

# THE LEAGUE OF THE IROQUOIS

BY

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**A**thletic sports have had an interest for man since the remotest times. They have afforded vigorous youth and early manhood an opportunity to work off physical exuberance and have served as a wholesome substitute for war. Rivalry in sport had existed for years in the upstate cities and towns of New York State, baseball, bicycling and track meets having their devotees.

In the first part of the current century the game of golf began to attract attention. Utica, N.Y., was one of the first cities to make the game popular, due in no small part to the Sherman boys, Tom and Sherrill, Dr. Arthur R. Grant and others. They foresaw its possibilities for inter-city competition and set about to promote it. This is of historical interest since the Mohawks of the Five Nations were the first to propose a confederacy, as was Yahnundasis of the land of the Mohawks the first to suggest the present League of the Iroquois.

#### League Formed in 1913

In the summer of 1912 Dr. Grant visited friends in the clubs of upstate New York with the idea of effecting an association. Then followed months of correspondence and discussion. Sufficient interest was aroused so that on January 31, 1913, groups of delegates from Yahnundasis Golf Club, Utica; Onondaga Golf and Country Club, Syracuse and Wanakah Country Club, Buffalo, met with Oak Hill representatives in Rochester and a permanent organization was created.

The question of a suitable name was solved when John Kavanagh, of Rochester, pointed out that the cities in the newly formed society occupied the same geographical area as did the ancient Five Nation Indian tribes who formed the League of the Iroquois, and he proposed that name. Officers were then elected, D.C. Murray being chosen president and Sherrill Sherman secretary-treasurer. Both were from Utica.

The golfers decided to follow some of

the ancient league procedures. The title Sachem was given to the president of each club, while the presiding officer at each annual tournament was called the Chief Sachem. The treasurer and secretary was given the title Chief Wampum Keeper, a position held later for many years by the revered Marc Comstock of Buffalo. Annual meetings were called pow wows and the individual golfers hailed as warriors.

The program now in operation is as follows:

The annual meeting of the League takes place on the third Thursday in May at Bellevue Country Club, Syracuse. This is attended by delegates from each of the clubs. The site for the approaching tournament is chosen, and the president of that club elected Chief Sachem. At this time also the club where the tournament is to be played the following year is selected and a Near Chief Sachem named. Rules of play and matters covering the tournament are acted upon. The budget of the affair is estimated and apportioned. The dates of play are always the last Friday and Saturday in June.

On Thursday evening before, the captains arrange the schedules for the team matches which begin Friday at 2 P. M. Each club is permitted to name 27 men, 15 seniors and 12 juniors, from whom to select each playing team of seven juniors and five seniors. A senior is a golfer over 45.

The tournament opens Friday morning with all the braves assembled and wearing ceremonial headdress, the Chief Sachem being adorned with the traditional ceremonial bonnet of his high office. Then follows the raising of the national emblem and the official flag of the League. After an invocation, the Chief Sachem delivers a brief speech of welcome. The ceremony then terminates with an exchange of greetings among the warriors. The individual 18 hole rounds are then played for the league championship and

the low net prize.

Friday evening is given over to a banquet attended by the players and guests. At this time the individual championship trophy and the President's Cup for the lowest net score are awarded. Saturday morning the tournament is resumed, each team playing in turn the other three competitors, concluding Saturday afternoon. After the matches are over and the scores and standings evaluated, the prizes are awarded. This includes the team trophy, an appropriately designed oak plaque on which is embossed the essential facts about the tournament and the names of the players. The flag is then lowered and the League adjourned.

#### Spirit Behind the League

The League was not organized for the sole purpose of the team matches, but rather to bring together members of the several clubs to promote a spirit of friendship and intercity good will. The not-so-good golfers therefore are cordially invited to participate. They may play in the individual handicap competition and may make up their own foursomes. The League has far exceeded the hopes of its founders.

The golfing League is proud of its adopted ancestry and believes that all Americans should know about its remarkable predecessor. While there are many versions of its history, the following are the essential facts.

