

INDOOR GOLF SCHOOLS

By JOHN G. ANDERSON

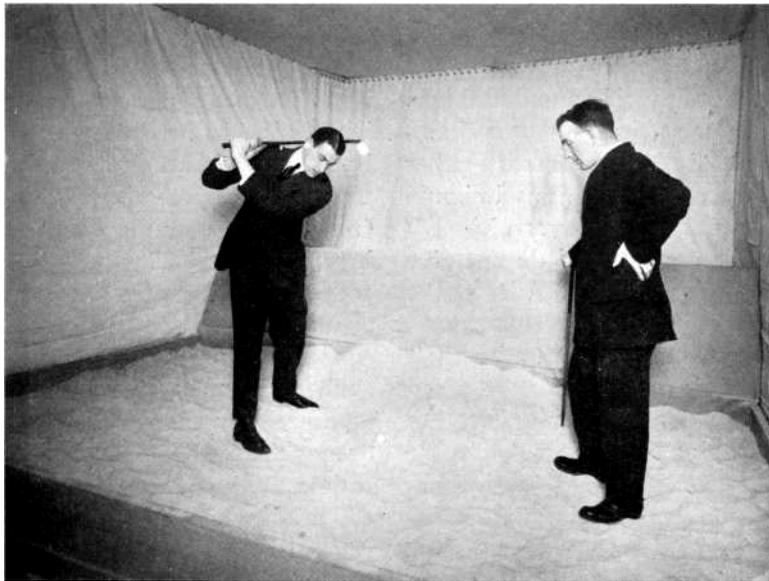
GOLF as a winter pastime, until this season, has been "at home" only in the Southland. Now, however, while the storm is raging without and the chill winds are sending shivers down the backs of Broadway pedestrians the golfer in the North, if he chooses, may stand on a golf tee and send drive after drive down the fairway, approach with measurable accuracy or putt on undulating greens. All this has been made possible through the introduction of many indoor golf schools where instruction, exercise, and other kindred benefits may be had for the seeking. No faddish ideas have forced the introduction of these indoor institutions; it was simply the demand which arose out of the feelings of those golfers who did not wish to put away their clubs for a half year and forego a certain amount of exercise which in the past had proved so beneficial. The result has been, there-

fore, that a supply met the demand. To-day we find indoor golf schools flourishing in every big city in the land, more numerous than is popularly believed, and brought to a high degree of perfection, a perfection which would have astounded the first originators of this style of play in this country.

Indoor golf is not by any means a recent development; its beginnings in this country date away back to 1896. In that year a school was started in New York on Forty-second Street by Willie Dunn of the famous Dunn family. There was nothing elaborate about the golf conveniences, for at the back of the room was placed a sheet of the ordinary kind. This was nailed to the floor at the start and also fastened to the ceiling. For a day or two no damage was done, but a rip appeared soon after and one shot going through this at a fairly rapid rate brought destruction to a part of the wall. Then it was seen that the ordinary sheet was not heavy enough to stand the strain and a large bit of canvas was bought which proved the very thing necessary for the purpose.

Nothing was attempted in the line of teaching except to show how to drive, particular attention being given to form, which, it is almost needless to say, was much different then from what it is to-day. The school paid well, for golf at that time was in the throes of faddishness and high sums were given for the lessons. The idea spread to Boston and a school for indoor golf was started on the top floor of Noyes Brothers' store which, at that time, was a shop carrying a line of haberdashery and athletic goods. To

this store in the winter of 1898 came Willie Dunn. His visit had been advertised and he remained at the store for three days. Half - hour lessons were given to the golfers and the price charged was five dollars for each thirty minutes. From eight in the morning until five-thirty at night Dunn was kept busy; and to this indoor instruction of but three days could be traced



A LESSON IN THE ART OF BUNKER PLAY

much of the enthusiasm manifested in Massachusetts the next spring. Two or three years later Gilbert Nicholls, at that time a newcomer in golf circles in this country, opened a school in the winter months at 407 Washington Street and the charges, I believe, were three dollars a lesson, a sum that did not prevent his school from being filled from morning until night for many consecutive weeks. Since then the indoor schools in the Boston district have not been so popular until this year.

