



Lord Byron Rules Over Central Pennsylvania

The Central Pennsylvania Open was once a mainstay on the regional golf circuit. Pros from clubs in the tri-state area competed, as did leading amateurs. First played at Berkshire Country Club in 1924, the tournament moved around in its early years before finding a home at Reading Country Club in 1934.

Let's look at some tournament color, courtesy of the *Reading Eagle* and *Reading Times*.

1924: Morris Talman was the only player to crack 40 in each of his four nines around the par 76, 6,600 yard Berkshire C.C. layout. He won by three strokes with 74-76—150. **Hawley Quier**, Berkshire course record holder at 70 and the Central Pennsylvania amateur champion, shot 81-87—168.

1925: John Schubel, Lu Lu C.C., led by three strokes after the first round with a splendid five-under-par 71. The magic deserted him in the afternoon. His 83 left him at 154, tied eleventh and out of the money. **Ted Weiser**, Williamsport C.C., won with 74-74—148.

1926: No tournament.

1927: Ralph Ebling, a one-armed golfer, finished in the top 20 at Berkshire on October 18. Ebling, originally from Wernersville and later a pro in New Hampshire, shot 83-83—166 for 36 holes over the par 76 layout. Only 40 of the 60 starters finished. Many did not start the afternoon round when the wind-driven cold rain made the soggy links nearly unplayable.

Bill Leach, Overbrook C.C., won with 73-75—148, four under on the par 76 links.

1928: The CPO moved to Coatesville C.C., where the host pro **Bill Cone** and **Joe Brennan**, an unaffiliated pro, tied at 148 after 36 holes. The field numbered 45 players. Cone won the 18-hole playoff with a score of 74 to Brennan's 76. Cone jumped out to a two-stroke lead when Brennan took a 7 on the second hole. Brennan evened the match after six holes but Cone reasserted himself with a par 3 on the seventh hole to Brennan's double-bogey 5 and carried a two-stroke lead to the back nine. Brennan closed to within one but could not even the match.



Morris Talman, left, talking with Raymond Derr between rounds of the 1924 Central Pennsylvania Open at Berkshire Country Club. Talman won, Derr finished fourth.

1929: Joe Brennan avenged the previous year's playoff loss with a win in the first event played at Galen Hall with 71-67—136, six over on the par 34-32—66 course. His 67 was the day's best round. Galen Hall played at 5,250 yards, with seven holes less than 200 yards. The pros found difficulty playing the hard, fast greens.

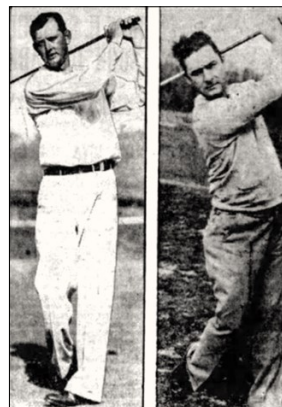
J.L. Nelson, managing director of Galen Hall, announced that he was brining **Gene Sarazen** to Galen Hall on August 9 to see if he could crack par. Playing in a foursome with **Bob Middleton**, the home pro, **Al Heron**, the professional at Berkshire, and CPO champion **Joe Brennan**, West Chester, the Squire carded 68, two over par. Middleton won the day with 67. Heron and Brennan trailed with 72 and 77, respectively.

Sarazen won seven major championships. In the final round of the '35 Masters, Sarazen hit "the shot heard 'round the world" on the fifteenth hole. He struck a spoon—a 4-wood—235 yards into the hole for a double eagle, tying him with **Craig Wood**. Sarazen won the 36-hole playoff by five.

1930: George Smith, Morestown C.C., shot 138 at Galen Hall to win by two over Al Heron, Berkshire C.C., and two others. The best round was 67, one over par, in the second round by Jock Campbell, Old York Road.

1931, '32 and '33: Records for these years were not found, indicating that the tournament was most likely not played. Gordon Williams, *Reading Times* sports editor, provided the strongest evidence of the CPO's three-year hiatus. In his column of May 16, 1934, Williams noted that the 1934 CPO, to be played at RCC, represented a revival of the event.

1934: Only **John Griffin**, Marble Hall C.C., equaled par 71 in the CPO's first tour around RCC.



Ed Dudley, left, and Harry Markel, Berkshire C.C., finished first and fourth, respectively, in the 1935 Central Pennsylvania Open at RCC.

George Smith, Spring Hill C.C., **Angelo Paul**, Valley Forge C.C., and **Clarence Hackney**, Atlantic City C.C., tied at 149, seven over par. Smith won the playoff with an even par 71. Paul posted 74 while Hackney skied to an 81. A gallery of 1,000 followed the match.

1935: Following victory on his first visit to RCC, **Ed Dudley**, the pro at Philadelphia C.C., was effusive in his praise of the links.