The American Indian owes his existence to the migrations of Mongolian tribes of Siberia across the Bering Strait down into the more livable areas of our Pacific Coast. They began at least 10,000 years ago and continued intermittently for centuries. The new environment offered so many opportunities for growth and development that, with the passing of time, new racial strains evolved, giving rise to the various Indian nations that ultimately spread over the continent. The Indian never lost, however, his distinctive Mongolian features. In his long process of nationalization the Far West and South were first occupied, but later centuries saw successive incursions to the Atlantic seaboard and the north country.

In one of the most recent of these, small tribes of Iroquoian stock settled in the area of what is now upper New York State. Among them were the Mohawks, the Onondagas, Oneidas and Cayugas and



Arts and Sciences, Rochester, N. Y.  
Courtesy Rochester Museum of

**The formation of the ancient League of the Iroquois. Deganawidah, holding the Peace Belt explains to Atotarho, the Evil one, the peaceful purposes of the league. Hiawatha, standing, assists.**

self taught Seneca Indian  
Artist, Ernest Smith.

the Senecas, known collectively as the Five Nations. The total population of this group, men, women and children, never exceeded 13,000 of which less than 3,000 were men, or slightly more than the number of golfers in the league bearing their name.

#### History Recorded through Wampum

They were an agricultural people, lived in bark houses, were fond of music, sports and family life. For convenience and security they lived in small villages without streets or roads. They were deeply religious, mystical and strong believers in spirits and magic. While they had no written or pictographic language and no permanent method of recording the important events of life as did ancient Oriental people in monuments of stone or clay, they did have a way of transmitting their history by means of wampum. The ancient Iroquoian had no use for money, the medium of exchange being furs and food.

Significant occurrences in tribal life were handed down from generation to

generation by specially trained individuals. The story was incorporated in an allegorical recital in which imaginary spirits, animals, and birds played a part. As an aid to memory strings of beads or belts were used. The beads were made of shell, stone, wood or bone, tubular or spherical in shape and often dyed. The color, number of beads, grouping and design all had definite significance. This was called wampum and highly treasured. Hence a priest or Royaner by examining a belt or string of wampum could read the story of historic events, or ceremonials centuries old. The Iroquois Confederacy had a large priceless library of wampum fifty years ago. Much of it, however, was carelessly lost by fire, a loss comparable in some degree to the one which destroyed the great Alexandrian library in Cairo, 389 A.D. What remained of the Iroquois wampum library in 1898 was placed in the permanent custody of the University of the State of New York.

For the most part these early Indians were peaceful, but the frequent attacks by covetous aggressive neighboring tribes necessitated a defensive phase in their tribal life. A young Indian had no social status until he learned to fight. His final test of manhood and becoming a real brave was the killing of an enemy. Accordingly, petty wars were an accepted part of life.

#### **Deganawidah, the Peacemaker**

One day a strange thing happened. A few Indians loitering on the shore of Lake Ontario near what is now Oswego saw a strange figure approaching in a canoe. He was greeted with apprehension as he stepped ashore, but by signs he made it clear that he was a friend, that his mission was peaceful and he was unarmed. In the short conference which followed he told that he came to bring peace and contentment to them, and that his main purpose was to abolish murder and tribal war. He gave his name as Deganawidah and said he was acting under the guidance of the Supreme Being.

This statement sounded fantastic to his amazed listeners. It was decided, however, that they would at once confer with their tribal chiefs as to what attitude they should take. Further conferences followed and it was agreed that the strange man should be helped in every

way possible in accomplishing his mission. His plan was to confer in turn with as many persons and tribes as possible with the hope of converting them to his philosophy of peace and to form one great family of nations. He had heard of many warring factions in the east so he decided to begin his crusade by going in that direction. His new friends tried to dissuade him from this course because there was known to live there a brutal cannibal Mohawk Indian named Hiawatha. Their warning only increased his desire so straightway he called upon Hiawatha. The account of this meeting is a fantastic tale. In due time Hiawatha was converted and became a valuable assistant to Deganawidah.

Another important figure who had to be won over was Atatarho, the chief of the powerful Onondagas. Atatarho was looked upon as a devil, and was called the Evil One. He is pictured as a monster with snakes living in his hair. The conversion of this chief, as told in the Indian story, was an almost incredible feat.