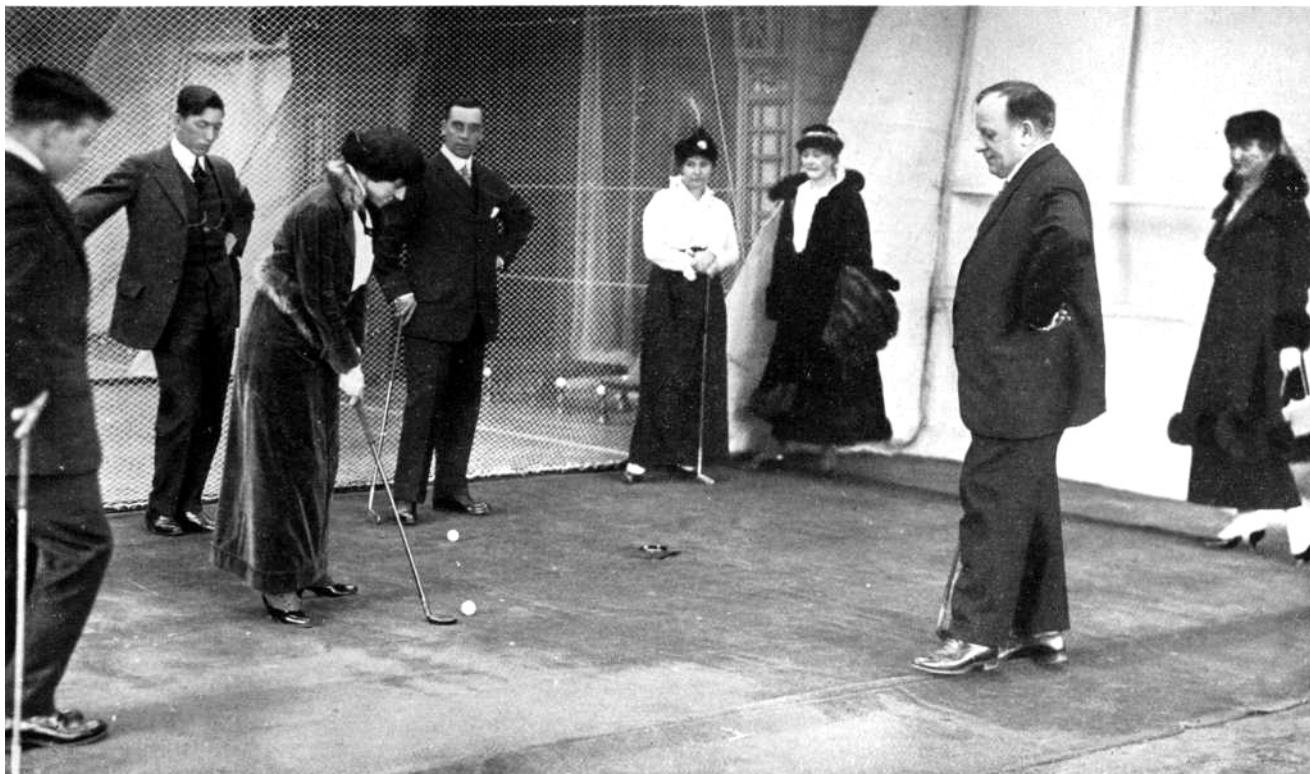
The New York City indoor schools were first established on a permanent basis by Tom Wells about five years ago. His first endeavor has grown until now he has control of not a few golf schools in the city. He may be termed and rightly the "golf caterer" of New York. While the entrances into the field by Dunn, Nicholls and others may be said to have been more or less spasmodic, Wells early saw the lasting nature of the venture and to-day may be considered the real pioneer in the indoor scheme. For years the schools have flourished but not until

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this winter have they been built on such a scale of magnificence or in such lusty numbers.

