 73, one over par, by Pat Doyle in the final round. Wiffy opened with 78-79 for 157, only five behind O'Laughlin's 152. I was tied with Johnny Farrell, two ahead of Gene Sarazen and four on the good side of Bobby Cruikshank. But I finished poorly with 81-87 for 325, well out of sight of the lead and well out of the money.

The final Met Open at the Lido was 1932, when Olin Dutra won with 282, six under par. He finished with a 65, tying Wiffy's course record. I started out okay, with two 72s, for an even par 144, only three off the pace. But I played poorly on Saturday, posting 74-77, which left me at 295, not even close.

It's a shame but the Lido Club is long gone. In 1942, the Navy acquired the property and the golf course was lost to a naval base. We were at war so needs must.

Now, back to 1929. In the third round, I shot 67, five under par. That would have bettered the course record by three strokes except for one thing. The day before, playing behind me was Arthur Potter, a 24-year pro old from Brooklyn, who shocked the assembled by posting a 64. A little perspective: in that second round, Sarazen shot 78; Leo Diegel, 73; Jim Barnes, 77; MacDonald Smith, 74; Craig Wood, 74; Vic Ghezzi, 81; Ed Dudley, 79; Johnny Farrell, 76; and Wiffy, 75. First-round leader Jack Forrester backed up a two-under-par 70 with a nine-over 81. Bill Mehlhorn shot a second consecutive 73. Nobody was tearing it up.

Potter's score, this 64, was the lowest score ever posted in a "major" golf tournament in America. Not even Bobby Jones, Gene Sarazen or Walter Hagen had shot 64. I'll note here that many in the golf game considered the Met a major tournament because it paid one of the largest purses on the circuit and was played on one of the country's most difficult courses.

Jones himself played Lido in 1925 in a National Open qualifying round. Bobby and Macdonald Smith both shot 70 to set the course record. Jack Forrester matched that



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record in the first round of the '29 Met.

Potter shot 80 in the first round, so the skeptics were out in full force. Heads turned so much that officials from the U.S.G.A. accompanied Potter for his third and fourth rounds. They scored him in 83 and 84.

So, what happened? The game was up when Harry Hunerhoff, a Brooklyn pro who played with Potter and attested to the 64, informed the official scorer that the card was false. Here's what Hunerhoff told *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

"I didn't realize what I had done in attesting Potter's card until I read the headlines in Saturday's papers," said Hunerhoff. "I brooded about it all day and decided to tell the truth.

"Potter actually shot about 79. He was the last man out. He walked over to the scoreboard and said 'Diegel is leading the field. I need 64 to tie him. I'm going to go out and get it.' Then he took two cards and accompanied me. [In addition to being a cheater, Potter was a terrible mathematician. He needed 65 to tie Diegel.]

"He kept saying all along, 'I'll give them something to talk about.' I thought he was joking. When he came in with me he laughed and said, 'Sign this.' I signed the card and figured everyone would take it as a joke. When I came out later and saw the score on the board with Potter leading Mehlhorn and Diegel by one stroke I said to Porter, 'This is a terrible thing to do. You are not going to let that stand, are you?' He said he was and as I attested it I'd better keep quiet about it."

The *Brooklyn Daily Times* printed this headline:

Potter's Record 64 Card at Lido Defies Solution.

Here's the first paragraph: 'Grover Whalen's police department isn't the only group that has to solve mysteries. The sporting department of every metropolitan newspaper is now faced with one of the most baffling episodes in the history of golf. How did Arthur D. Potter, an unattached pro, residing at the corner of Bay 15th Street and Cropsey Avenue in Bensonhurst, who until a year ago was the official fisherman for lost balls in ponds of the Dyker Beach course, score a 64 at Lido yesterday afternoon? That's the question. He broke the course record by six strokes and shot into the leadership of the field by a margin of one stroke over Leo Diegel with a 144 aggregate, but how he did it nobody knows.'

Potter had priors, as the cops say. In 1927 at Salisbury Golf Club, Potter turned in a 67 but officials refused to accept it as a course record. Potter played with a scorer the next day and shot 91.

I think you can see where this is going.

