



The Golf Chronicles

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



Number 29 • January 10, 2016



In this photo from the *Reading Eagle*, April 9, 1939, Byron Nelson gives a lesson to 11-year-old Buddy Lutz at Reading Country Club. Nelson would win the National Open later that year. Lutz would go on to a storied career in Berks County golf, winning the Berks Am four times (1948-'49-'51 and '63).

The Scribe

Matthew P. Romanski was on the editorial staff of the *Reading Eagle* for 50 years. He was Sunday women's page editor when he retired in 1976. He continued as a contributor, with his articles and photos appearing into the mid-1980s. His photos were also published in national magazines such as *Life*.

Romanski immigrated to the United States from Poland in 1912 at age nine months, arriving at Ellis Island with his mother, brother and sister. His father, who was already in the country earning money to bring his family to the U.S., was on hand to greet them.

Matthew Romanski died on November 13, 1983, at age 72 and is buried at Gethsemane Cemetery, Laureldale

This Game Called Golf – 1939 Style

Golf was a growing sport in 1939, in the country and in Berks County. The exploits of players such as Byron Nelson, Walter Hagan and Gene Sarazen were featured regularly on the sports pages. Nelson's tenure as head golf professional at Reading Country Club also threw the national spotlight on Berks County, especially when he won the 1937 Masters and the 1939 National Open.

The local golfers also made headlines. The *Reading Eagle* followed the career of Miss Edith Quier, a nationally ranked amateur who competed in tournaments across the country against golf legends such as Glenna Collett Vare, namesake of the Vare Trophy awarded to the player with the lowest scoring average on the LPGA tour, and Maureen Orcutt Crews. Among the county's premiere sports events were the Berks Amateur (established in 1929) and the Berks Publinx (first played in 1931) golf championships, and the Central Pennsylvania Open, a professional event played at Reading Country Club. At the high school level, a youngster named Johnny Markel was not only winning the state championship in 1939, he also won the Berks Am in 1938 at age 16, still the youngest winner, and went on to take six more championships (1940-'41-'47-'53-'54 and '60).

Such was the interest in the sport that the *Reading Eagle* published a golf column, "From Tee to Green by Dan Divot", and Bill Reedy, the sports editor, devoted many column inches to the people who populated the links. Mr. Divot's writing style was a close match for Mr. Reedy's. Just sayin'.

To kick off the 1939 season, the *Eagle* ran a series of articles under the heading "This Game Called Golf – And What Berks Countians Think of It". The articles appeared under the by-line of *Eagle* staff writer Matthew P. Romanski, and profiled the county's golf courses.

Each article was preceded by the following editor's note: *This is the first [or second, third, and so on] in a series about Berks County's seven golf courses, and the hobby in which is invested more money than any other sport. We're going to tell you a thing or two about the time golf in Reading was known as an old man's game, when golf clubs were called shinny sticks, and when you had to run a gauntlet of jeers if you were seen on the street in a pair of knickers. Today former golf widows are tagging along to the links and junior keeps a golf ball in his pocket as company for his marbles, top and fishing book.*

Knickers are gone from the scene, mostly, and many calendar pages have turned since junior last carried his marbles, top and fishing book in his pocket. But golf balls? Let's hope all the juniors and their sisters keep picking up the game.

The first article, published on April 9, focused on RCC and Byron Nelson. On the following Sundays, the *Eagle* printed articles that highlighted Berkshire Country Club, Berkleigh Country Club, Galen Hall Golf Club, the now-defunct Riverside Golf Club, Manor Golf Club and Rich Maiden Golf Club. Berkleigh, then a nine-hole, was set to re-open that spring following a fire that razed the clubhouse. Rich-Maiden was also a nine-hole layout.

In this and subsequent issues of *The Golf Chronicles*, we'll look at the *Reading Eagle's* articles and find out what was happening on the Berks County golf scene in 1939. The text is a bit fuzzy, which is what you get with micro-filmed copies of ole newspapers.

We'll begin at the beginning with the Reading Country Club article on the following page.



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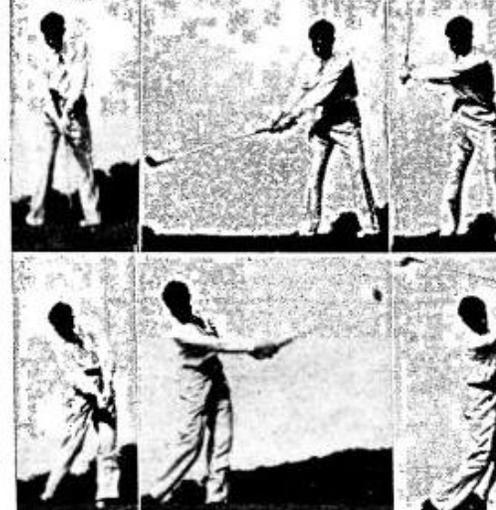