To the golfer who is unfamiliar with the indoor school and its contrivances, conveniences, contraptions, or call them what you will, a peep into a few would no doubt present a series of surprises. In New York City to-day are schools in all sections and of all kinds. The main features are similar and a word about their construction may be enlightening. To begin with we have a closely webbed net probably

sky on a summer's day. Or the net may have a canvas protecting which has pockets five in number. If on your drive you are able to get the ball in the center then you have made an excellent shot. If the ball on the tee-shot goes into the other pockets that means that the shot has been missed either by being soled, skied, sliced or pulled. The same is true if the ball hits the canvas and does not disappear into the fairly capacious receptacles. But these other pockets serve a definite purpose. They are used to show



TOM WELLS GIVING A LESSON IN PUTTING

At his school on top of the Hotel Astor, New York, one of three such establishments of which he is proprietor

thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. At the back of the net there hangs down a heavy strip of canvas which deadens the force of the impact of the ball and permits of but little rebound. The balls used are usually of the old gutta-percha make, for they are less likely to rebound and cause damage. The canvas is of several designs in the various schools, although, in some which have many nets all kinds are used. Accuracy is tested by a ring of colors just like a bull's-eye in a shooting gallery. To the golfer who is able to hit the center goes the assurance that he is still at the top of his game. If, however, the ball comes back from the target covered with a color different from that in the center he knows that his game is a bit off. It is easy, of course, to tell the moment after the ball is hit whether it is on a straight course or not, for the swing brings the golfer in the proper position to follow the flight of the ball. There is no feeling of crampedness as regards room and the player is as free in his actions as if he were whacking under the blue

proficiency in the play with the irons and the golfer's ability or inability to get the ball up in the air or to loft it with sureness can be cleverly demonstrated.

We may find certain accessories in the indoor golf schools which have so far been lacking in out-of-door teaching, but which will find a place, I am sure, in the near future. The most important is the use of mirrors. As the golfer taking a lesson or even practicing by himself stands on the tee he gets a full size picture of himself and is able to judge if he has any ludicrous "outs" in his posturing; if he is taking a lesson the professional can explain the way in which the shot should be played the more easily. Two mirrors are used and the little one which is placed so that the golfer can get a glimpse of his head as he prepares to swing and can tell at the end of the stroke whether he has swayed or not is of inestimable value. Many a time a golfer, told by a professional that he is swaying, does not realize the extent to which he is guilty. If, however, he sees that his head has moved several inches

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and he knows the fact because he cannot see himself in the mirror after he has played the stroke then the golfer takes the utmost pains to correct his error. The more conscious that we are of our failings in golf the harder do we all try to conquer them and this little looking-glass is as potent as any had by the immortal Alice.

All the indoor schools have bunkers with lots of real sand. The bunkers are about seven feet long and six feet wide. The sand is probably a foot or more deep and here a golfer may play to his heart's content and learn how to get out. Many are the golfers who have never tried a practice shot in the bunkers outdoors and this contrivance will keep many a score card from being torn up when the tournament season of 1915 rolls around. I was talking with a golf player the other day in one of these schools and I asked him why he didn't take a turn at the bunker with its inviting glistening sand. "Shucks" said he, "I get enough practice in the summer. I get into several every round and lose more strokes there than on the putting green." That state of mind is quite common among many golfers; to those who are wise the indoor school bunkers will not be shunned for there it will be possible to find out how to play the stroke and get out in one. I doubt if one golfer in one hundred ever practices in a bunker and those who need it the most never. But here is the chance.

