



# The Golf Chronicles

## Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland



Number 64 • December 8, 2017

### Byron Nelson Reflects on his Open Win

On June 20, **Byron Nelson** was honored at a celebration at RCC for his Open victory. Here are Byron's comments, as reported in the *Reading Eagle*.

"Every pro in the business has one thing in mind and that is to win the open. Not because of the money it will bring, but because of the prestige, and for such parties as this one. Some folks may think that the pros get the jitters in the open. That is all wrong. Most of them play as well for \$10,000 as for \$5. That is because the nerves are keyed up all the time in competition. They don't worry about the cash. They want to make good because of what people and the press might say.

"I hate to think of the days and nights that **Sam Snead** has spent since messing up that final hole at Spring Mill. The same thing happened to **Harry Cooper** in 1927 at Oakmont. Cooper, perhaps the greatest golfer in the game for the past 10 years, although he never won the open, probably never fully recovered from the mistakes he made. If he had won that title, Cooper would have been the top man for several years. The pros can't get the mistakes out of their mind.

"You know every pro has hopes of winning the open. I always pictured myself holing out a long putt on the final hole to win the crown. I think that helped me sink that eight-footer against Wood in the first playoff.

"I hate to leave Reading and my friends. My wife feels the same way. I have been lucky since coming to this town. Every title but two that I won I captured while here. Is there any wonder that I feel I made a good move in signing with the Reading Country Club? We will leave here this fall with a deep feeling in our hearts for all our friends. And you may rest assured that we will be back to see you all."

**Louise Nelson** also thanked the audience for their hospitality and kindness during the Nelson's stay in Reading.



*Thomas A. Wilson, president of the Chamber of Commerce, presents **Byron Nelson** with a silver plaque inscribed: "Awarded to Byron Nelson, 1939 National Open golf champion, America's foremost golfer, Reading's greatest athlete, a true sportsman and a fine citizen, by the Chamber of Commerce, Reading, Pa., June 20, 1939."*

### All Hail, Lord Byron, National Open Champion

*This is the seventh in a Golf Chronicles series telling the story of **Byron Nelson's** victory in the 1939 National Open played at Philadelphia Country Club's Spring Mill course.*

So, what does the newly christened National Open champion do?

In 1939, **Byron Nelson** made the short drive from Gladwyne back to Reading to resume his duties as head professional at Reading Country Club. He gave lessons. He ran the golf shop. He played tournaments, winning the Massachusetts State Open (\$400), the Western Open (\$750), the Central Pennsylvania Open at RCC (\$100), and, with partner **Johnny Giles**, the Berkshire Country Club pro-am (\$140).

He lost the final of the PGA Championship, played at the now-defunct Pomonok Country Club, Queens, N.Y. on July 15, to **Henry Picard** on the first playoff hole.

**Walking Ref.** And on September 4 of that year, Nelson served as the walking referee for the match to determine the 11<sup>th</sup> Berks County amateur champion. A September 5 *Reading Eagle* article reports that Nelson led a sizeable gallery following the players. There is no indication that he was called upon to make any rulings.

The winner, **Lefty Faber**, became the first player to win the Berks Publinks and Amateur championships. Faber began his golf career as a caddy at RCC. In 1947, Henry Clay Poe hired Faber as assistant pro and caddymaster at RCC.

Faber defeated 17-year-old **Johnny Markel**, 1-up. Markel was the defending Berks Amateur champion having defeated Faber the previous year. Markel is still the youngest Berks Am champ at age 16.

Markel would win seven Berks Amateur championships: 1938, 1940, 1941, 1947, 1953, 1954 and 1960. He is also the only player to win three consecutive PIAA high school state championships (1939, '40, '41). Markel retired as head pro at Berkshire in 1987, having served for 25 years after succeeding his father, Harry, who retired in 1969 after 38 years.

**Back to Byron.** In his first tournament after the Open win, Nelson won the Massachusetts State Open by four strokes, earning \$400. Because this was not a PGA Tour event, Nelson was paid a \$250 appearance fee (from *Byron Nelson: The Little Black Book*, page 75).