1—This is how the Reading Country Club, most pretentious of Berks county's seven golf courses, looks from the air. The shot was taken by an Eagle cameraman recently from a plane piloted by Eddie Nibur as it glided a few hundred feet above

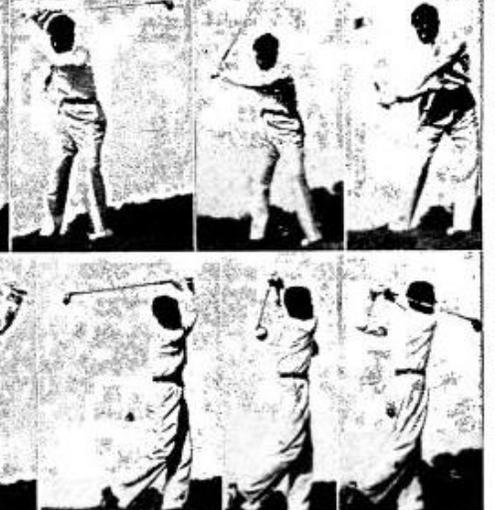
the links. The road leading to the circle in front of the club house comes off the Philadelphia pike, which the course borders. In the summer, when trees and shrubbery look their best, the country club grounds are a thing of beauty.



2—Yes, sir! They're taking to golf pretty young these days. Eddie Nelson (left) and 11-year-old Reading Country Club member, and a few pointers from Byron Nelson, the club pro, who returned home this week after a triumphant winter tour, which put him at the top of the season's money winners.



3—A new speed camera which takes pictures in rapid succession graphically shows the form which brought Byron Nelson the Phoenix and North-South championships.



4—The series of shots were taken before Nelson left Reading on his golf tour. Notice his fine stance, his perfect swing and follow through.



4—The lawn or back yard is as good a place as any to knock a ball around, as three-year-old Stephen A. Brown, son of Dr. S. A. Brown, Reffittown, demonstrates. Steady clubs to be in the youngest golfer in these parts. It just goes to show that golf is getting a lot of juvenile at its ranks.

Byron Nelson Predicts Popularity Of Sport Will Increase Threefold Within Next 10 Years

(Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles about Berks county's seven golf courses, and the hobby in which it invested more money than any other sport. We're going to tell you a thing or two about the time golf in Reading was known as an old man's game, when golf clubs were called sherry sticks, and when you had to run a gauntlet of fees if you were seen on the street in a pair of knickerbockers. Today former golf widows are tagging along to the links and junior keeps a golf ball in his pocket as company for his marbles, top and fishing hook.)

By MATTHEW F. ROMANSKI
Eagle Staff Writer

Take it from the season's No. 1 money-winning golfer of the United States, golf is definitely on its way to becoming America's No. 1 sport.

It's Byron Nelson speaking, folks!

Yes, the winner of the recent North and South Open tournament believes no recreation will have as many active participants within the next several years as the game which was known in Reading back in the gay 90's as an "old man's" pastime.

Several of the more spectacular winners, football, basketball and baseball, will continue to draw more spectators, but when it comes to predicting the game with the largest number of active players in the future, the Reading Country Club pro stacks golf against the field.

Down at the Reading Country Club, for instance, there are about 400 members, which is 20 times the number it had when incorporated in 1922. In Berks county as a whole, it is safe to say there are between 3,000 and 4,000 who either play once a year or 40 times a year.

2,500,000 Playing

"Therefore," continued Nelson, "Berks compares favorably with the rest of the nation, which has approximately 3,500,000 persons who can be classed as golfers. Don't be surprised to see a three-fold increase in the game's popularity within 10 years. And that—in case you're doing mental multiplication—means 10,000,000 devoted diggers on the links by 1932."

What a different picture existed 40 years ago.

Let's look into the archives of the Berks Historical Society. We find a paper written on the history of golf in Berks. In it G. Howard

insisted to be kept before the golfing public through his great showing on the road again this season.

From coast to coast Nelson and his fellow pros have been receiving great receptions. Year by year the crowds of spectators are getting larger. Nelson has been quite to notice this growth of interest, and it is with these facts in mind that he believes golf is to achieve unequalled popularity.

"Let's," said Nelson, "review things a bit.

"First, and indubitably most important, the increasing interest evidenced in golf by youth is to be considered. Slowly and surely the pendulum has swung away from the 'old man's game' attitude once held by young people toward golf.

"Likewise, the sport is no longer considered a 'sting' pastime. Such conceptions have been debunked. The youth of America has awakened to the fact that golf has much to offer as a sport; that study, concentration, poise and stamina of mind and body are prime requisites before one becomes a fine golfer. The earlier you start, the better."

Cites Example

Nelson mentioned 11-year-old Buddy Lutz, son of Elmer Lutz, Reading general director, as an example of how the youthful beginner can get into the "groove" much more readily than an adult whose muscles have already been developed.

Buddy, who can be seen on the Reading Country Club links practically every day during the summer, has already achieved the aim of every beginner—so break 100—and made a good showing in one of last year's tournaments.

