

Golf in the Philippines Comes of Age

By James M. Robb

On January 6, 1939, an estimated 70 top-notch golfers from all over the world will swing their drivers from the first tee of the Wack Wack course for the start of the three-day 1939 Philippine Open tournament. Among them will be George Montague, highly-publicised "mystery man of golf", Norman Von Nida, Australian ace, who won the title last year, E. Cremin, who beat him this year in the Australian Open, Chin Sesui of Japan, runner-up last year with nine of his countrymen, and our own Larry Montes, five-time title holder. The participation of such outstanding performers, some of whom will travel many thousands of miles to enter the competition, ensures the success of next year's tournament, and definitely marks the coming of age of golf in the Philippines.

Although it was only last year that an Open Tournament was held here with sufficient inducements in the form of cash prizes to attract champions, actually the annual Philippine Open is one of the oldest, if not the oldest tournament in the Far East, and the history of the ancient and honorable sport in the Philippines goes back so far that there are few left today who can tell us about it. In the hope that it might be of interest, we have tried to piece the tale together from scraps of information gathered from conversation with old-time golfing residents, old newspaper files, and club records.

Golf has been described as "a Scottish invention, an English sport, and an American profession." However this may be, golf in the very early days after the American Occupation was almost exclusively an English affair, although Mr. J. R. H. (Bob) Mason says the Englishmen "let a few Scotchmen play". These pioneers had a seven-hole course built on some land in Pasay, where the Manila Polo Club now stands, and there they endeavored to satisfy that golfers' urge to try to hit that little ball high, far and straight. Nothing organized about it; just a small group of English gentlemen far from home, infected with the golfing virus but otherwise normal, swinging their clubs on a bit of green grass—and keeping the game alive.

Most of these players, naturally, belonged to the Manila Club, sometimes known as the English Club. It was not long before there were enough club members



(Wack Wack) Looking toward the clubhouse from the eighteenth fairway. It's a long way home.

who insisted on playing golf, to form the nucleus of a golf club. Just how this came about is not clear, but evidently by 1902 there was a golf club of some sort within the Manila Club. Its membership was not well-defined, in fact was apparently not defined at all, for we have a minute-entry in this wise:

Manila, July 1, 1902.

"The club met in pursuance of a call by the acting secretary as follows:

"GOLF CLUB CIRCULAR June 24, 1902.

"In view of the disorganization in the management of the golf club, and the want of proper data for deciding the actual membership roll, it has been proposed that a general meeting be called of original members. Membership for proposal and those anxious of joining the club with the object of placing the same on a proper basis, electing committees, etc., and dealing with the general business of the club for the purpose of thoroughly reorganizing same. With this object a meeting will be held in the Manila Club Tiffin Rooms at 5:30 on Tuesday July 1st, when a full attendance is earnestly requested.

(Sgd.) H. T. MORRIS
Acting Hon. Sec. and Treas. Protem."

The meeting was duly held, articles of association and by-laws adopted, and officers elected. Civil Governor William Howard Taft was elected president, the club members evidently overlooking the rotund Governor's ineptitude for the game in favor of the amenities. Major H. C. Carbaugh (U. S. A.) served as secretary. Carbaugh was one of the very few American members, and he gradually brought in others who, in turn, introduced their friends into the Club, until eventually the Americans outnumbered the British. History records which will give it two full 18-hole courses. While the Manila Golf Club probably still has a little edge in the quality of its players—claiming such toprank amateurs

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(Wack Wack) The short seventeenth. You are all right if you get over the ditch and miss the trees—if you keep out of the traps.

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as Mervin Simpson, Jr., "Bob" Mason, Allison Gibbs, Jr., John R. McFie, Colonel R. K. Sutherland, Frank Chalmers, "Tommy" Aplin and A. C. Hall. — Wack Wack is coming up, with "Johnny" and Celso Tuason. Judge Albert, "Johnny" Cuadrado, and others. Many golfers belong to both organizations, and play on both courses. Rivalry is naturally keen, and many wordy battles have been waged at the 19th hole on the question, "how much tougher a course is Wack Wack than Caloccan"? A possible source of ill-feeling was neatly removed in 1935, when it was agreed that the Manila Golf Club would thenceforth have the Philippine Amateur Championship Tournament, and Wack Wack would play host at the Open.

The Open Tournament did not amount to very much until last year. They used to offer small prizes—\$50.00 or so—and most of the entrants were, as usual, Manila Golf Club players. Larry Montes used to turn out regularly, more for the publicity than anything else. Larry won the title in 1929, '31, '32, '36 and '37, and it began to look as though the boy would be an easy winner of every tournament.

