



# The Golf Chronicles

## Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland



Number 70 • May 19, 2018

### Money Machine

**Byron Nelson** retired as a touring professional after the 1946 season. He played infrequently after that, but good enough to win the 1948 Texas Open, the 1951 Crosby Invitational and the 1955 Crosby Pro-Am and French Open. His last major championship was the 1966 Masters, where he missed the cut. He tied for 15<sup>th</sup> the previous year.

In 1937, his first year at RCC, Nelson won \$6,509 in tour events. Caddy fees, ranging from \$11 to \$125.50 per tournament, totaled \$699.50. Entry fees, \$5.00 for most tournaments, came to \$130.50. His RCC contract guaranteed him \$3,750 plus whatever he made from giving lessons and golf shop sales.

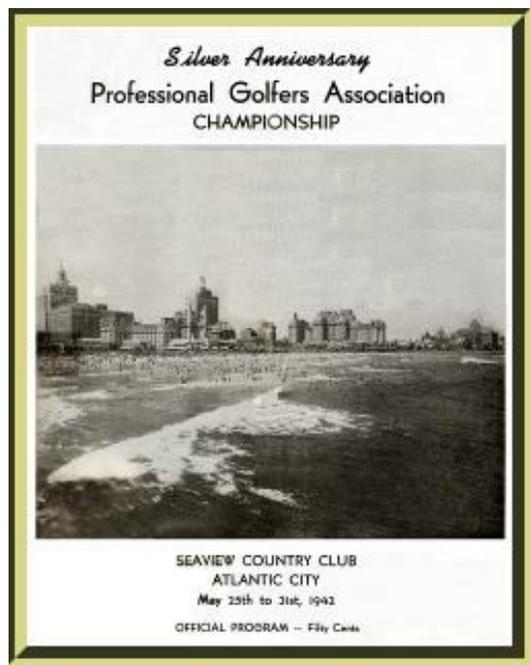
In 1938, his guarantee was raised to \$5,000. From *How I played the Game*, page 80: "That wasn't salary. It was simply that if I didn't clear \$5,000 from my shop, club care costs, lessons, clothing, clubs, balls, etc., then the club would make up the difference. Fortunately, I had to trouble meeting and even surpassing that guarantee, cut to increased play and more lessons."

For his career, Byron won 54 tournaments, including five majors, and \$201,160 in prize money.

Putting that in perspective, at the 2018 Players Championship, **Chesson Hadley, Brooks Koepka, Ian Poulter, Adam Scott, Tiger Woods** and **Justin Thomas** finished tied for 11<sup>th</sup> at 277,

From the Little Black Book:

- His lowest purse was \$10.40 for the 1935 New Jersey Pro-Am.
- His largest prize was \$14,700 for the 1947 Tam O'Shanter Open.
- He was paid appearance fees of \$250 for the Massachusetts State Open and \$200 for the St. Paul Open, both in 1939. From his book *How I Played the Game*: "There weren't many events that paid appearance money then, and I'm glad the PGA stopped it, but it sure did come in handy when most of us were just barely making ends meet."
- He noted, without explanation, a \$60 'special prize' in the 1939 Western Open.



**Byron Nelson** led **Jim Turnesa**, 1-up, on the final hole of the semi-final match of the 1942 PGA Championship when he lost concentration and missed a two-foot putt. Turnesa won on the 37<sup>th</sup> hole. The next day, he lost the final match to **Sam Snead**, 2 and 1. Turnesa had defeated **Ben Hogan**, 2 and 1, in the quarter-final match.

iron play. Those comments disappeared as his game improved.

Here is what he wrote about the 1935 Indianapolis Open: Shot 80-75, failed to qualify. Putted terrible. 14 three-putts on 36 holes.

Gulfport 1945:  
Tied Snead.  
Shot 71 in playoff.  
Lost on 19<sup>th</sup> hole.

For his greatest victories, Lord Byron noted just the facts.

Augusta 4-14-37  
66-72-75-70—283  
Won by 2 strokes  
Won \$1,500

*In his book How I Played the Game, Nelson reports on page 64 that he had a practical reason for wanting to play well at Augusta: he needed money to stock the pro shop at his new course, Reading Country Club. He travelled from Georgia directly to Reading.*

Natl. Open – Phila. [1939]  
73-72-71-68—287  
tied Wood, Shute  
tied Wood 68-68  
won 70-73  
won \$1000  
  
PGA [1940]  
Won \$1100

*Nelson was modest. He didn't note that he defeated Sam Snead, 1-up, in the 36-hole final played at Hershey Country Club. Snead's birdies on 12, 13 and 14 gave him his first lead at 1-up. Nelson came back with birdies on 16 and 17 and won by matching The Slammer's par 3 on the final hole. For the 36 holes, Nelson posted eight birdies, one bogey and one double bogey. Snead also fired eight birdies against two bogies.*

### Still Byron After All These Years

*As we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> 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 second in a series.*

The *Golf Chronicles* #69 introduced **Byron Nelson's Little Black Book**, his personal diary from 1935 to 1947. He recorded his every tournament: score, finishing position and money won. He even noted caddy and tournament entry fees and playing advice.

