

# *Bobby Jones: The Grand Slam*

America's best amateur golfers sailed for Liverpool, England, from New York City in April 1921. The eight-man team planned to play a set of matches against British golfers starting on May 21, and then play as individuals in the British Amateur and the Open Championship. The team leader, Francis Ouimet, had helped start the American golf boom by winning the 1913 U.S. Open.

The group also included Atlanta's Robert T. Jones Jr., a rising senior at Georgia Tech. Jones had burst onto the national golf scene in 1916 as a pudgy 14-year-old prodigy. At that year's U.S. Amateur at Merion Cricket Club near Philadelphia, Jones unexpectedly played his way into the quarterfinals. Writers lavished praise on the shy youngster, who had a smooth yet powerful golf swing.

Jones had lost in the finals of the first postwar U.S. Amateur in 1919. He continued his fine play in 1920 by tying for eighth in the U.S. Open and reaching the semifinals in the Amateur. By 1921, Jones had grown to 5 feet 9 and 165 pounds and become a handsome young man with an easy smile. With an engaging personality, Jones attracted friends as easily as a porch light beckons moths.

Royal Liverpool Golf Club hosted the international team match on the Hoylake links. The American players swept the foursomes games to the British golf establishment's disbelief. The Yanks then won five of the eight singles matches, giving them the team title, 9-3. The victory heralded golf's emerging shift from British to U.S. dominance.

The British Amateur started on Monday, May 23. After an easy first-round win, Bobby met an unheralded Englishman, E. A. Hamlet. Although he won despite wretched play, Bobby displayed a childish temper during the match. After misplaying a recovery shot from a greenside bush, he angrily pounded his club into the ground and tossed his ball over the greenside gallery into the dunes. Despite a solid win in the third round, Jones lost the next day.

In the Open Championship at St Andrews, Bobby's 78-74 – 152 in the first two rounds left him five strokes behind leader Jock Hutchison. However, Bobby's game disintegrated during the third round. He struggled to a 46 for the first nine, 10 shots "over 4s." (Instead of comparing scores to par then, the British used a four-shot average per hole.) Fuming, Bobby hit into a greenside bunker on the par-3 11th hole. Standing in the hazard, Bobby could barely see the flag over the back lip. His first shot failed to clear the bunker, and the ball fell back to his feet. "Damn!" he said to himself. He flubbed the next shot. "Goddamn!" After three or four tries—even Jones couldn't remember how many—he picked up his ball and put it in his pocket. Such an act signified a player's withdrawal from a tournament. He'd had enough of that hellish course. "What's the use?" Bobby asked himself.

Bobby's angry withdrawal resonated far more seriously than cursing or abusing a club. Despite his modest and affable demeanor, he clearly harbored a short-fused temper. Bobby's behavior at Hoylake and St Andrews regrettably overshadowed his often-excellent play and cemented his reputation as a talented yet flawed player. Jones later admitted his childish behavior at the Open reflected the "most inglorious failure of my golfing life."

Later that summer, Bobby began his fourth attempt to win the U.S. Amateur. At St. Louis Country Club, he breezed through his

first two 36-hole matches. In the afternoon 18 of the third round, he hit a poor approach shot to the 17th green. Jones angrily threw his 9-iron toward his bag. The club bounced off the ground and hit a woman in the leg. He apologized repeatedly to the unhurt spectator. Unsteadied by the incident, Jones missed his 15-foot birdie and lost the match.

After returning to college that fall, Bobby received a stern letter from USGA official George Walker. The progenitor of two U.S. presidents—George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush—admonished Jones for his club-throwing incident in the Hunter match. Walker wrote, “You will never play in a USGA event again unless you can learn to control your temper.”

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Bobby broke 80 as an 11-year-old in 1913, the same year that Ouimet won the U.S. Open. His parents, Robert (Big Bob) and Clara, had joined the Atlanta Athletic Club in 1906. They moved into a home near the 13th hole of the club’s East Lake course in 1907. Bobby started playing at age six, and despite his poor health as a child, he learned the game by following his parents around the course. Bobby found his fluid, almost languid swing by mimicking the club’s Scottish pro, Stewart Maiden. By the time Bobby shot 80, Maiden had yet to give young Jones a formal golf lesson.

In July 1916, Bobby shot a course record 68 at East Lake, just after he finished his first year at Atlanta’s Tech High School. The *New York Times*, 900 miles to the north, ran an article on his round, headlined “Georgia Has Golf Marvel.” Three weeks later, Jones won the inaugural Georgia State amateur, beating his friend Perry Adair in the final. He then traveled with Perry and the Adair family to the 1916 U.S. Amateur at Merion.

The USGA scheduled two qualifying rounds, one each on Merion’s East and West courses. In his first round on the easier West course, Bobby shot a 74, the morning’s lowest score by two strokes. The sensational score attracted a large gallery for the afternoon round. The attention made him nervous, and his putter turned balky. He finished with an 89, a score closer to what the skeptical golf writers had