On June 24, he stumbled to a 78 in the first round of the Anthracite Open. Nelson's eight over par featured 40 putts on the tricky Country Club of Scranton greens and left him 13 shots behind **Henry Picard**, who went on to win the \$1,200 first prize. **Sam Snead** finished second, six behind. Nelson recovered to finish 11<sup>th</sup> at 291, 11 over par, and pocketed \$35.

**Party time.** In his book, *How I played the Game*, Nelson wrote about a June 20 celebration of his Open win that was organized by members from Reading, Galen Hall and Berkleigh. Byron wrote that the gifts included a silver bowl for Louise, engraved with her name, and for him, a solid-gold Hamilton watch with "Byron Nelson, Winner U.S. Open 1939, Members of Reading Country Club" engraved on the back and a Model 70 Winchester 30-06 rifle. As of the writing of his book in 2006, Byron still had the watch and the bowl. He used the Winchester for many years, but eventually sold it to a friend.



# The Golf Chronicles

## Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland



### Busy. Busy. Busy.

*Reading Eagle*, June 20, 1939

• Five caddies turned down an opportunity to tote **Byron Nelson's** bag for the Open. They believed Nelson was "too conservative" to challenge for the title. To their dismay, Nelson won and rewarded his caddy, **Jim Fraelich**, a 29-year-old Philadelphian, with \$130, a pair of golf shoes and a set of irons.

• Nelson reported that he lost seven pounds over the six days of play.

*Reading Eagle*, June 30, 1939

• On June 29, Nelson spoke to the Pottstown Rotary Club.

• He was to leave on July 1 for an exhibition match in Chicago.

• He would be available July 5 and 6 for lessons.

• Then he was to leave for Pomonok Club, Long Island, for the P.G.A. Championship, July 9 through 15. He would lose the final 36-hole match to **Henry Picard** on the first playoff hole. Nelson won \$600.

A June 21 article from the *Reading Eagle* provides color and background.

More than 400 attended the event. As a prelude to the lunch and speeches, Byron presented a clinic of his wood and iron techniques on the first tee. He finished with sand trap work, most likely on the 9<sup>th</sup> green, which is adjacent to the first tee.

In the clubhouse, the audience watched a movie of Byron's Open play at Philadelphia Country Club. A buffet lunch followed.

Then came the speeches. Reading Mayor **J. Henry Stump** lead off, lauding Nelson thusly: "No man has done more for Reading in a long time than Byron Nelson."

Before introducing Byron, **J. Stanley Giles**, the chairman of RCC's Greens Committee and event host, spoke glowingly of the tall Texan.

"There is no limit to how far he will go in his chosen profession. He has been on the up for several years. Now he has reached the top. The open championship will be a great help for him. It will give him added confidence. I predict he will be a hard man to beat in coming competitions. Today, Bryon Nelson, as open titleholder, is just as much interested in the Reading Country Club as the first day he came here."

Golf professionals from local clubs who spoke included **Bob Wallace**, Berkleigh; **Harry Markel**, Berkshire; **Bob Middleton**, Galen Hall; **Bob Venables**, the Manor; and **Chick Hart**, Riverside.

**Thomas A. Wilson**, president of the Chamber of Commerce, presented Nelson with an inscribed silver plaque.

**Nate Fein**, president of Berkleigh C.C., gave Byron a movie camera, a gift from the members in appreciation of what he has done for golf in Berks County.

**Charles A. Corbitt**, president of RCC, presented Byron with a wrist watch.

Giles presented **Louise Nelson** with a beautiful flower bouquet.

After the speeches, the guests danced to the music of the **Whitey Meiskey** orchestra.

**Bantam Ben Visits**. The Nelson's were also busy entertained guests. Shortly after the Open, **Ben** and **Valerie Hogan** visited for a week. Ben and Byron practiced and played. When Byron had to work, Hogan played with **Stanley Giles**. The *Eagle* reported that **Mrs. John Penta** had the first lesson with Nelson since he became the ruler of golfdom and that **Johnny Giles, Jr.** and **Avard Taylor** also spent time with Lord Byron on the lesson tee.

Below, **Byron Nelson** appeared at a Reading men's apparel shop on June 20 and 21, 1939.

