



The Golf Chronicles

Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland



Number 69 • May 14, 2018

All Good Things Must Come to an End

In 1945, **Byron Nelson** won 11 consecutive tournaments, a record that most likely will never be broken. The streak came to an end in Memphis. Here's how he explained his finish:

"That's where I really lost my concentration. I think it was because of fatigue; not physical fatigue as much as mental fatigue."

In the final round, he was making up ground on **Freddie Haas**. On a back-nine par-three hole, his 7-iron tee shot hit the flag stick and caromed away, leading to a double bogey. He lost to Haas by two strokes.

Nelson never acknowledged his consecutive wins in the black book. The entry for the Memphis Open is to the point:

69-73-66-69—276
tied for 2nd \$1,200

The end of the streak wasn't much of a setback for Lord Byron. He won the following week in Knoxville by 10 strokes then finished second in Nashville, third in Dallas and fourth in Tulsa.

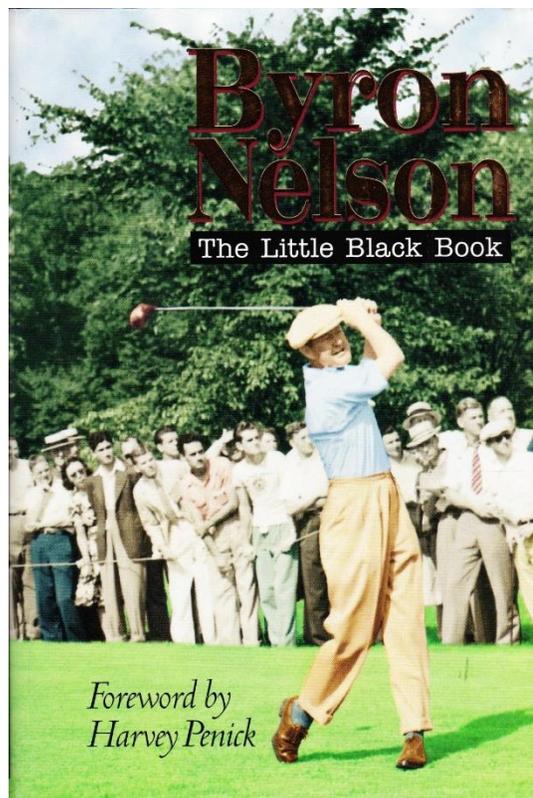
The tour moved to the Pacific Northwest where Nelson won by seven strokes in Spokane and finished second in Portland. He finished ninth at Tacoma, his only finish out of the top five all year.

He bounced back pretty well the following week in Seattle. He shot 62-68-63-66—259, winning by 13 strokes and setting a 72-hole scoring record. **Mike Souchak** shot 257 in the 1955 Texas Open to break the record. The record currently stands at 253 by **Justin Thomas** in the 2017 Sony Open.

Nelson capped a 19-victory year with an eight-stroke win in Ft. Worth.

Byron Nelson's 1945 highlights:

- He won the PGA championship
- He shot par or better in 97 rounds (87 percent)
- He shot 15 rounds over par (13 percent)
- He shot 12 consecutive rounds in the 60s



Byron Nelson—Conqueror of the Golfing Part of the World

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Byron Nelson Classic, to be played May 17 – 20 at Trinity Forest Golf Course, Dallas, The Golf Chronicles takes a look Lord Byron's record-shattering, hall-of-fame career. This is the first in a series.

Byron Nelson didn't smoke. He abstained from alcohol. Wasn't a gambler. Maybe even didn't curse.

But he kept a little black book. In it, he inscribed his conquests. He noted their unique characteristics. He called the black book a remembrance, a scrap book of twelve years of his life on the road as a touring professional, often away from his family.

He was lonely. He had a lot of time after the day's golf was completed. He spend hours on trains traveling from tournament to tournament. He had to fill the hours, so recording his conquests in a little black book made perfect sense. He couldn't explain why he kept the book, except that it must have had something to do with his love of figures.

Thankfully, Nelson kept the little black book long after his touring professional days were over. And thankfully, he published the little black book in 1995 (*Byron Nelson: The Little Black Book*, The Summit Publishing Group, Arlington, Texas, ISBN 1-56530-180-3).

Between 1935 and 1947, he recorded every round of every tournament he played. He wrote down the name of the tournament, his score, his finish and how much he won. He even noted caddy fees.

For some events, Byron commented on his play. Here are his first entries in 1935.