But, then, Bill Shaw got to thinking again. And he talked to Henry Belden, and got him to thinking, too. Something was bound to happen, and it did—a big, bang-up 1938 Open, with four champions entered, and enough near-champions to provide the crowd with a thrilling battle which ended only with Norman Von Nida's blazing 69 on the last day.

Now, to attract golf professionals to a tournament takes just one thing—money. At least \$10,000 was needed in cash prizes, and Belden started out to pass the hat. It was not long before he discovered that people were reluctant to donate to the kitty when it looked as though Montes would have no competition for the first prize. "What is the use of putting up a big prize for Larry Montes to win?" was what Belden heard everywhere.

Good players, who could give Montes a run for his money, were desperately needed. Of course, invitations were sent to well-known professionals in the United States and elsewhere, but the first response was discouraging, for, while the Japanese signed with a will, the Americans held off. Hagen and Kirkwood went on a hunting trip to Africa. Sarazen, then in the course of a world tour, thought at first that he would enter, but later found that he could not work the event into his itinerary. As tee-off day drew near, it began to look as though the Open Championship would be fought out between the Japanese aces, Tim Kanrai, Siamese champion, and Larry Montes.

Then one day when things looked blackest, Belden got a cable from Australia, signed, "Norman Von Nida", asking for details. Von Nida had read about the tournament in "Golf in Australia", a sporting journal, and had become interested. Belden answered at once, and the Australian champion entered the competition. It was a big break for the committee, for the colorful Australian, as much as anyone else, made the tournament a success.

With these entrants to offer, the money was finally raised. As everyone knows, Von Nida, after trailing far behind for the first two days of play, burned up the course on the last day to nose out Chin Sesui, Japanese title holder, by two strokes. Behind the runner-up came two Japanese, while Larry Montes, who had led the field for the first 36 holes, blew up on the last round



J. A. MACKAY
First President, Manila Golf Club

to finish fifth. Hugh Robertson and "Tommy" Aplin, both of the Manila Golf Club, were first and second among the amateurs.

These men will all be in there next January, and this field, with the addition of Montague and the others, guarantees an Open Competition of a calibre equal to similar events everywhere. The Committee now envisions nothing less than a Far Eastern Circuit, embracing Open Tournaments in Japan, Siam, Australia, India, the Straits Settlements, and Manila. The tournaments would be held during the Fall and Winter—off-season for golf in the States—and would provide world-fame professionals with lucrative endeavor during these months. Sarazen has expressed himself publicly in favor of the scheme, and much work is now being done behind the scenes to bring it about.

It is a far cry from that first little group of Englishmen stroking happily away on their seven-hole that Major Carbaugh was a fair golfer, tying for third place with Warren Kennedy in the first Handicap Tournament. The competitors in that first tournament, held on February 28, 1903, negotiated the seven-hole Pasay course twice, and the Carbaugh-Kennedy tie was played off at the fifteenth hole.

By 1905, membership in the Manila Golf Club had grown to such an extent that the seven-hole course at Pasay was no longer satisfactory. Accordingly, in 1906, a nine-hole course was constructed out at Caloccan, and the Club transferred its activities there. In 1909, the land occupied by the golf course was purchased.

with an option on enough adjoining ground to construct an additional nine holes. In that same year, the Club was incorporated.

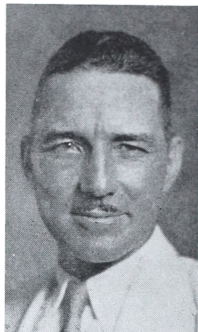
The Manila Golf Club dominated—and very nearly monopolized—the golfing picture in the Philippines for many years. While no Open Tournament was held until 1913, the annual Club Championship was the precise equivalent, since the best golfers in the country belonged to the Club and took part in the competition. This being so, when, in 1913, the Manila Golf Club sponsored an Open Championship with everybody welcome, the situation was but little changed, for the winner of the Open always turned out to be a Club member. "Bob" Mason won the title in 1913, and repeated in 1914, 1918, 1921 and 1927. J. C. McGregor took the title in 1919 and 1920, and title-holders of other years, such as G. M. Ivory, E. A. Noyes, Capt. J. S. Moore, and others were regular mainstays of the Club.

