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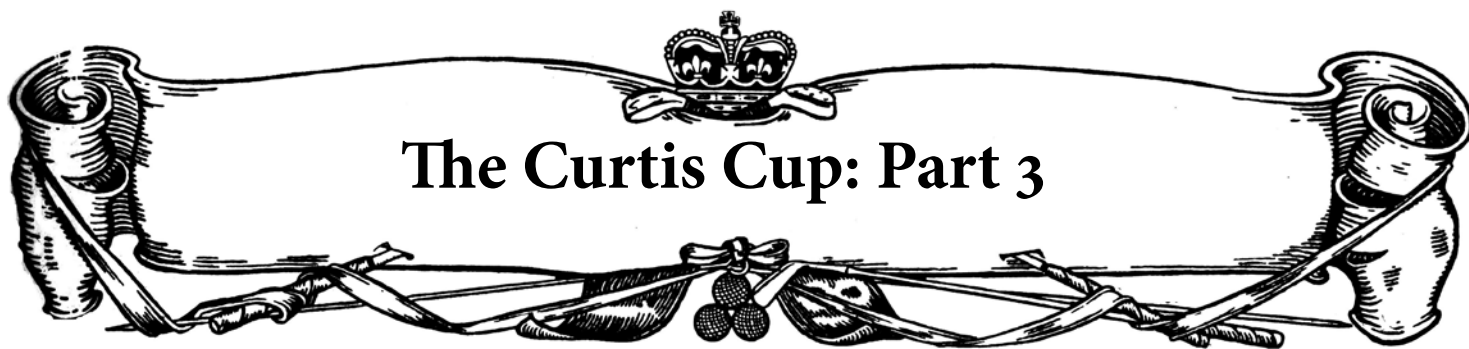
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We are grateful to **Jim McCormick** for permission to use as cover image, Charles Lees' wonderfully evocative *A Summer Evening on the Musselburgh Links*. This forms the main publicity theme for the exhibition *Musselburgh: Cradle of Golf*, which opens at the Musselburgh Museum on the 6th of July

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Lyle Slovick
concludes his account of the very first Curtis Cup match

Two weeks before the match date, Margaret Curtis wrote to Herbert Ramsay, now agreeing that 'it would be better to wait to give the cup and to say anything to the press'. She added that she had hoped to attend, 'but the charity meeting that I was combining it with has been called off – so it made it seem a rather expensive luxury. I think we have a real chance to win.'¹

Glenna Collett wrote an article for *The American Golfer* before the matches, paying respect to the opposition by stating that 'nothing is to be taken in advance as indicating an easy match', adding, 'we can't figure anybody on our team a reasonably sure winner in advance'. She believed this was the 'strongest delegation we have ever sent over', asserting that 'except for myself, all members of the team were rather active in a competitive way during the winter season just ended'. She reminded readers that weather would also play a role:

In one of my former visits to play in their championship, I experienced conditions such as I had never played in before. A cold rain fell all through my round, and the wind blew in gales, and the golf I played was something to be forgotten.²

After a few days of sightseeing, the team arrived five days before the matches, and commenced practice, including at the host club, Wentworth, a parkland course twenty miles from London. *Golf Monthly* described Wentworth as:

the only club in Britain which approaches the American ideal of a country club. ... Undulating pleasantly but not steeply, the soil is light, turf fine, and the bunkers, full of white sand, are on a grand scale, very big and menacing.

From the men's tees, which the women were expected to use, it played some 6,113 yards.³

One member of the US team was fortunate to even be there. Virginia Van Wie had been staying with Helen Hicks and working with well-known teacher Ernest Jones in New York, and the two had dinner with Lincoln Werden of *The New York Times* the evening they were to leave. It was then that Van Wie realized she had left her golf shoes at the Women's National Golf and Tennis Club, where Jones was the professional. Werden offered to drive her back to the Club to fetch them, while Hicks made her way to the ship and told the captain her partner was *en route*. As one reporter described it, 'A wild ride followed and it was only Werden's ability as a driver that finally got them to the *Berengaria* just as it was about to cast off'. Van Wie would recall

nearly 60 years later, 'So, needless to say, I was very happy to get there. But it was touch and go for a while.'⁴

Hicks, the reigning US Women's Amateur champion, reported for *The New York Times* on her experiences as a member of the team. Bernard Darwin noted that some newspaperman called her 'Hard Hitting Helen', given her length off the tee, 'but it is a fine easy swing quite without any appearance of forcing'. She wrote that when the players began practising at Sandy Lodge, a course northwest of London designed by Harry Vardon, some 'were still afflicted with sea legs' after the ocean voyage. 'Our captain, Marion Hollins, is a good psychologist, and she thought it was best for us to get warmed up a bit on other courses before trying Wentworth'. The team felt it had a 'very good chance of walking away with victory'.