"The course is in marvelous condition and is ideal for the average golfer," he said. "What I'd like to see to make it a real championship course is a flock of back tees to give the boys something to shoot at in

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the big tournaments.” In the first round, Dudley nearly drove the green on the 356-yard 18th hole. He chipped to within four feet of the cup but missed the birdie putt.

Dudley’s 70-73—143 edged **Felix Serafin**, Scranton C.C., and **Gene Kunes**, Jeffersonville C.C., by a single shot. **Harry Markel**, Berkshire C.C., was fourth at 145.

1936: Ed “Porky” Oliver, Wilmington, just two years removed from the caddy ranks, won with a record 139, three under par. In the first round, **George Low, Jr.**, Plymouth C.C., set the competitive course record 68. He faltered in the second round with 75, his 144 total tied sixth. Oliver had to overcome his explosive temper. In the morning round, he broke his putter on the 10th green after missing a short putt. Porky eagled the par 5 12th hole in both rounds. **Ed Dudley** did not defend his title.

1937: Byron Nelson, the reigning Masters champion, won \$150 for defeating **Bruce Coltart**, Woodcrest, N.J., in an 18-hole playoff, 68-75. Coltart won \$75. **Sam Byrd**, a former major league baseball player who was the assistant at Philadelphia C.C., and **Ed Oliver**, the defending champion, tied third, each winning \$35. Oliver arrived late because of car trouble.

The par 15th hole proved challenging from the new back tee, stretching the par 3 to 205 yards. There were twice as many bogies as pars for the two rounds. **Ed Dudley**, who finished nine strokes behind Nelson, double-bogied the hole twice, once with a ball in the creek and once missing the green to the left. The agony award went to **Pete Strauss**, Lehigh Country Club amateur, with a 14 on his way to a first-round 89. He attempted to play his tee shot from the creek in front of the green with disastrous results.

Nelson and **Dick Renaghan** found joy on the par-5 14th hole. Playing into a strong headwind, both made eagle 3 in the morning round by sinking long putts. Nelson’s ball hung on the edge of the cup before tumbling in.

Bob Venables, Manor Golf club, and **Walter Work**, Tyrone, Pa., were the last to finish, handing in their cards at 7:40 p.m.

Bob Middleton, pro at Galen Hall, was unable to play because he has a full lesson schedule in the morning.

RCC caddy master **D.R. Van Olinda** had a busy day securing enough bag totters for the 79 players. The task was not as daunting for the second round after 16 withdrew.

1938: Lord Byron led after an opening 66, which set an RCC competitive course record. He faltered in the afternoon with a 75, losing the title by a single shot to **Ed Oliver**, who carded a steady 70-70—140.

Nelson maintained a four shot lead going to the final nine holes. On 16, Nelson’s tee shot hit a tree and bounded into “the devil’s rock garden” to the left of the fairway, setting up the second of four consecutive bogies for an inward nine of 40. Oliver’s closing 35, two under par, featured an eagle 2 at the 10th hole. Oliver won \$125, Nelson \$75. Two hours after finishing his round, Nelson left for Cleveland to compete in a \$10,000 tournament.

Nelson won a driving contest with a shot measuring 273 yards and six inches. He edged **W.L. Dyson**, an amateur from Hazleton, by a half-foot.



Byron Nelson, center, won in 1939 with a record 137. His playing partners were Ben Hogan, left, and Clarence Doser, Merion CC.

1939: Just weeks after winning the U.S. Open title, Nelson won \$100 for his second CPO title. Byron posted a record 36-hole score of 68-69—137 to surpass the old record of 139 set in 1936 by **Ed Oliver**. **Sam Byrd** finished second, taking home \$60. **George Fazio**, City Line G.C., tied sixth, good for \$35, while **Ben Hogan**, White Plains, N.Y., tied tenth and won \$10.

1940: Charles Sheppard, a native Californian playing out of Huntingdon Valley C.C., set the CPO scoring record. Sheppard toured RCC in 67-68—135, seven under par, breaking Nelson’s 1939 mark of 137. In his first year as host pro, **Henry Clay Poe** finished tied fourth along with **Ed Dudley**, Philadelphia C.C., **Fred Johnson**, Philadelphia Cricket Club, and **Gene Kunes**, Holmesburg G.C., at 142.

1941: Joe Zarhardt, an unheralded pro playing out of Jeffersonville C.C., won the CPO with a four-under-par 138. In the first round, **Felix Serafin**, Scranton C.C., and **Bruce Coltart**, Seaview C.C., broke the competitive course record with 65s. Both posted 74 in the second round, good for a third place tie with **Henry Clay Poe**, the host pro, who scored 72-68. **Harry Markel**, Berkshire C.C., was second at 70-69—139.

The end. Writing in the *Reading Eagle* on May 3, 1942, sports editor **Bill Reedy** reported the first sign that tournament golf would be greatly affected by World War 2 came when Reading Country Club officers cancelled the Central Pennsylvania Open because of transportation difficulties. The tournament was not renewed after the war.