But, here and there, good golfers were developing outside of the Club membership. Out on the Municipal Links, for instance, there was a caddy by the name of Larry Montes, who, they said, had the most beautiful swing of any golfer in the country. Rumor had it that the boy could play a shot with a controlled hook on it for extra yardage, which, as every golfer knows, is as difficult to do as it is desirable. Other good players were developing on the little Wack Wack course, near Camp Nichols.

William J. Shaw of the Atlantic Gulf & Pacific Co., who acted as president of the Manila Golf Club in 1926, began to think about the situation. And when "Bill" Shaw thinks, something usually happens. The burden of his thoughts was that what golf in this country needed was another club which could furnish facilities for golfers of every nationality which the Manila Golf Club



W. J. SHAW

J. R. McFIE JR.
President, Manila Golf Club

could not duplicate. He reasoned that such a club would help the game to no end, since it would naturally lead to the development of more good players, and to healthy competition between clubs. Bill began to sound out his legion of friends on the subject.

The upshot of the whole thing was that the old-time Wack Wack club was taken over bodily, and entirely rejuvenated. A big tract of land was purchased out at

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COPRA AND ITS PRODUCTS

by
KENNETH B. DAY AND LEO SCHNURMACHER



KENNETH B. DAY

November was a comparatively quiet month for coconut products, except for one minor peak shortly after the middle of the month, at which time practically all the month's business was done. The month ended as it began, with prices weak and uncertain.

COPRA—Arrivals in Manila were somewhat disappointing, being off 37% as contrasted with October, although 2% above the previous November. Cebu arrivals were also off about 11% as compared with October, and 24% as compared with the previous November. The weather was bad

in Cebu with plenty of rain, thus holding up production of copra and transportation arrivals would improve. In Manila elec-



LEO SCHNURMACHER

tions and holidays did a good deal to limit production, thus holding copra back in the provinces which should be marketable in December and January.

When the month opened, copra was weak with no Manila buyers at over P5.75 for resacada, at which price sellers were not generally interested. Quotations dropped to P5.30, but owing to the stimulus in the American oil and copra markets resulting from election returns and a more encouraging world outlook, prices advanced and about the 18th of the month business was done at as high as P5.75. At this price a great deal of copra changed hands and trading was very brisk for a number of days. The market gradually eased, however, with selling down the line as far as P5.50. Below that figure very little business was done and at the end of the month buyers were quoting P5.30 to P5.40 with sellers holding back because of higher pro-

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Mandaluyong, where an elaborate 18-hole course was laid out. Plans were also drawn for a big, ultra-modern club-house, and for tennis courts and a swimming

pool. For ladies and super-duffers, a nine-hole auxiliary course was provided.

A membership drive quickly netted 400 members, at P1000 each. With the money thus in hand, "Jim" Black, long-time Manila Golf Club professional, was told to go ahead and lay out a course which would be worthy of the very best efforts of champions. Black proceeded to do just that. He found at Mandaluyong 880,000 square meters of land, abounding in natural golf hazards, and low-handicap men as well as duffers have since decided the canny Scotchman took advantage of each and every one of these hazards in building his course. It is a long course—par 72—6,590 yards, and no less a person than the great Gene Sarazen said last year to Henry Belden, "whenever anybody breaks par on this thing, please write and let me know".

The Wack Wack course was opened for play in 1931. Few changes have been made on it since it was first built, and those changes have been mostly with a view to placing somewhat less of a premium on distance, and more emphasis on accuracy with the irons.

Both the Manila Golf Club and the Wack Wack Golf and Country Club have prospered exceedingly since 1931. Neither organization has since look back, and in fact "Caloocan" is now engaged in erecting a new clubhouse to replace the 1914 structure, and Wack Wack is completing a nine-hole addition to the auxiliary course. "course" in Pasay nearly forty years ago, to the present lusty picture of two first-class golf clubs, and dozens of smaller courses all over the Islands, thousands of enthusiastic players, and an annual Open which attracts the very best the game has produced. But is it such a far cry, after all? To be sure, golf is still golf, and the 27-handicap duffer and the smooth, parbreaking professional have one thing in common: love of the game. Both get the same delightful thrill that comes from smacking out a long one straight down the fairway, or stroking a high pitch onto the green. The "pro" accomplishes these things automatically, like a well-oiled machine; the duffer does it accidentally, but the thrill is the same. The game is the thing, whether it is played with precise perfection in a big tournament to an admiring gallery, or hopelessly by a duffer everlastingly trying to straighten out his "gorblimey" slice. Those early pioneers deserve plenty of credit, and they wrought better than they knew, but don't forget the Game.



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