The Met was played over three days, with the final 36 on Saturday. The third round was in the books and some of the players had teed off for round four when Lester

Arthur D. Potter, unattached	80-64-144	Tom Boyd, Fox Hills	84-81-167
Leo Diegel, Mexico	72-73-145	Hugh J. Glasby, Antlers	82-84-168
Bill Mehlhorn, Fenimore	72-73-145	Watson Szymanski, unattached	82-83-168
Craig Wood, Forest Hills	74-74-148	Jack Semple, Rock Spring	82-83-168
Jim Barnes, unattached	71-77-148	Bert Brindley, St. Albans	82-83-168
Bobby Cruikshank, Purchase	76-72-148	Harry Dunn, unattached	82-83-169
*Maurice McCarthy Jr., Great Meadow	78-71-149	Geo. F. Sparling, Brooklawn	82-83-170
Gene Barasen, Fresh Meadow	72-78-150	James Watson, Scotland	84-82-170
Jack Forrester, Hackensack	70-81-151	Jack Patton, Wykagyl	82-82-171
MacDonald Smith, Lakeville	71-80-151	Victor Ghezzi, Rumson	84-87-171
Henry Cuel, Mill River	71-80-151	Elmer Yungis, Sunningdale	84-87-171
Whiffle Cox, Dyker Beach	78-75-153	Jack Hiner, Gallopung Hill	84-87-173
Wm. Brady, Winged Foot	77-77-154	W. Dorward, unattached	82-83-173
Willie Klein, Wheatley Hills	77-77-154	Geo. Slingerland, unattached	84-84-174
Joe Sylvester, St. Albans	80-74-154	Jas. F. Donato, Yonkers	92-82-175
Tony Mainer, unattached	79-75-154	Bob Black, Phelps Manor	82-83-175
Sal di Bono, Bonnie Briar	79-75-154	Jack Cummings, Cleveland	82-83-175
*Ellis Knowles, Apawamis	80-74-154	Chas. Szymanski, unattached	91-83-176
Herman Barron, Fort Chester	73-80-155	William Brown, Lido	93-81-176
Purdy Gatrops, Peninsula Club	77-79-156	Albert Brosch, Lenox Hills	91-83-176
George McLean, Grassy Sprain	77-79-156	Carl M. Burns, N. Y. Golf School	86-91-177
Jerome Cook, Hollywood	80-76-156	Alex Armour, Congressional	93-85-178
Pat Girrell, Oak Ridge	79-77-156	Peter Cassella, Forest Park	88-90-178
Johnny Farrell, Quaker Ridge	81-76-157	A. E. Gravatt, Ashbury Park	88-94-184
*Eddie Driggs, Lakeville	81-76-157	Harry Runersoff, unattached	97-81-188
Joe Turnesa, Elmford	80-78-158	Leo Walper, Salisbury	88-91-188
James Hines, Hempstead	81-77-158	Ernest Gatrops, unattached	73-80-189
Pat Doyle, unattached	80-79-159	Jimmy Law, Cherry Valley	82-80-189
John Alberti, Jumping Brook	81-78-159	Ben Parole, Sunnyside	82-80-189
Ed Dudley, Concord	80-79-159	C. Nichols, Swayze	82-80-189
Fred Moore, Dunwoodie	78-82-160	Willie McFarlane, Oak Ridge	84-80-189
Thomas J. Herman Jr., Montclair	81-79-160	Barney O'Neil, unattached	83-80-189
George Herron, Meadow Brook	81-79-160	Joe Reiner, Floral Park	83-80-189
Tom Cready, Bonny Briar	80-80-160	James Thompson, Apawamis	84-80-189
Emme: French, Southern Pines	79-81-160	C. Ralph Smith, Canoe Brook	87-80-189
Marshall Truittum, unattached	80-81-161	Bill Hartman, Ordway Farms	87-80-189
Jack Farrell, North Shore	81-80-162	Robert N. Prior, Shackamaxon	89-80-189
D. S. Mackie, Century	84-79-163	A. H. Gundry, unattached	91-80-189
Jack Rice, Hudson	82-81-163	Fred Hunter, Monroe	93-80-189
Geo. Kerra, Midston	82-81-163	W. E. Chagman, Phelps Manor	95-80-189
Alex Watson, Hudson River	77-86-163	Herbert J. Martin, N.Y.A.C.	97-80-189
Jack Babol, Westchester Hill	76-87-163	J. L. Dolan, unattached	114-80-189
Thomas Hughes, unattached	83-81-164	Louis Chissee, New Britain	83-80-189
Eddie Lund, Greenfield	83-81-164	Arthur Demaree, Sound View	83-80-189
Jervis S. Hicks, Hempstead	83-81-164	Walter Kosak, North Hills	89-80-189
Charles H. Mays, Pocomok	83-80-163	Joe Cooke, Liberty	92-80-189
Wm. Noon, Old Westbury	81-84-165	Jack Clark, Sunnyside	100-80-189
Albert McDonald, Millbrook	83-82-165	Francis Wood, Rockaway	80-80-189
Fred Canusa, West Point	81-83-165	J. G. McGowan, unattached	92-80-189
Harold Sanderson, Hollywood	83-83-166	Thomas Penin, unattached	80-80-189
Archib Sanderson, Sleepy Hollow	80-82-166	Alfred McCutcheon, unattached	80-80-189
Anthony Crego, Clearview	87-79-166	W. S. Ferris, Rockaway Hall	82-80-189
Walter Scherer, Salisbury	83-81-166	William Grant, unattached	82-80-189
John Dwyer, Mechanicville	81-85-166	Neil Frey, Queensboro	87-80-189
John O'Connor, Valley View	87-79-166	Cl. Cuel, Fresh Meadow	79-80-189

