

Golf Gold Medalist

There has been considerable hype about golf returning to the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro this coming summer. Based on all the commentary from the talking heads and the ink spilled by the sports writers, one would be led to assume that golf had never been a sport in the Olympics. How misguided is this?

The 1904 Olympic Games in St. Louis, Missouri included golf for men. The Gold medalist was 46 year old George S. Lyon of Canada. George had an interesting career, as he did not begin to play golf until he was 36 years old. George was born near Ottawa, Ontario in 1858. His sport early in life was cricket, where he represented Canada eight times in International competitions. In 1894, he made 234 runs before going out, a world record that would last 40 years. Once he took up golf, he began an illustrious career in his second sport:

- George won eight Canadian Amateur Championships between 1898 and 1914, the first a mere three years after taking up the game
- He won ten Canadian Senior Amateur Championships between 1918 and 1930
- He lost in the finals of the 1906 U.S. Amateur Championship
- He played in the 1905 and 1908 British Amateur Championship, and lost the latter in the semi-finals when he was in his 50th year
- He played the Open Championship once, in 1905 at the Old Course, St. Andrews, won by James Braid
- He won three US Senior Amateur Championships, 1923, 1931, 1932
- He was elected to the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame in 1955
- He was elected to the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame in 1971
- He participated in the US Amateur three times between 1905 and 1907.

George travelled to London, England in 1908 to defend his Olympic championship, but the golf was cancelled at the last moment, after a dispute between US and UK golfers that Lyon's was the only entry deemed acceptable by the Olympic Committee, who informed him that the gold medal was his by default. Lyon chose not to accept it, saying that he didn't feel he could accept a medal that he had not won fairly in competition. That was the last time that golf was ever considered for the Olympics.

Now, 112 years since the last Olympic medals were awarded for golf, there may be new gold medalists crowned, both for men's and women's golf. Who could imagine that a Canadian golfer would hold the title for those many years? (Over)

Walt Lemon – January 21, 2016 (436 words)

