



# The Golf Chronicles

The story of golf at Reading Country Club and in Berks County



Number 43 • May 27, 2016



Byron Nelson plays a 6-iron to the second green at Pine Valley.



Gene Sarazan, resplendent in his plus-fours, was the amiable host of *Wonderful World of Golf*. Here, he asks Gene Littler to demonstrate how he hits long-iron shots. Sarazan won 39 PGA events between 1922 and 1941, including the U.S. Open (1922 and 1932) the PGA Championship (1922, 1923, 1933), The British Open (1932) and the Masters (1935 when he holed a 4-wood for a double-eagle 2 on number 15). Sarazan is also credited with inventing the modern sand wedge.

## Bring on the Pros!

In the 1920s and '30s, RCC played host to exhibitions featuring the day's leading professionals. In that era, the pros relied on exhibition money to supplement their tour winnings, which were meager even by the day's standards. Most also held club jobs.

Pros who played exhibitions at RCC include Walter Hagan; the "Silver Scott" himself, Tommy Armour; "Lighthorse" Harry Cooper; Bobby Locke; Jimmy Thomson; Henry Picard; and Ben Hogan.

## Lord Byron Takes on Pine Valley

Challenged by Gene Littler on Shell's Wonderful World of Golf

Shell's Wonderful World of Golf brought the global game to American television. The program was sponsored by the Shell Oil Company and followed the tradition of challenge matches between professional golfers (see sidebar article), which were an early form of golf competition. Some Wonderful World of Golf matches featured three players in competition. The series was suspended between 1970 and 1994, when the show was restarted by the Golf Channel.

One of the more interesting matches was filmed in 1962 when **Byron Nelson** faced **Gene Littler** at the legendary Pine Valley Golf Club in New Jersey. This program provides a rare look at the secretive Pine Valley and shows Lord Byron when he was still capable of playing championship golf, even at age 50. Nelson retired in 1946 at age 34 but he continued to play in the Masters, finishing 15<sup>th</sup> in 1965, his second-to-last appearance.

If you missed this program, fear not. YouTube provides. [Go here](#) to see the match, which is posted in six segments. Unfortunately, Part 1 is not available, but Part 2 picks up play from the second hole. You won't miss much.

At the time of the filming, Littler was the reigning U.S. Open champion, his final-round 68, two-under par, good enough for a one-stroke victory over Bob Goalby and Doug Sanders at Oakland Hills in Michigan. Littler carved out one of golf's most unappreciated careers. He captured 29 PGA tour titles between 1954 (San Diego Open, won as an amateur) and 1977 (Houston Open). And yet, he is rarely included in discussions of golf's greats. That's a pity.

Wonderful World of Golf was a pre-recorded one-hour program on Sunday afternoons. The show included a segment about the host country for that week's show. It also included conversations between the competitors, which was a rarity in that era. As such, it allowed to audience to feel they were walking the fairways with the competitors, rather than being spectators behind the ropes. The legendary Gene Sarazan provided expert commentary in the shows early years.

The first match (Brazil in 1961) featured Billy Casper against Mario Gonzalez, a Brazilian professional. The final match was in 2003 when Fred Couples played Michael Campbell in New Zealand.

In between, the shows visited Argentina, Brazil, France, Japan, Scotland, England, Canada, Ireland, India, Netherlands, Chile, Germany, Spain, Morocco, Kenya, Thailand, Guatemala, Jamaica, Barbados, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Philippines, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, New Zealand, South Africa, Portugal, Aruba, Malaysia, Panama, Greece, Italy and a number of courses in the United States.

Several of the matches are on YouTube, so crack open a cold one and enjoy a nostalgic look at the wonderful world of golf.