Hicks noted that the long game of all the US players was 'working very nicely, but the short game of pitching around the green is still difficult', due to their use of 'a niblick to soft greens, and the necessity in this country of playing to hard greens with the pitch and run we seldom use'.⁵

CB Macfarlane, one of Great Britain's leading golf writers, claimed that Glenna Collett Vare had 'lost none of her splendid length since she has taken to steel [shafted] clubs'. He described Helen Hicks as 'one of those happy golfers who laughs when she makes a mistake' and considered Virginia Van Wie and Maureen Orcutt 'a fine pair of golfers with grand swings which look as though they could never go wrong'. The team as a whole looked to him 'as composed of trained athletes and the players did not pursue the ball in any leisurely fashion'.⁶

Other members of the British press expressed concern with their side's preparation. The *Manchester Guardian* wrote the day of the event, 'it will not be surprising if the result is a British defeat. The Ladies' Golf Union have given their team an international character by including two Scottish players, but beyond that they have done little to ensure victory'.

The players, the article noted, had no idea who their partners would be earlier in the week, and 'instead of being asked to make themselves familiar with whatever peculiarities Wentworth possesses, they have been told only that the match will be played today'. The US team, conversely, had arrived early and had ample time to prepare so as to get 'accustomed to English weather and turf, and to acquire as much of the team spirit as is possible in golf'.⁷

The match

Saturday the 21st of May was a less than delightful day for golf, with grey clouds spitting rain for most of the day. At 10 am, an estimated 10,000 paying spectators watched the first match go off. Joyce Wethered partnered with Wanda Morgan against Glenna Collett Vare and Opal Hill. The tempo was set when Hill hit a 'long, straight, clean shot down the first fairway before one of the greatest and most enthusiastic crowds ever assembled at an English golf course'. Morgan followed with a nervous drive, scattering the gallery with her errant shot. The British pair had a 'terrible time on the greens', recalled Maureen Orcutt, with Morgan 'constantly leaving Joyce four and five feet from the hole and Joyce not able to hole the short putts'.⁸

Orcutt remembered Wethered as being long off the tee and usually a great putter. 'She had a very methodical swing, and it was beautiful to watch. ... She was the cream of the crop at the time. Glenna was our best and she was their best.' Vare and Hill were able to squeak out a 1 up victory, despite also being off their games. Helen Hicks noted that 'both recovered brilliantly from repeated difficulties. Although they were three down at

one time today, they overtook their opponents at the very last moment by refusing to admit themselves beaten'.⁹ Orcutt and Leona Cheney also won their match 1 up over Doris Park and Molly Gourlay.

Hicks reported that 'Miss Van Wie and I were even fours when the match ended on the seventeenth green', as they defeated Enid Wilson and Mrs JB Watson 2/1. Bernard Darwin wrote that the 'feature of the foursomes play in the morning (it cost Britain the match) was the fact that for once in her life the impeccable Miss Wethered had an attack of nerves on the green[s] and played but ill'.¹⁰

Hicks described the afternoon's play as 'marred by a steady downpour of rain, which favored the English players, who are more accustomed to wet play than we'. Wethered defeated Vare decisively 6/4, and according to Hicks, 'played as good golf as she ever played in her life'. Darwin reported that the match was a disappointment, and 'lacked nearly all the thrills of their historic duel at St Andrews' three years earlier in the Ladies' British Amateur, as Vare could win only a single hole against her opponent.



Opal Hill and Glenna Collett Vare against Joyce Wethered and Wanda Morgan, in the opening foursomes match

The match between Hicks and Wilson was a tight one, with neither player having more than a single hole advantage until the end. 'The rain just poured down', wrote Hicks, 'and carting an umbrella did not help any'. After holing a fifteen-footer on the Sixteenth to remain just one down, Hicks missed a four-foot putt on the Seventeenth to lose 2/1.¹¹

Virginia Van Wie was three down after eight holes to Wanda Morgan, but roared back to win 2/1, ending it with a 35-foot birdie putt at the Seventeenth. In the remaining matches, Diana Fishwick beat Maureen Orcutt 4/3, Molly Gourlay and Opal Hill halved (when Hill left a winning putt on the lip of the cup), and Leona Cheney beat Elsie Corlett 4/3. With her two points won, Cheney 'did very much to contribute to the America victory', noted *Canadian Golfer*. In the end, as WF Leysmith wrote in *The New York Times*, 'Cool heads and steady nerves in crisis after crisis' gave the United States a 5½ points to 3½ points victory over Great Britain and Ireland.¹²

Retrospection

Bernard Darwin believed that if the match could be played again, the British side would have performed better in the foursomes, 'because they could hardly collapse so badly twice in succession. It was a bad collapse, no doubt of that, and I have

not seen such gloom and consternation in a British crowd since eight and twenty years ago when Mr Walter Travis was steadily and surprisingly putting his way to victory at Sandwich' [in the British Amateur].

