



Tom's Message Board



The Pioneering Spirit

pi·o·neer \ , pī-ə- 'nir\

Verb: Develop or be the first to use or apply a new method, area of knowledge, or activity.

I just finished a book titled *The Greatest Game Ever Played* ...an inspirational and interesting book about the pioneers of the game of golf. I know, I know...golf? When you think pioneers, the first thoughts that come to mind are astronauts, scientists, and pilgrims...not golfers. The book (and also a movie) is about a veteran British player, Harry Vardon – the Jack Nicholas of his time – and a 20 year old American amateur, Francis Ouimet. Both grew up in working class families and excelled at the game early on. Their story tells of the challenges each faced while pursuing the game they loved; at a time when golf was just beginning to draw the attention and commercialism that is prevalent today. Their paths converged in the 1913 US Open at The Country Club golf course in Brookline, MA. unexpectedly pitting Harry, the world's top golfer versus Francis, the wet-behind-the-ears amateur. The author does a wonderful job of weaving the historical perspective of golf with the historical occurrences of that era. Apparently, President Taft loved the game so much he spent as much time on the fairway as he did in the White House. Hmm, I wonder how well that would go over today. But the most compelling parts of the story take place during the US Open itself and the suspense wondering whether the young rookie could successfully match wits with the experienced veteran and not only pull off the biggest upset in the history of the game, or arguably any game since, but also produce the US Open's first American winning player! Back then, there was much more national pride on the line than money... quite different than today.

There were a couple of things I found really compelling about this true story. First... the mental parts of the game were as prominent then as they are today. Second, that even a hundred years ago with clubs whittled out of hickory instead of dynamic composite materials, striking balls nowhere near as stable, uniform or built for distance and accuracy as they are today, teeing off from mounds of dirt rather than the utilitarian tee we rest our ball on, and playing in clothes consisting of knickers, a button-down shirt with necktie, and a sport coat (not a Nike swoosh in sight), the pros then shot the same scores as the top pros today; playing the same courses like St. Andrews and Winged Foot, but without the modern grooming tools and techniques that make a golf course so luxurious today. How interesting would it be to watch players swap eras and play the game? Given what I've come to appreciate from reading this book, today's golfers might be just a bit challenged, to say the least! The human mind and spirit's ability to create is a marvel, and each of us, in different ways, gets to enjoy the fruits of the labor of pioneers. Golfers today enjoy the game that these guys teed up.

Fore!

Tom Brassard, President