

The most important event, however, involved a 20-year-old American amateur. Francis Ouimet beat British greats Harry Vardon and Ted Ray in the 1913 U.S. Open at The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts. Ouimet, a former caddy who grew up across the street from the course, tied Vardon and Ray after 72 holes. Before starting an 18-hole playoff on September 20, the local bookies posted 5-4 odds that either Ray or Vardon would beat Ouimet. Francis shot a splendid, even-par 72 to win the championship, fives strokes clear of Vardon and six of Ray.

America had its first golf hero. More important, he was neither a privileged society swell nor a professional. Instead, Ouimet was the polite young man who lived next door. Americans opened their arms to Francis and rushed to adopt his game. The U.S. golfing ranks grew from 350,000 in 1913 to 2 million just 10 years later.

Another American young man tied for fourth behind Ouimet, a brash pro from upstate New York. Before the tournament's start, the 21-year-old player entered the golf shop and walked up to the defending champion. "You're Johnny McDermott, aren't you?" he asked. Without waiting for a reply he said, "Well, I'm glad to know you. I'm W. C. Hagen from Rochester and I've come over to help you boys take care of Vardon and Ray." Only a disastrous seven on the final day's 14th hole cost him a spot in the playoff.

Young Walter Hagen delivered on his boast the following year when he won the 1914 U.S. Open, the first of his 11 major championships. Hagen won a second in 1919 after a two-year wartime hiatus of championship golf. He then added a PGA Championship in 1921, followed by four straight PGA wins in 1924–27. Hagen became the first American-born champion in the "Open," as the British prefer to call their major championship, in 1922. Walter won three other Opens—1924, 1928, and 1929—the tournament that golf considers its world championship. Hagen also won the Western Open, then viewed as a major championship, five times between 1916 and 1932. During his most active period as a professional, 1912–36, Hagen won more than 70 tournaments worldwide. He also captained the

first six Ryder Cup teams, 1927–37. Hagen is a member of both the World Golf Hall of Fame and the PGA Hall of Fame.

Walter became the first professional golfer in 1919 and distinguished himself from a “golf professional,” a person who gives lessons, fixes clubs, and sells golf shirts. While they occasionally played in tournaments on days off, the golf professionals worked at clubs and public courses to make a living. Hagen broke the model and created the parallel universes of club and touring pros.

With only a handful of open tournaments available to pros in 1919, Hagen turned to challenge matches and exhibitions to generate cash flow. Pro golfers in Great Britain had long played each other in highly publicized matches, competing for purses put up by gentlemen amateurs. The British public thronged to watch these staged events, and the considerable press attention led to the current yardstick for measuring a pro’s skill—the amount of money he wins.

Although Hagen’s amateur rival Bobby Jones shared the public’s attention, most sports historians and veteran golf writers consider Walter as golf’s Johnny Appleseed. He planted golf in Americans’ minds and spirits by playing thousands of exhibition matches throughout the country. He showcased the game from swank northeastern clubs to dusty nine-hole tracks in the heartland. Often paired with another pro, Hagen played against local golfers for stakes raised by the host course or a promoter. Hagen sweetened the pot with side bets, a common practice throughout the sport’s history. The exhibitions gave hundreds of thousands of nascent golfers the chance to see a pro in action.

A 1920 exhibition match with Jim Barnes provides a good example. Barnes, an English immigrant, later won the U.S. and British Opens and the PGA Championship.

“The long-awaited and important Hagen-Barnes match will be played at New Orleans this morning and afternoon, at thirty-six holes for a fifteen hundred dollar side bet,” announced the *New York Times*. That a northeastern newspaper dedicated eight column-inches of type to an exhibition match 1,300 miles away reflected the growing interest in these events. Hagen won on the 37th hole.

Hagen traveled the world in search of a payday and continued to sow seeds in Europe, Africa, and Asia during his multiple exhibition tours. Walter became the face of international golf generations before the days of Ernie Els, Sergio Garcia, and Pdraig Harrington. In 1930, when the Great Depression ended the Golden Age, Hagen and Joe Kirkwood undertook one last grand tour to Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Japanese organizers offered Hagen a bonus for every course record he broke. "Breaking Japanese records became somewhat of a habit," Walter recalled years later.

Closer to home, Hagen joined 34 other pros and founded the PGA in 1916. The fledging organization held its first championship that year, but the PGA had yet to sponsor an organized tour in the 1920s. A few clubs or hotels sponsored a sprinkling of tournaments during the winter in Florida and across the Sun Belt to California. Northern pros, with their home courses shut down for the winter, traveled south in hopes of winning a \$100 to pay for gas or train fare. Hagen proved to be a major draw in what the pros called the "winter circuit" because of his unprecedented success in major tournaments in the first half of the 1920s. Walter's press coverage, coupled with his high-profile challenge matches and exhibitions, drew ballyhoo almost equal to that showered on Ruth, Dempsey, and Tilden.