Here are the scores before Potter's cheating was discovered. I'll forgive the newspaper for misspelling my name. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle, July 20, 1929*

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Palmer, the official scorer, received a phone call while at lunch. It was Hunerhoff who confessed to falsifying Potter's card.

The officials intercepted Potter on the 10th tee where he was playing with Maurice McCarthy, Jr., the Met amateur champion, and Craig Wood. Potter insisted that he had indeed shot 64 the previous day. They permitted him to complete his round.



On July 20, 1929, the New York Daily News printed this photo of the lying, cheating Arthur Potter.

The ever-skeptical press was on the story from the get-go. On Friday evening, after Potter's 64 went on the board, Kingsley Childe, a reporter for the *Brooklyn Times Union*, tracked down Potter. He reported that Potter was in a daze trying to explain how he carded nine birdies. He claimed holing a 3-footer on the third for a birdie 2, reaching the par 5 fourth in two for a two-putt birdie, canning a 20-footer for birdie on 5 and sinking a mashie shot on six for a 4. He couldn't remember how he got a 4 on

the seventh hole. He claimed his only bogey was on the par 3 eighth hole when his tee shot landed in the sand trap.

Nor could he recall his birdie on 11, although he laid claim to a long putt holed for birdie on 12 and a four-footer for birdie on 13. He claimed a two-putt birdie on the 563-yard 17th hole and said his tee shot on 18, a 424 yarder, was but 40 yards from the green. His 30 foot putt rimmed the cup, depriving him of another birdie. In all, he laid claim to nine birdies and as single bogey.

Potter told Childe said he was out of a job and had to play good golf to get one. That was his explanation for all those birdies. Remember, this was June of 1929. The

Great Depression didn't really heat up until the market crashed on October 29. The word desperate came up more than once in Potter's comments to Childe. As the scribe pointed out, the only witnesses to Potter's 64 were Potter, his playing partner Hunerhoff and the two lads toting their bags.

Not content to leave his story at that, Childe tracked down Potter's caddy, Sol Bernstein, also known as Eaglebeak the Second, a nickname he and his brother, Eaglebeak the First, earned because both had bulbous noses. Childe roused Eaglebeak from his slumber at home on Bay 16th Street near Benson Avenue. Sol's only explanation for Potter's ten 4's was "on in two and two putt." As for the seven 3's, all Eaglebeak the Second knew was that Potter sank his pitch shot on the fifth hole. For the other 3's, Potter holed long putts. Eaglebeak could not recall the 2 on the third hole. The caddy summarized Potter's big day by saying, "I knew he was doing well, but I didn't know he was doing that good."

Tournament officials disqualified Potter for returning in an incorrect score card. Course officials said his 64 would not be sanctioned and it was expunged from the record book. Potter was banned from all future Met Golf Association and USGA events. Hunerhoff, a golf ball salesman whose next-day confession blew the scheme wide open, was similarly punished.

You're probably wondering what Wiffy thought about all this.