Riverside (Cal.) Pro-Am

Score 64 Place 2nd tie Money \$125.00

Los Angeles Open

Played bad all thru
75-75-80-74—303

San Frisco Match Play

146 qualified 6th
Beat Lawson Little 5-4
Beat Vic Ghezzi 3-2
Lost to Jug McSpadden 5-4
Won \$154.00

Phoenix Open

Played last 9 holes bad
72-73-71-74—290
won 10th and \$75.00.

Charlotte Open

Played well all through
73-71-70-70—284
won 6th and \$100.00.
Had 7 on par 4 no. 4 in last round



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He Wasn't Called Lord Byron for Nothing

Byron Nelson retired as a touring professional after the 1946 season.

Although he played infrequently after that, he managed to win the 1948 Texas Open, the 1951 Crosby Invitational and the 1955 Crosby Pro-Am and French Open.

His last appearance in a major championship was the 1966 Masters, where he missed the cut. He tied for 15th in 1965.

He currently ranks sixth in all-time PGA Tour wins with 54, including five major championships:

- The Masters, 1937 and '42
- The PGA, 1940, '45
- The U.S. Open, 1939

Between 1934 and 1951, Nelson finished out of the top 10 in the Masters only once, tied 13 in 1936.

He played the Open Championship only two times.

His journey to the U.K. in 1937 coincided with the Ryder Cup matches, which the U.S. won, 8-4. In the Open at Carnoustie a week later, Byron finished fifth, six behind **Henry Cotton**, winning \$125.

From his book, *How I Played the Game*: "Our boat tickets cost \$1020, plus I'd lost a month out of the summer in the shop [at RCC], so you can see why we didn't play the British Open much back then."

He played at St. Andrews in '55 at the urging of his friend, **Eddie Lowrey**. **Peter Thompson** won at 7 under par. Nelson shot 72-75-78-71—296, for 32nd place. He averaged 37 putts per round.

Unbeknownst to Nelson, Lowrey entered him in the French Open. Byron broke 70 in the first three rounds, but posted 38 for the front nine of the fourth round. He came home in 32 to win, the first American winner since **Walter Hagan** in 1922. His prize of 10,000 francs didn't cover the hotel bill.

He is one of only two golfers to have a PGA tournament named in his honor. The other is the **Arnold Palmer** Invitational.

Atlanta Open

Terrible rain in second round
71-75-69—215
won 3rd and \$250.00

Augusta Natl. Open (Now known as The Masters.)

played last three holes bad
74-72-71-74—291
won 8th tie and \$137.50 (His book, *How I Played the Game*, credits Nelson with a 9th place tie.)

He recorded his first win in the **1935 New Jersey State Open**, played August 8, 9 and 10.

75-71-70-72—288
won by 3 strokes won \$400.00
also won \$40.00 pro-am

He noted the following about the **1935 National Open** played at Oakmont.

75-81-82-77—315
played well but no head work, failed to qualify by one stroke (Nelson explained that "no head work" means he was not concentrating. The reference "failed to qualify" most likely means he did not earn any money for his tied 32nd finish.)

Here is his comment about the **Western Open**, where he won \$200 for a third-place finish:

Played well except for no. 16 had 8-4-6-6, 4 balls in the water

Then there is this blunt observation from 1935:

PGA Qualifying
80-76 failed

Among the more interesting entries are for the **Central Pennsylvania Open**. What he omits is that the tournament was played at Reading Country Club, his home course.

From 1937
Central Penna
69-71—140 tie
68 playoff
won \$150 (*Nelson defeated Bruce Coltart, Woodcrest, N.J., 68-75 in a playoff.*)

From 1938
Central Penna. Open
66-75—141
second won \$90 (*According to the Reading Eagle, August 9, 1938, Nelson won \$75. Ed Oliver, Wilmington, Del., won his second title with a 140, two under par.*)

From 1939
Central Pa. Open
68-69—137
won \$100 (*Nelson's tournament-record 137, five under par, was three better than Sam Byrd of Philadelphia Country Club, where Nelson won the U.S. Open that June.*)

Byron wrote this about his victory in the **1939 National Open** at Philadelphia Country Club.

73-72-71-68—284
tied Wood, Shute
tied Wood 68-68
won 70-73 won \$1000

His final little black book entry, for **The Masters**, was also the only entry in 1947. His understated description:

Masters
69-72-72-70—283
won 2nd won \$1,500.00