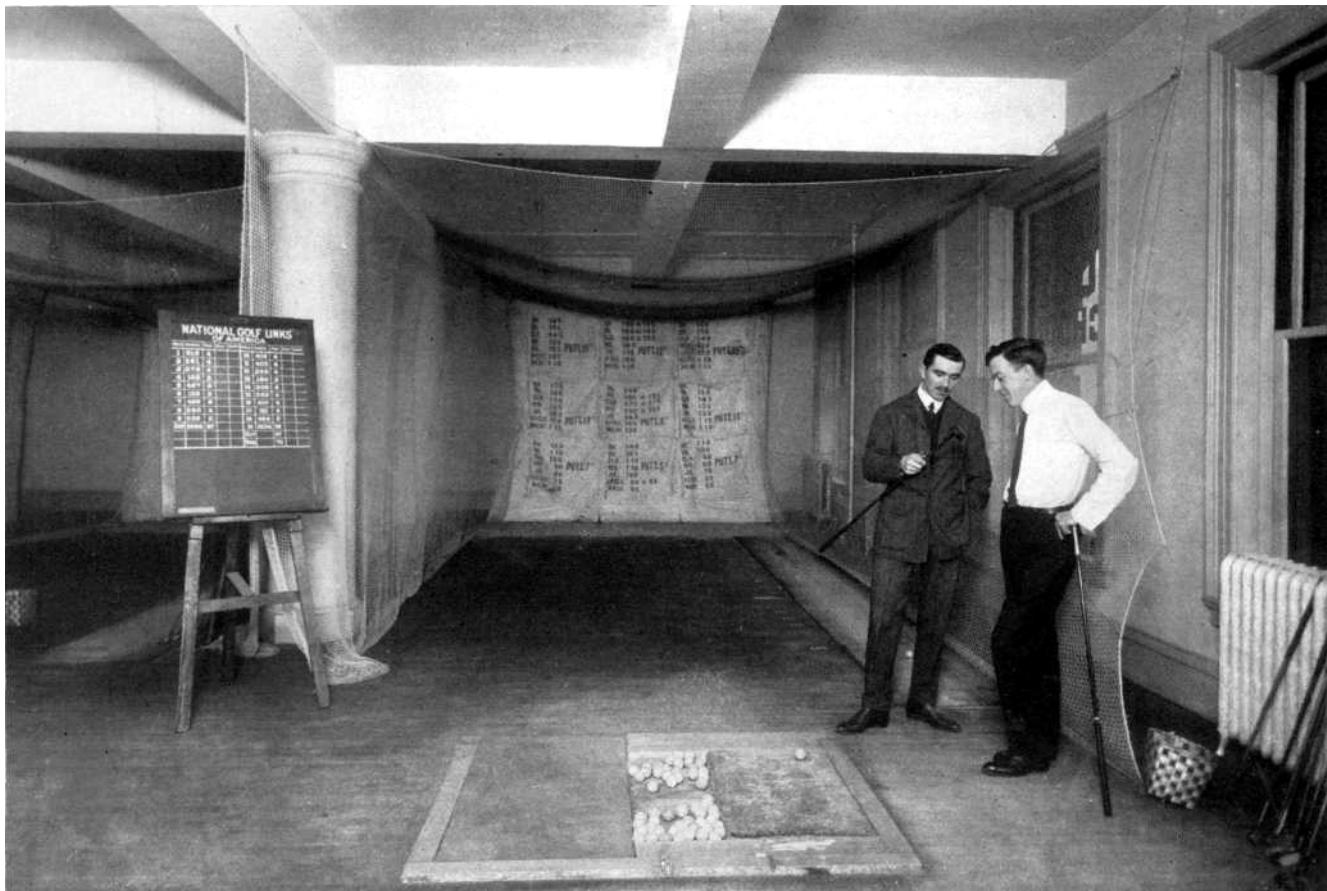
When we come to the putting greens we find much improvement in the past year. At many of the schools in former years one hole was cut in the floor and the strip of carpet would not be more than two feet wide. Few people could putt on account of the limited space, and there was no educational benefit derived. But all is changed now in most of the indoor schools, not only in New York but in Boston, Chicago and the other cities where this style of game is flourishing. Four, five, six, and even nine holes are constructed in the allotted space with putts which run from six to twenty feet in length and which must be made over the cleverest of undulating rolls. The carpet, it is hardly necessary to say that it is green in color, has a surface sufficiently rough to make the resistance to a putt similar to that of a regular grass green; undulations are made by placing rounded bits of blocks under the carpet or it may be that tins in the shape of bowls are used for this purpose. All these pieces of paraphernalia go to make up an indoor school where the golfer can procure pleasure and profit.