Conferences and tribal meetings followed for a long time before there was unanimous agreement and a plan perfected. The date of this important covenant is uncertain. Historians place it between 1390 A.D. and 1540 A.D. In it the Five Nations federated into one unit, living as a single family in a theoretical great home covering the tribal lands of the Five Nations extending from the Hudson to the Genesee Rivers, to be known as the Longhouse.

#### **Great Peace Plan**

The plan embraced a constitutional representative government with a permanent capital in the Onondaga country. Each tribe in the confederacy was charged with specific responsibilities. Representatives were chosen with the greatest care and most of them for life. Induction into office was a solemn and sacred ceremony. Detailed plans were worked out to ensure a government affording its citizens the highest type of efficiency and security. Freedom of speech and religion were regarded as human rights so obvious as to be beyond the needs of legislation. No final decision became operative until there was unanimous agreement. Provision however was

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**CORRECTION**

Decision 57-30, which appeared in the April, 1958, issue, has been superseded and was printed in error. The superseding decision is 58-3, which was published in the February, 1958, issue.

of the cup, Rule 26-1a would have applied and it would have been a rub of the green. It would still have been considered holed.

**Tournament Committee Must Interpret Local Rule**

USGA 58-12  
R. 36-7, 37-7; LR

**Q:** When playing in the last Masters Tournament in Augusta, I was penalized two strokes. Here is how it happened:

At the 2nd hole I missed a 4-foot putt and holed out the next putt. I have now finished the tournament and as there was no one behind me (the next couple was two holes behind). I retried my putt and therefore was penalized two strokes.

Was it correct that I was given these two strokes penalty?

**Question by:** FLORY VAN DONCK  
Royal Waterloo Golf Club  
Rhode Saint Genese, Belgium

**A:** There is no Rule of Golf to prohibit or to penalize the action you took in the circumstances described.

We are informed that a Local Rule existed for the particular competition which prohibited practicing putting after holing out. As it was a Local Rule rather than a Rule of Golf, it must be interpreted by the Committee in charge of the tournament which promulgated it.

As for delay in play in general, Rule 37-7 is applicable.

**“Plumb Line” Sighting Approved**

USGA 58-11  
Misc.

**Q:** Does the use of a plumb line by a golfer, to determine the slope of the green, violate any rule of golf? The plumb line is a weight suspended from a string.

**Question by:** ALBIN MARTINSON  
Sacramento, Cal.

**A:** No, provided play is not delayed, the line of putt is not touched and no mark is placed on the putting green to indicate a line for putting. See Rules 37-7, 35-1b and 35-1c.

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made to circumvent the omnipresent belligerent or bureaucratic individual or group, who might attempt to stay progress.

Much of the machinery of government was directed toward the abolition of war. Each tribe was required to surrender all of its weapons and to disband its armies. The federation then organized a small police force with warriors drafted from each tribe. These were thoroughly trained, and over the centuries this little army was rarely defeated in the defensive wars which it was compelled to fight. Great significance was attached to the power of diplomacy. Persons showing adaptability in this field received special training and were assigned to it as a life work. Minor phases of this great peace dealt with health, improved agriculture and education.

It seems almost incredible that a few hundred unlettered Stone Age Indians could formulate and put into operation

such a remarkable document. It secured for them a peace that endured for upwards of 300 years, whereas in half of that time our government has fought six highly destructive major wars and innumerable minor ones. This ancient league set a pattern which has been widely copied. In the framing of the Constitution for these United States, our founding fathers freely used this great peace plan as more recently did the nations of the world in framing the charter of the United Nations, the hope today of the civilized world.

In assuming the name of this ancient historic league, the golfers of New York State do themselves honor. Golf is a wonderful form of recreation. Its possibilities for health, sportsmanship and character building are unlimited. These were the dominating characteristics of the historic Iroquoian whom we would emulate. Finally, in the annals of world history Deganawidah and his associate Hiawatha must be classed with the noblest benefactors of mankind.