Enid Wilson gave her own typically honest assessment of the defeat in the June issue of *Golf Monthly*:

The trouble was that we were too cocksure and took it for granted we could win without much difficulty. The Americans, with their usual thoroughness, worked together as a team, and left no stone unturned. The result, let us hope, will have the effect of making us realise that we cannot treat international golf lightly, and we must pull ourselves together if we wish to resist the challenge from overseas.¹³

Wilson never forgot the disappointment, saying in 1991 that 'the LGU's complete lack of organization ... was inexplicable. We were thrilled to have Joyce Wethered as our captain and leader, but there was no way on which she could have been expected to arrange accommodations, transportation, and meals for the home side'. *Golf Monthly* was also critical: 'The Ladies' Golf Union, with all the experience of our men in the American internationals [Walker Cup] to guide them, should have made more preparation, and it was altogether wrong to delay the arrangements of the British team.'¹⁴



Opal Hill plays from a bunker during the first match

Wilson maintained it was 'the worst day I've ever spent on the golf course, because we didn't know who we were playing in the foursomes until we were on the way to the first tee. We lost all of them. The match was gone beyond redemption'. She credited Marion Hollins with doing 'a wonderful job with her team: 'she had them out every day practising [Scotch] foursomes which you don't normally play in the States. And her captaincy prevailed.'

Years later Joyce Wethered insisted that the captain's role did not come easily: 'To be honest, I no more liked ruling others than I liked to be ruled myself. Things such as team practices appalled me.' Wilson also observed a difference in the approach to playing the game between the US and British teams: 'The trouble lies in the fact that we are frightened to be found working at the game. We still cling to the old-fashioned idea that it is unsportsmanlike to regard a game seriously.'¹⁵

This 'old-fashioned idea' also reflected gender biases that portrayed women who took sports too seriously, and played to win, as being 'unladylike'. Unlike men, who saw sport as 'something to be enthralled in, to bet on and to fight over', women sought sport for diversion, and they remained good friends no matter who won or lost. Even in formal competitions, the central aim was 'to renew old and make new friendships'.¹⁶

Yet 30 years earlier, Rhona Adair, the great Irish player, shared views similar to Wilson's. She wrote in her book *Golf for Women* in 1902 that women golfers in the US had 'pluck'. That is, they had energy and enthusiasm, even when things looked grim. Never in her experience had she seen 'such universal grit ... or what I believe you call 'nerve' as is displayed by every woman golfer in America'. She found that 'with the never-say-die spirit, which I have always heard was typical of all America, they keep right on playing until their opponent's ball is actually in the hole'.¹⁷

Wilson maintained the US team was serious from the start, 'out on the practice ground with dozens of balls, concentrating and hitting their shots correctly'. The loss was personally devastating and convinced her that 'we shall all have to pull ourselves together and work really hard if we wish the supremacy of women's golf to remain in Britain'.

Bernard Darwin made the following assessment:

There are many ifs and butts, excuses and alibis, however I am not going to indulge in any of them. The right side won, and moreover, the side of better swingers of a golf club won. If marks had to be given for style, the result of the examination would certainly have been in the victor's favour.

The British defeat notwithstanding, the match was seen as a success on both sides: 'It was a most thoroughly and friendly and enjoyable match in every way and there was a mighty crowd to see it', wrote Darwin. The entire length of first hole was 'a thick black line of people. I doubt if any men's match could have gathered so many'.¹⁸ Years of labour by the Curtis sisters and others had been rewarded.

Acceptance

At the end of the year, the LGU offered a gift of sorts to the USGA, when, at its November meeting, it voted to finally accept the cup. Margaret Curtis wrote to Herbert Ramsay with the happy news, but added that the LGU seemed

to emphasise keeping the matches between ourselves, only suggesting that France come in when able. ... Harriot and I have hoped and intended that the cup might be played for by women from many countries and that the matches would develop good fun and good feeling internationally.¹⁹

While it was hoped that other nations would eventually join in the match, the Curtis Cup has remained a two-sided event.