There are several systems of playing the game for a score. In the Boston district the one in use at present is that of Mr. C. B. Cory who fashioned it about a dozen years ago. At present the device is set up in the barn at The Country Club, Brookline, and the members are making good use of it. The scheme may be described in this manner. There is a heavy canvas which is divided into two parts, each of

which is eight feet wide and twelve feet high. One side is for the shots which are supposed to travel about 130 yards or more and the other side is for those shots which are under that length, and also for putting. On the side where the play is to get the long distance there is a strip of canvas two feet wide and two feet out from the main sheet and it is the object of the player to hit this narrow strip on the drive. If the golfer is successful then a bell rings a-la-shooting gallery and to his credit goes a drive of 225 yards. If he fails in his attempt then he is credited with a paltry 200 (how our ideas and ideals as regards distances have changed!); then there are varying distances for the different clubs as for instance 225 yards for a perfect drive, 200 yards for the brassie or cleek shot, 175 yards for the midiron and 150 for the mashie. A concrete example will explain it better. If we had a 500-yard hole to play then two good shots, a perfect one with the driver and the cleek would put the player but fifty yards from the hole and then the golfer would go to the other side of the canvas for the approach. Here is a hole in the canvas which is ten inches in diameter and if the ball is hit accurately then it will roll back and lie dead to the hole on the artificial putting green through the medium of a funnel. But if the player fails to get his approach through the hole the ball will roll back to some part of the putting surface about fifteen or twenty feet from the hole and tricky undulations will have to be surmounted before the ball is holed. In this scheme is also a bunker which in this instance is a mat about two feet high and placed about four feet from the back canvas so that if a player does not hit the ball clean or if he tops it the ball strikes the mat and as a result a stroke is added to his score. The same distances may be played over this indoor course as are on the real holes outside. The lowest score made as yet by the golfers who have essayed the home course distances is a 73.

The men who are interested in the various attempts to make the golfers realize that such schools are a necessity are most enthusiastic about the future of this kind of winter sport. They point to the different indoor championships which have been held in the big cities of the land, particularly Chicago, where this style of play has been a regular feature of the indoor season and the prediction is made that in the next ten years or even before that time there will be a championship held between the different winners of the sectional or rather city championships. Whether this will be a fact is quite problematical; at any rate we know that there will continue to be championships in the west and there may be an indoor championship of New England held in the latest indoor golf school which has just been started in Boston for the edification and the education of that district's players. Not long ago there was a tournament held on the top floor of one of the finest hotels of New York City

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By this system of bags into which the ball is driven, each bag having marked upon it, an allotted distance for the various clubs, any course in the country may be played. The illustration shows part of the National Golf School of America, with Albert G. Elphick and Irving Stringer, the proprietors

in which no less than twenty professionals took part. The interest has reached a fairly acute stage among some of the golf "fiends" and it may be that the golfers of the different schools will get together in competition. It is also true that in a year or so every large club where winter sports have a hold will have one or more of these indoor nets set up where the members of the club may while away the hours and improve or harm their golfing abilities. All these club courts will not in any way interfere with the city schools, for the golfer who wishes to take lessons will not attempt to pick up what he can from the club members, but will go to the professional. At present five cities in New England have these indoor schools, the same number in New York, the number of schools in this state far outnumbering all others; in the United States are probably fifty or sixty at the present writing.

The prices paid for the golf lessons are the same in most of the schools. One dollar for a single session, ten dollars for a dozen and a season ticket which will permit the holder to practice any time he feels so disposed during the entire season, provided the courts are not engaged, costs twenty dollars. Then if the golfer is going in for the sport as a means for daily exercise he will rent a locker where he may keep his play clothes which will mean an additional expense of

five dollars. The prices are reasonable enough and if the sport is looked on simply as needed exercise it would be worth the investment for many a man who is forced to fight his waistband. In several of the finest indoor golf schools are ladies' rooms and courts reserved for the members of the fair sex. The opportunity for the ladies to learn the game sufficiently well, so that they may go out on the links in the spring and summer and not feel that they are an obstruction to their partners and others, is certainly one which should not be passed by, and from all accounts it is not being neglected. A course of twenty-four lessons would give a foundation, a fairly good grasp of the fundamentals of the game, all of which could be had during a period when the ladies have as much need of a change and exercise as during the summer when the social obligations are not so numerous.

Last year Wells in his two schools together with his assistants gave 12,000 lessons. His eldest pupil was seventy-three years of age and his youngest five. This year it is impossible to predict how many lessons will be given in the United States but the number will run way up to 100,000. At present there are flourishing golf schools in Boston, Buffalo, Cleveland, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Los Angeles, New York, St. Louis, Providence, Rochester, Worcester and Washington and other cities of less population.