Many seeds have been planted to change the old-time opinion about golf.

The most fruitful result, Nelson went on, "have been those of the past decade. With magazines, newspapers, sports the region and other mediums bringing golf to the attention of our youngsters, and with such grand players as Walter Hagen, Gene Sarazan, Harry Cooper, Sam Snead and a host of others supplying colorful sports copy, young people are beginning to take and think golf.

Schools Form Teams

"Then, too, golf is being added to the sports curriculum of an increasing number of schools with each passing year. While the game is not new to colleges and high schools, golfing teams are being

formed in junior high and, in numerous instances, grammar schools. Educators have come to realize that golf provides ample exercise for growing children, and yet is a non-violent sport. Teachers and parents alike are giving it their stamp of approval.

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boys and girls to take up the game. At many clubs, free group instructions are being given for members' children, and the pro usually dedicates his services for an hour or two each week, generally for about three months in the early spring.

A decided cooperation exists between parent and pro in trying to interest children in the game, according to Nelson, and it is working to the mutual advantage of both.

"Fathers and mothers," he added, "have voluntarily expressed their own desire to see their youngsters become engrossed in golf.

"When the children play golf, like the other fellow from Missouri, they say, 'we know they are out of mischief. We feel they are safe, away from harmful associations, and engaged in healthful, beneficial recreation."

"This attitude, I feel, will be important in golf's future, and the wisdom of these parents' conclusions can scarcely be questioned. Momentarily looking backward, but with one eye to the future, one can readily see that the Post-Play (Post-Thumb, miniature, etc.) courses which flourished about 1920 gave a considerable impetus in its present popularity.

Assured Certainty

"Most people found amusement putting around the miniature holes, although the majority had never played golf. The result was a curiosity as to what would happen on a regulation course. Then it was merely a matter of a few rounds on the greens and golf had several hundred more devotees."

Nelson is of the opinion that today's driving ranges will have the same effect, but that their influence will not be noticed immediately.

"Coincident with golf's increased popularity," Nelson continued, "I think there will be an improvement in the average caliber of golf played. Several of my colleagues, Ed Dudley, Horton Smith, Henry Picard, to mention a few, share my belief that tomorrow's Mr. Average Golfer will play a better game.

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County Boasts Seven Courses, With Estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Players No Longer a 'Sissy' Pastime

courses are now being built or changed so as to penalize the better players more than the poor ones. Hazards are being placed so that long off-line drives are penalized rather than being arranged so that shorter, watter hits are more than a normal handicap. The latter kind of a bad shot is an exact enough to handicap a player and prevent a low score on the average hole.

High Standard

"Comparatively, I'll say that right now the standard of golf played in America is the best in the world. Perhaps my opinion is strong, but, like the other fellow from Missouri, you've got to show me if I'm wrong.

"Several things are responsible for improving the caliber of golf in general. Chief of these is the casual growth of interest in golf tournaments—professional, amateur, club, city, county, all kinds—and the resulting keener competition. Furthermore, our golfing equipment is better and more scientifically designed. Lastly, but not least, many people are seeking golf instruction.

"The decided change in attitude toward golf instructions is apparent. Whereas golfers used to think of lessons as something to get any old time, today's crop of beginners usually want help from the start.

"This is an encouraging sign in looking ahead. I believe it is an attitude which will prevent more steadily on the years to go on. It is logical that a sound swing can be acquired more easily from scratch with instruction if a habitual 'vuffer swing' has not been formed beforehand. I have yet to meet the novice who regretted taking lessons in the beginning."

"But golf doesn't need me to sell the game."

"It is a sport whose appeal constantly grows for the player. Few persons who start golf abandon it, and young and old enjoy the game equally well. Golf is dear to the heart of those who get into it, and swing, and among them it is a subject of discussion for hours on end."

"For these reasons I'll bet a slightly better putter against a lip-

History of Club

The history of the Reading Country Club goes back to Jan. 15, 1892, when it was incorporated. The charter was signed by the late Harry, John J. Reed, Jr., Walter C. Sibley, Francis F. Seaver, Harry Morrill, Nathan S. Aldrich, George W. Mayner, Frank S. Gier, Lee Lincoln, Frank Sawyer, Jr., W. W. Kocik and Robert Trumbull.

Until 1921 the clubhouse was situated directly along the Philadelphia pike in a building which was purchased through the generous gifts of the club and its members. In that year the present structure of Reading Country Club, which now costs several hundred thousand dollars, was completed.

Charles A. Curran is the club president and Peter Woodcock secretary.

(Watch for the second of a series of golf articles next Sunday.)

The Predicts Twist

Earl Thompson, Capt. April 10, Mrs. Lydia Fiskel, 40, long-time preparator to enter a hospital at Putnam as a voluntary patient on July and says:

"I will be an accident of 23 years ago."

Mrs. Fiskel has had 17 children, 12 of whom are twins. All 17 are still living.

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