For some events, he included brief comments.

Such as Swickley Open 1935: Played irons badly.

Or this comment from the 1935 Glen Falls Open: Tied for 12<sup>th</sup>. Won \$56. Putted terrible.

In those early years, he made numerous comments about poor putting and terrible



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### So Much Respect

**Byron Nelson's** little black book includes commentary from a number of golf professionals.

My father taught me that golf is a game for gentlemen. And I can't think of a nicer gentleman than Byron Nelson. I'm only sorry we were from different generations. It would have been fun to compete against him.

— Arnold Palmer

To me, whatever Byron Nelson said or did was the thing to do, from wearing a coat and tie to how to swing a golf club. My knowledge of the swing is from Byron.

—Ken Venturi

He was the greatest putter God ever put on this earth. And the best iron player and...he was just a helluva good golfer.

—Henry Picard

You know, Byron didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't play around, didn't dance and I wondered just what the hell *does* he do?

—Sam Snead

Winning the Nelson four times was obviously wonderful because of my relationship with Byron and Louise. But I didn't enjoy the victories because I always wanted more. Then Byron gave me his most enduring advice: It's not how you play, it's how you conduct yourself and how you treat people.

—Tom Watson

To me, he was always the picture of a golf swing. My teacher told me that Byron had the first one-piece takeaway from the ball—the first modern swing. Old-timers like Sarazen were all hands and wrists.

—Mickey Wright

I was amazed at what Byron did in his great year of 1945. Eleven straight wins and eighteen tournament victories. It's still hard for me to believe that anyone could play so well for such a long period of time. But as much as I was impressed by his wins and his great record, I've treasured our friendship much more. I think the big thing we have in common is that we love people more than golf.

—Harvey Penick

He was a little more expansive in his description of his win in the 1945 PGA Championship at Moraine Country Club, Kettering, Ohio.

70-68—138; First medalist won \$125  
1<sup>st</sup> beat [Gene] Sarazen 3-2  
2<sup>nd</sup> beat [Jim] Turnesa 1-up  
3<sup>rd</sup> beat [Denny] Shute 3-2  
4<sup>th</sup> beat [Claude] Harmon 5-4  
5<sup>th</sup> beat [Sam] Byrd 4-3  
won \$3,500

*What Byron doesn't mention is that each match was played at 36 holes. Nelson played 205 holes, including the two qualifying rounds, in six days. He was 37 under par for the event.*

How about this description of his victory in the 1942 Masters.

Augusta Natl.  
68-67-73-72—280  
Tied Hogan  
won 69 to 70 playoff; won \$1,500

Byron's playing advice is as fresh and relevant today as it was in the 1930s and '40s.

**Putting** (page 2): You are going to three-putt some holes, but if you are three-putting a lot, you need to do some work in two areas: work on short putts and work on lag putts.

**Playing in the wind** (page 54): The assumption is that you have to hit the ball low to be a good bad-weather player. But that's not the secret to it. What is most important is hitting the ball solidly. A lot of people playing in the wind will swing harder, trying to hit the ball harder. Their timing gets off and they don't make good contact. Therefore the ball doesn't go as far as you want it to. Keep your rhythm, try to hold your balance and brace yourself against the wind. Maybe widen your stance a little.

**Practice** (pages 24 and 86): I didn't practice much, but that was by design. Golf is like anything else. You learn by doing. You just keep doing it until you can do it subconsciously. I had my swing pretty well grooved. It didn't make sense to me to be going out to the range and beating several hundred balls a day. Before I played, I just hit a few balls to warm up.

**Swinging in the rain** (page 94): The thing about playing in the rain is that you have to be careful not to overswing. Play a little shorter, a little firmer and use a little more club. The ball going through the air is being hit by water. It's simple: the harder it's raining, the more the ball is being hit, and is being slowed and knocked down. Adjust accordingly.

**Drive for show** (page 120): We had a long-driving contest nearly every week. I wasn't considered a long driver, so I usually didn't get in them. But sometimes they would want me to hit, so I was game. You had to keep in in bounds to win, and while mine wouldn't be real long, I won a few of them that way—just by hitting the ball straight.

**When the going gets rough** (page 126): When in the rough, the average player will try to hit the ball harder to get it out. You need to hit the ball harder, yes, but it's also important to use the right club. Use a club that will allow you to get the ball up and out of the rough. Use a club with some loft. When in the rough, you have to yank the club out as quickly as possible after striking the ball. Hit down on the ball, then get that club up and out of there. Get the ball back into the fairway. Bad holes are a result of trying to hit miracle shots out of bad places.

**In the zone** (page 140): My way of playing was fairways and greens, fairways and greens. Keep it straight, keep it safe, and capitalize on as many birdie puts as possible.

**Judging distances** (page 158): One of the rules about estimating distances is that it's always father across water than it looks. I figure your eye sees only about half of the water surface in front of you. Or when you are shooting at a green fronted by a bunker, the tendency is to figure distance to the back lip of the bunker, forgetting to add in the distance from the back of the bunker to the front of the green. What makes a green hard to judge in terms of yardage is that sometimes there is nothing behind the green to use for perspective.