Margaret Curtis, when reflecting on the event shortly before her death, claimed that the inaugural match of 1932 'was a day of real gratification for us. It was the start of some wonderful golf competitions and some wonderful friendships'. Curtis spoke from experience. In 1905, when she and her teammates lost that informal match at Cromer, she fell to Ireland's May Hezlet, winner of three Ladies' British Amateurs. Afterward, the Curtis sisters had a lengthy discussion which May and her sister Florence (who also played) pondered the future of such matches.

May Hezlet would exchange letters with Margaret Curtis, and that August regretted not being able to accept an invitation to visit Curtis, lamenting that it was 'a more expensive outing than we could manage'. She reminded Curtis that she and Harriot 'promised to come to us the year after next when the championship will be in Ireland'.²⁰

In October, Hezlet wrote to Curtis to console her after her loss to Pauline Mackay in the finals of the US Women's Amateur. 'Just a few lines', she began, 'to tell you how sorry we all were that you didn't win the Championship as we hoped you were going to', adding 'better luck next time and win it and the Open [Ladies' British Amateur] championship the same year'. Camaraderie such as this was a key element in developing the Curtis Cup matches. In 1928 Curtis had said, 'I have great hopes that a game of such good sportsmanship as golf will develop the sentiments of fellowship that players feel ...'.²¹ Her hopes were indeed realised.

Beth Daniel, winner of the 1975 and 1977 US Women's Amateur and member of the 1976 and 1978 Curtis Cup teams, maintains that the experience 'is something that a lot of people don't understand, the camaraderie that comes out of it ... and when you come out of that week the friendships that you've made really mean a lot to you'. Nancy Lopez, a member of the 1976 team, said 'the Curtis Cup added a new dimension to the game', with its tradition and history. Being her first experience representing her country, she claimed, 'To this day, my spine tingles at the memory'.²²

Although the US has dominated the matches with a record of 28-8-3 through 2016 (GB and Ireland would not win until 1952), to play in the Curtis Cup remains a goal of top amateur golfers on both sides.

Since 1932, great players on the US side have included:

Patty Berg, Louise Suggs, JoAnne Carner, Anne Sander, Hollis Stacy, Beth Daniel, Nancy Lopez, Patty Sheehan, Juli Inkster, Carol Semple Thompson, and Lexi Thompson. On the Great Britain & Ireland side: Pam Barton, Jessie Valentine, Philomena Garvey, Elizabeth Price, Angela Bonallack, Belle Robertson, Mary McKenna, Laura Davies, and Catriona Matthew. In future years, the list will continue to grow with names not yet known to us.

Enid Wilson would attend several Curtis Cups after 1932, and said in 1991, 'I think the happiest match I ever went to was when the Curtis Cup went to Brae Burn [in West Newton, Massachusetts, 1958], and the Curtis sisters were greatly in evidence.' She recalled the players all in the clubhouse together, sitting at the same table. 'And the noise, the clamor they made, the shouts of laughter, that's what it's all about.'

Wilson had another lasting memory from the 1958 matches: 'The Curtis sisters said on that occasion: "We're so astonished by the publicity this event has achieved. We feel that the trophy is not pretentious enough." And everybody said, "But it's become a symbol ... of all the best that's in women's golf, it couldn't possibly be changed."'

And so the cup first offered in 1927 continues to be awarded to the winning team, a fitting reminder of the efforts of Margaret and Harriot Curtis to make real the international competition that took root in their imaginations in 1905. Their legacy lives on every two years, when players from both sides of the Atlantic tee it up, filled with a unique pride in representing their countries on a grand stage, just as those trailblazing women did in 1932.²³

Notes

1. Letter from Margaret Curtis to Herbert Ramsay, May 7, 1932.
2. Glenna Collett Vare, 'The International Team Match', *The American Golfer*, May 1932, 42, 62.
3. Anthony Spalding, 'Where American and British Ladies Will Meet', *Golf Monthly*, May 1932, 41; W.F. Leysmith, 'U.S. Women Golfers Beat British Team', *The New York Times*, May 22, 1932, 1.
4. Patrick Leahy, 'The Curtis Cup: A Welter of Incident', *Golf Journal*, July 1990, 17. Virginia Van Wie, interview by Joe Doyle, 32.
5. Bernard Darwin, 'The Team Matches at Wentworth', *The American Golfer*, July 1932, 52; Helen Hicks, 'Miss Hicks says Americans Have Good Chance for Victory over British golfers Tomorrow', *The New York Times*, May 30, 1932. A niblick is equivalent to a nine-iron today. The team practiced at Sandy Lodge, Camerley Heath, and Sunningdale, before tackling Wentworth.
6. W.F. Leysmith, 'US Women Stars Impress British', *The New York Times*, May 18, 1932.
7. 'USA Challenge', *The Manchester Guardian*, May 21, 1932, 5.
8. Leysmith, 'US Women Golfers Beat British Team', 1; Orcutt, 'The Curtis Cup – A Preliminary Skirmish', 12. *The New York Times* noted '10,000 umbrellas' in its report.
9. Orcutt, interview by Joe Doyle, 24-25; Helen Hicks, 'Superior US Play Decided Foursomes', *The New York Times*, May 22, 1932.
10. Bernard Darwin, 'The Team Matches at Wentworth', *American Golfer*, July 1932, 15; Hicks, 'Superior US Play Decided Foursomes'.
11. Hicks, 'Superior US Play Decided Foursomes'; Darwin, 'The Team Matches at Wentworth', 15.

