

The Golf Chronicles

Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland

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Walter Hagen Takes on RCC

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

What is the **Walter Hagen**-Reading Country Club connection? Here ya go.

On July 13, 1931, The Haig teamed with **Tommy Armour**, the Black Scot himself, in an exhibition match at RCC. Armour's nickname was in tribute to his jet-black hair. Later in life, he was known as the Silver Scot; men didn't color their hair back then. Armour won the British Open Championship at Carnoustie the month prior to his Reading appearance and captured the 1927 U.S. Open Championship.

Rocky Road. Their road to Reading was interesting. Both had played in the Canadian Open, 72 holes staged over two days with a 36-hole finish on Saturday, July 11. The schedule was upset by **Percy Allis**, an Englishman playing out of the Wannsee Club, Berlin, Germany. Allis toured the final nine holes in four under par, making up six strokes on Hagen. He rammed home an 18-foot birdie putt on the final hole to force a playoff, which was scheduled for Tuesday. Armour, the defending champion, finished fifth, collecting \$100.

Immediately after their rounds in Toronto, Hagen and Armour shuffled off to Buffalo where they played an exhibition match on Sunday. The duo then boarded a train for Allentown, Pa. where they spent the evening in the Americus Hotel. A contingent from RCC met them at the hotel and drove them to RCC for the 4:00 p.m. match, which started a half-hour late.

The professionals faced off against two leading amateurs, **Will Gunn** and **Ted Johnston**, in their RCC match.

Easy Win. The pros easily defeated the amateur, holding a six-up lead at the turn. Hagen bogeyed the first and fifth holes, then finished with three consecutive birdies for a one-under-par 33. Armour fashioned seven pars and two bogeys.

The back nine was much the same with Hagen and Armour matching par 37. Each birdied 13 and 14, the Scot sinking a 40-foot putt on 13. Hagen found trouble on 15, scoring a double-bogey 5. The amateurs were long off the tee, if not erratic, but succumbed to the pros' superior iron play and putting. They both came home in 40. Gunn notched birdies at 10 and 18 to finish in 79. Johnston finished at 80.

No rest for the Haig; he was due back in Toronto on Tuesday for a 36-hole playoff to decide the Canadian Open championship. After the match at RCC, the golfers were whisked back to Allentown where a train awaited to take them to Toronto.

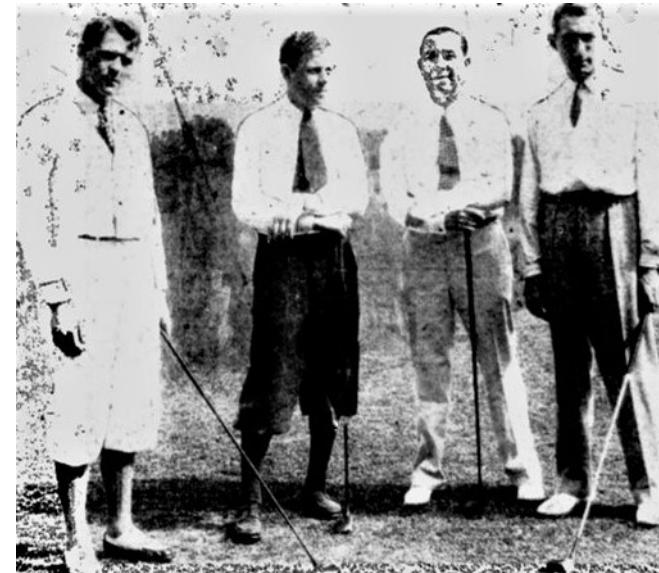
The Haig Rallies.

Hagen made the most of his travel adventure by defeating Allis by a single stroke, 141 – 142. Hagen fell behind early, trailing by four strokes after four holes. Allis held a one-stroke lead after nine, 18 and 27 holes. Hagen forged ahead by two after 29 holes, but the resolute Allis found the cup from 35 feet on the 34th hole to square the match. Hagen showed his class on the penultimate hole, knocking his second to within inches of the target for a birdie three. Allis, only three feet away, missed. The home hole was halved in par four, although Allis gave The Haig a fright, missing a long birdie try by mere inches. Had the putt dropped, the pair would have squared off in another 36-hole playoff.

As it was, Hagen took the winner's purse of \$500. Allis settled for \$300.

Père et Fils. Allis was one of England's leading golf professionals in the 1920s and '30s. He won 22 professional tournaments, all in Europe, and played in the Ryder Cup four times.

His son **Peter** was also a professional golfer, golf writer and broadcaster, and played in the Ryder Cup eight times. The Allises were the first father and son pair to play in the Ryder Cup. The Spaniards **Antonio** and **Ignacio Garrido** are the only others.



The distinguished foursome posed before taking on Reading Country Club's links. From the left, Will Gunn, Spring Haven amateur; Ted Johnson, amateur from Roxboro; Walter Hagen, U.S. Open, British Open and PGA champion; and Tommy Armour, the reigning British Open titleholder.