When Childe asked me to comment for his story, I decided the best answer was no answer. Sometimes, keeping your mouth shut displays real wisdom. Even though Potter played at Dyker Beach, my home course in Brooklyn, I didn't know him well. I had seen him around, sure, but never played with him. The boys said he could knock it long but his iron play was bad. Lido requires long driving and keen approach shots. I was baffled that a poor iron player could shoot 64 there or anywhere. I also learned that Eddie Lund, a local pro, was supposed to play with Potter and

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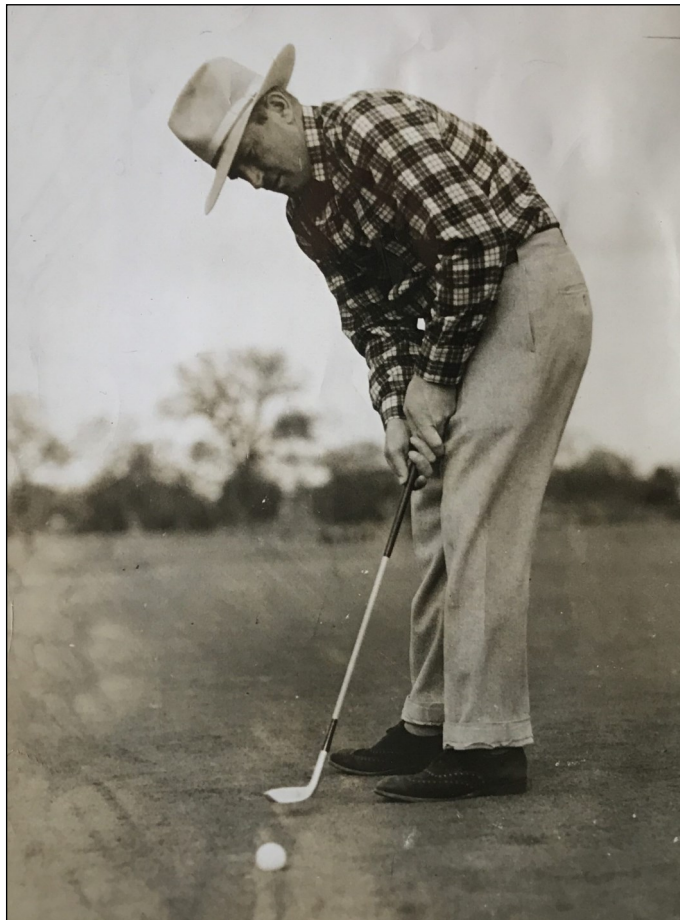
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Hunerhoff but for some reason, he played earlier. That was two fewer sets of eyes to witness his round.

Just to add to the mystery, the course was soaked by a heavy rain that morning and a strong northwest wind was whipping across the links. So how did this guy who never displayed such form shoot 64 when the next best round was Maurice McCarthy's 70? Only Bobby Cruikshank managed even par 72 and Leo Diegel and Wild Bill Mehlhorn were the only players at 73. Wiffy's 78 wasn't so bad under the circumstances. The first round, played the previous day under better weather conditions, saw Jack Forrester tie the course record at 70. Next were Jim



Wild Bill Mehlhorn often played wearing a cowboy hat.

Barnes—the Englishman who won the National Open 1913, the PGA Championship in '16 and '19 and the British Open in '25—and Mike Brady at 71. Gene Sarazen and Diegel matched par. I think you can fathom Wiffy's point.

I need to explain something. Mehlhorn's "Wild Bill" nickname honored Wild Bill Hickok, the cowboy who was shot dead in 1876 while playing poker. Mehlhorn was always playing cards and often played cards and golf wearing a cowboy hat. Wild Bill was a striking figure on and off the golf course. He won 19 tour titles in only eight years but never copped a major championship.

With that unpleasantness behind us, Wiffy's third-round 67 was recognized as the new course record. Mehlhorn came close to matching me in the fourth round. His 1-iron second shot to the final green finished some 50 feet from the hole on the long, closing par 4. In the morning round, he holed his ball from a similar distance. Needing two putts for 67, Wild Bill lived up to his nickname. Maybe he was amped up on confidence or maybe he was comforted by a four-stroke lead. We'll never know why he rammed the first putt 10 feet past the cup and missed coming back. I do know that before he hit the first putt he said, "I can't expect to can another. I'll probably three-putt this." Maybe he just talked himself into that three putt.

Wild Bill's 68 for an even par 288 for the 72 holes was plenty good enough to beat me by three. I was proud of my closing rounds, 67 and 71, a total of six under par. The 67 was sweet. I canned three 20-footers and must have made five or six from about 15 feet. I was six under going to 18 but made a sloppy bogey 5. A poor opening 78 cost me dearly. I don't remember how much I won for second but it wasn't enough to ease the ache of coming up short in the Met. I started the final round tied with Wild Bill and even though I shot a solid 71, his 68 topped my by three. I really wanted the win, especially because the 1929 tournament was played on the Island, just miles from my home course at Dyker Beach.