



### Byron at Berkshire

On August 9, 1937, Nelson made his first visit to Berkshire Country Club. Byron played in a 36-hole pro-am tournament with 18-year-old Billy Eban. Young Billy won RCC's club championship in 1935, making him RCC's youngest club champion at age 16, a mark that still stands. He also won the title in '41 and '47.

Byron and Billy shot 68-67 for a 135 total, three behind the winning score of 132, 14 under par, posted by the Lancaster County team of Harry Haverstick, Jr. and Abe Thorn. Marty Lyons and Bob Dunn, Llanerch Country Club, placed second at 134. Par at the Berkshire course was 73.

Thorn won \$100 as the winning pro. Lyons took home \$60 and Nelson won \$40. Other pros in the money were Hal Callaway, \$35; Ed Oliver, \$15; and Jack Hiner and Sam Byrd, \$5 each.

The RCC duo attracted the largest crowd, what with the Berks golf fans wanting to see the Masters champion and member of the U.S. Ryder Cup team in action. Byron's individual score was not reported, most likely because he may have picked up on a few holes when he couldn't top his partner's score. Byron and Billy were contending until they battered their chances on the 12<sup>th</sup> hole of the afternoon round by taking a double-bogey 6. Gordon Williams, Reading Times columnist, noted that Byron was "...banging 'em up to the pin all day but the putts just wouldn't drop."

Other notable pros in the field were Ed Oliver, Wilmington Country Club; Sam Byrd, a former major league

*Continued on next page*

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Playing with Bob Wallace, the home pro, and Stanley Giles, chairman of RCC's Greens Committee. Giles was instrumental in bringing Byron to RCC in 1937. Byron shattered par and the record with a three-under 67, becoming the first person to score under 70 at Berkleigh. Wallace was playing for only the second time since May when he fractured his foot while working on the golf course.

Byron shot 35, even par, on the first nine holes, with a bogey on number three and a birdie on number four. Nelson turned on the jets for the second nine, with two birdies, an eagle and a single bogey.

### Byron Battles Berk's Best Golf Courses

During Byron Nelson's tenure as head golf professional at Reading Country Club in 1937, '38 and '39, he played a lot of golf in Berks County. Most of his rounds were, of course, at RCC. But he did venture to other Berks' courses to take a crack at some the county's other fairways.

His first Berks golf foray away from RCC was May 14, 1937, when he took on the challenge of Berkleigh Country Club. This was just six weeks removed from Nelson's victory in the Masters tournament. Berkleigh was a nine-hole golf course, playing to a par 70. Nelson posted what the newspaper described as a "sizzling" course record 72, considered all the more remarkable because he played in the rain. The previous mark was 73, posted three years previous by Bob Wallace, the home pro who accompanied Nelson. Wallace shot 78. The amateur record was 75, set by Al Ackley in 1933.

Byron shot 38, three over par, on the first nine with bogeys on 2, 3, 4 and 9 and a birdie on 5. He played one under par on the second nine, with birdies on 14, 16 and 18 and bogeys on 13 and 15.

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# The Golf Chronicles

## Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland

Byron Nelson  
Reading CC Pro  
1937-39



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baseball player representing Philadelphia Country Club; Bud Lewis, Jeffersonville Country Club; Felix Serafin, Scranton Country Club; George Low, Huntingdon Valley; George Fazio, Norristown; Bob Venables, Manor Golf Club; Harry Markel, Berkshire Country Club; and Bob Wallace, Berkleigh Country Club.

### A Shot for the Ages

Writing in his *Reading Times* column on May 16, 1939, Gordon Williams, sports editor, recalled what he described as the finest golf shot he had ever witnessed. Playing in an exhibition match at RCC, Byron Nelson drove his ball in to the creek on the par 5 fifth hole. Byron took a drop and, with the penalty stroke, was hitting three. Choosing a spoon for his next shot, he smashed a high fade that soared over the creek twice, landing on the green 250 yards away. Nelson two-putted for a par.

The exhibition, played May 12, featured the duo of Leo Diegel, the 1928 and '29 PGA Champion playing out of Philmont Country Club, and Gene Kunes, Jeffersonville, who won the Canadian Open in 1935. They went up against Nelson and Harry Markel, Berkshire Country Club

Diegel and Kunes won the match, 1-up, with Kunes making two eagles on the back nine. He drove the green on the short tenth hole, and sank a five-foot putt for the 2. He found the green in two strokes on the 14<sup>th</sup> hole and proceeded to roll in his 25-foot putt. Kunes led the scoring with a 70, one under par, followed by Nelson at 71. Diegel and Markel shot matching 76s.

His accomplishment earned him a \$25 prize from Alex Kagan, a Reading businessman, Berkleigh member and president of the Berks County Golf Association. Kagan presented Wallace with a dozen golf balls.

The group had a gallery, as many of the players competing in the Berks County women's championship at Berkleigh followed the U.S. Open champion. Wallace said he never saw Nelson hit the ball any better.

"The Berkleigh is a tough layout," said Nelson. "It is much too hard for the members and average amateur. It is a real test of golf."

Nelson played Galen Hall Golf Club only once, on May 16, 1938. The course record was 64, set by the Bob Middleton, the home pro. Par for the course was 66 at the time, so 64, while under par, was not an eye-popping score. Middleton once toured the links in 58, but he wouldn't accept this as a record because he took a few gimmies.

Middleton didn't believe Byron could break his record. His belief was well founded. In 1929, Gene Sarazen took on Galen Hall with the intention of putting his name in the record book. Sarazen was one of the world's top players at that time, having won 14 professional tournaments, including the 1922 U.S. Open and PGA championship and the 1923 PGA.

The best the Squire could do was 68. Sarazen made just three birdies, on holes 3, 7 and 11. Middleton bested him with 67. Al Heron, the professional at Berkshire Country Club, posted 72. Joe Brennan, West Chester, shot 77, which was surprising because he won the Central Pennsylvania Open at Galen Hall just three weeks prior with rounds of 71-67.

Playing Galen Hall with Stanley Giles, Byron's quest for a course record came a cropper early with a bogey 4 on the second hole. He got that back with a birdie 4 on number three but on the fourth hole, his tee shot found the creek that fronts the green. He played from the water but could do no better than a double-bogey 5.

Byron birdied holes 3, 6 and 7 for and even par 34 going out. Nelson's

drive on the par 4 sixth hole was pin high to the right, setting up a birdie 3. Coming home, he posted eight pars and a bogey 4 on number 11 for a one-over-par 33.

He nearly drove the 16<sup>th</sup> green, his ball finishing just short and to the right. He failed to get it up and down, settling for a par.

REPLACE TURF								Galen Hall Golf and Country Club							
HOLES	YARDS	PAR	STKS	SELF	PART'N	OPP.	OPP.	HOLES	YARDS	PAR	STKS	SELF	PART'N	OPP.	OPP.
1	320	4	8					10	435	4	4				
2	140	3	17					11	145	3	16				
3	460	5	1					12	445	4	3				
4	350	4	7					13	205	3	12				
5	190	3	13					14	425	4	6				
6	300	4	9					15	215	3	11				
7	455	5	2					16	265	4	10				
8	165	3	15					17	190	3	14				
9	120	3	18					18	425	4	5				
Out	2500	34						In	2750	32					
								Out	2500	34					
Player								Total	5250	66					
Attested								Handicap							
Date								Net							

Galen Hall played to a par 66 in 1938.