**Come In and Meet  
The United States Open  
Golf Champion**



**Byron Nelson**  
*Will Be In Our Store  
Tomorrow  
and Thursday  
between  
11:30 and 1:30 o'Clock*

**Get His Picture**  
*With Our Compliments  
Personally Autographed*

**Meet Him**  
*Ask About Golf and  
the Big Tournaments*

*See the  
National Open  
Golf Trophy*

Come in and meet the Champion Byron Nelson, who brought golfing fame to Reading, and who is unquestionably one of the greatest golfers of today. This is the last opportunity for local people to meet him as he leaves Reading after this season for the Inverness Country Club at Toledo, Ohio. He will be in our store tomorrow and Thursday during the above hours.

Here are some of the major Tournaments he has won while Professional at the Reading Country Club since 1937: . . . Master's Tournament at Augusta, Ga.; Central Pennsylvania Open; \$10,000 Belmont Open; Thomasville, Georgia, Open; Phoenix, Arizona, Open; North and South Open, and the National Open.

**CROLL & KECK** and more



Left, **Byron Nelson** demonstrates an iron shot during an exhibition on the first tee.

Right, **Byron Nelson** is presented with a movie camera by **Nathan Fein** on behalf of Berkleigh Country Club. Looking on are **J. Henry Stump**, mayor of Reading, and **Charles Corbitt**, president of RCC.





# The Golf Chronicles

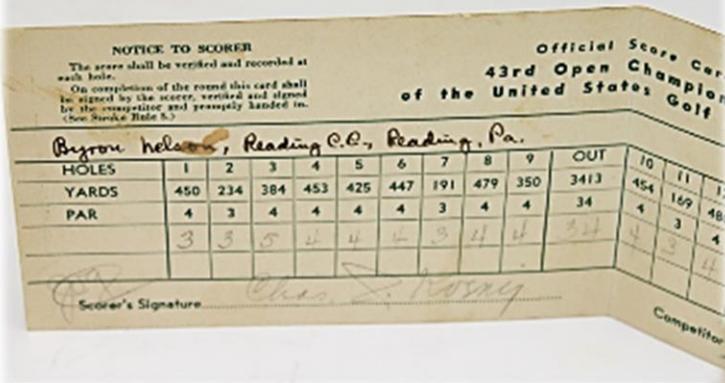
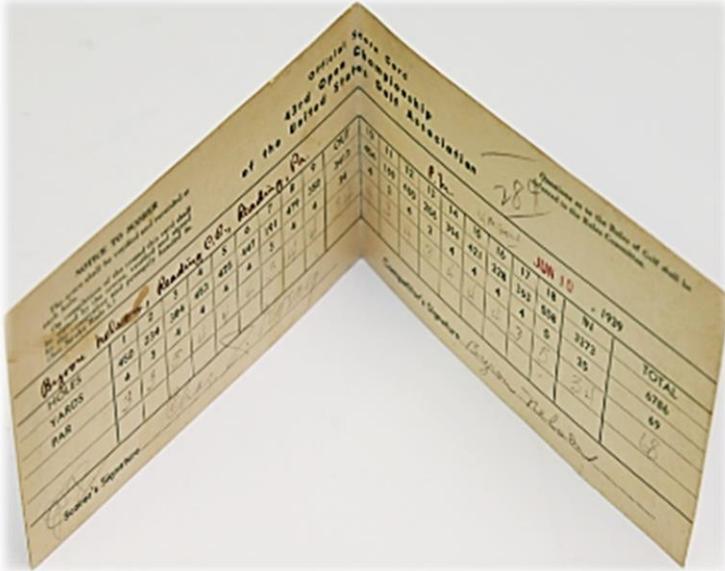
## Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland



Number 64 • December 8, 2017

### Byron Nelson's 1939 National Open final-round scorecard.

Source: USGA



Byron Nelson's steady fourth-round 68 included 15 pars, two birdies and a single bogey; he bested his playing partner, **Olin Dutra**, by 10 strokes. Nelson started the fourth round, played Saturday afternoon, five strokes behind the leader, **Johnny Bulla**, who shot 68 in round three, played Saturday morning. With Bulla struggling to a final-round 76 for a 287 total and **Sam Snead's** triple-bogey 8 (286 total) on the finishing hole, Nelson made up the deficit and tied **Craig Wood** and **Denny Shute** at 284, eight over par.