One of Hagen's most challenging opponents in the 1920s, Gene Sarazen, credited Walter with spawning the PGA Tour, today's gazillion-dollar traveling circus. "All the professionals who have a chance to go after the big money today should say a silent thanks to Walter Hagen every time they stretch a check between their fingers. It was Walter who made professional golf what it is."

Hagen promoted professional golf through more than excellent play. He became the sport's first celebrity. Hagen garnered widespread attention through his engaging personality, a flair for drama and showmanship on the golf course, and a gambling, go-for-broke style when the situation allowed. Walter was a show horse leading a pack of draft animals. "Walter was not quite six feet tall," said golf writer Charles Price, "but he always looked taller because he walked around

a course as if he owned it. Walter was supremely confident, and he knew the virtue of a grand gesture.”

By his second U.S. Open victory in 1919, Hagen dressed like a movie star. He favored fine wool or gabardine plus fours, silk shirts, dapper ties, and cashmere sweaters. (Mistakenly called knickers, plus fours are trousers bloused four inches below the knee. Knickers are women’s underwear.) On all but the rainiest days, Walter wore two-tone, patent leather golf shoes. He never wore a hat and slicked his black hair back with whatever brilliantine he endorsed at the time. Hagen’s perpetual tan set off his friendly smile and green eyes. His regal demeanor on the golf course prompted the press to nickname him “the Haig” and “Sir Walter.”

Hagen added drama and increased gallery interest by milking apparently difficult situations. Although he didn’t purposefully throw away shots as Tilden did on the tennis courts, Hagen made the crowd believe an easy shot seemed hard. Always a poor driver off the tee, Walter took advantage of hitting a ball from the rough to make his recovery seem miraculous. Upon reaching his ball, he quickly found an opening in the tree line between his ball and the green. But Hagen heightened the tension by taking time to scrutinize the lie, the trees, his opponent’s lie, and the wind direction.

Hagen frequently arrived late for matches. In some cases he actually had been partying all night and teed off in black tie, but Walter staged many of his entrances for dramatic effect. He later confessed to rumpling one of his tuxedos, donning it just before arriving at the course, and splashing whiskey and perfume on the lapels. Hagen then had his driver deposit him on the first tee, where he astonished the gallery with a smooth opening drive. Showtime!

Although married twice, Hagen had a roving eye before, during, and after those marriages. Randy as a back alley tomcat, Hagen enjoyed reporters’ propensity to overlook his moral failures, just as they did for Ruth. Hagen’s first wife, Margaret Johnson, left him after four years because of his repeated absences while on exhibition tours. He married his second, Edna Straus, in 1923. Hagen’s old friend, Henry W. Clune, a columnist for the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, described Walter’s disposition toward married life.

Marriage was definitely not his forte; he was as ill-suited for the restraints and ordinances of the conjugal state as a pirate. The second marriage was less durable than the first, and the story is that its dissolution began one night in a Florida hotel, when Walter, returning at a very unseemly hour, was discovered by the new Mrs. Hagen, as he hastily prepared for bed, to be without underwear.

“My God,” Walter cried, when the deficiency was remarked by his outraged lady, clapping a hand sharply against his naked thigh, “I’ve been robbed!”

Grantland Rice followed Hagen closely and wrote often about the Haig in his column. Even discounting Rice’s Gee Whiz approach to sportswriting, Rice captured how Hagen helped popularize golf after the 1913 Ouimet triumph. “It remained for Hagen to supply the human interest, to put the throbbing kick into the game. Color, no matter how it’s spelled out, means gold for the newspapers. Hagen had more color than a lawn full of peacocks.”

Along with colorful sports stars, the public sought amusing pastimes at every turn in 1922 and 1923. Besides nonsensical songs and fads, crime and sex captivated most everyone. The Fatty Arbuckle trial in the spring of 1922 proved a major attraction. A silent film comic, Arbuckle allegedly raped and murdered aspiring actress Virginia Rappe in Hollywood’s first major scandal. After two mistrials, a jury acquitted him after a key witness fled the country. Apart from this real-life drama, popular films included Lon Chaney’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Robin Hood* with Douglas Fairbanks.

On a more serious note, President Warren Harding died on August 2, 1923. As Vice President Calvin Coolidge assumed the office, the numerous scandals and corruption investigations of the Harding administration played out in the nation’s newspapers. Many read about the imbroglios in the newly created *Time* magazine, first published in March 1923.