12. Orcutt, 'The Curtis Cup – A Preliminary Skirmish', 12; 'US Women Win International Match', *Canadian Golfer*, June 1932, 104; W.F. Leysmith, 'US Women Golfers Beat British Team', 1.
13. Darwin, 'The Team Matches at Wentworth', 52. Travis beat Ted Blackwell in the final of the British Amateur in 1904, 4/3 to become the first player from the US to win it; Enid Wilson, 'Lessons from Wentworth and Saunton', *Golf Monthly*, July 1932, 24.
14. Enid Wilson, interview by Alice Kendrick, May 28, 1991, USGA Oral History Collection 13-14, 38-39; 'Behind the Scenes', *Golf Monthly*, June 1932, 18.
15. Lewine Mair, 'Lady Heathcoat Amory', *Golf Monthly*, March 1984, 36; Wilson, 'Lessons from Wentworth and Saunton', 24.
16. Donald J. Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910* (The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 138.
17. Terri Leonard, Ed, *In the Women's Clubhouse: The Greatest Women Golfers in Their Own Words*. Contemporary Books, 2000. 26
18. Wilson, 'Lessons from Wentworth and Saunton', 26; Darwin, 'The Team Matches at Wentworth', 52.
19. Joe Looney, 'The Curtis Sisters of Boston', 16; 'May Hezlet – The Greatest Ever', *The Irish Times*, September 28, 1999, accessed September 1, 2017, www.irishtimes.com/sport/may-hezlet-the-greatest-ever-1.232438; Letter from May Hezlet to Margaret Curtis, August 25, 1905, Papers of the Curtis family, Carton 9, Folder 437. Hezlet won the British Ladies' in 1899, 1902, and 1907.
20. Letter from May Hezlet to Margaret Curtis, October 20, 1905, Papers of the Curtis family, Carton 9, Folder 437; 'Curtis Sisters Set Up Mark', *Boston Globe*, December 2, 1928.
21. USGA Rhonda Glenn Collection Box 2, Folder 9, notes on Beth Daniel, September 11, 1982, 5; Lewine Mair, *One Hundred Years of Women's Golf*, 133.
22. Wilson, interview by Alice Kendrick, 40-42; Margaret Curtis won the USGA's Bob Jones Award in 1958, which recognises the individual who demonstrates the spirit, personal character, and respect for the game exhibited by Jones. As she said, 'Golf is my game and I love it. I'd play it with rocks, if I had to'. See Tim Horgan, 'Science, Not Fashions, Helped Women's Golf – Margaret Curtis', unidentified clipping in USGA Pamela Fox Emory Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.
23. The current Women's World Amateur Team Championship was an outgrowth of the Curtis Cup. Conducted by the International Golf Federation (formerly the World Amateur Golf Council), which comprises the national governing bodies of golf in more than 125 countries, the World Amateur Team Championships are a biennial international amateur golf competition rotated among three geographic zones of the world: Asia-Pacific, American and European-African. Each team has two or three players and plays eighteen holes of stroke play for four days. In each round, the total of the two lowest scores from each team constitutes the team score for the round. The four-day (72-hole) total is the team's score for the championship. The impetus for the women's championship was an invitation by the French Golf Federation for the 1964 US Curtis Cup team to stop off in France for an informal match after that year's Curtis Cup match in Wales. The USGA accepted the invitation, but also suggested inviting other nations to create a women's counterpart to the World Amateur Team Championship (an event for men's teams begun in 1958 after an invitation from Japan to establish a match between the two nations.) The French were delighted to sponsor the inaugural women's championship in October 1964. A total of 25 teams and 75 players participated, which instantly established the competition as a member of international golf's family of championships.

This article stems from consultancy work undertaken on behalf of the USGA by BGCS member
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