

Golf Encyclopedia Article

Golf

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Golf

Golf is considered one of the world's most popular sports. The name of the game is derived from the German word for "club," but almost everything else about golf originated in Scotland. The 500-year-old game was invented there during the early fifteenth century, most likely influenced by the Romans who occupied parts of England and Scotland and who played a game called *paganica* with bent sticks and leather balls filled with feathers. Golf became so popular in Scotland that, in 1457, King James II (1430-1460) banned the sport because it threatened to surpass the popularity of archery, the national sport. In 1502, the ban was lifted, and golf has continued unabated ever since. Queen Mary Stuart (1542-1587) was the first woman to play the game, and she created the world's first great golf course, St. Andrews, which still exists today. Golfers played with a leather-covered ball stuffed with feathers until 1848, when a ball of solid gutta-percha ("guttie") was invented. In 1899, Coburn Haskell, an avid golfer from Cleveland, Ohio, devised a light, tightly-wound, rubber-threaded ball with a solid rubber core. For four centuries, when golfers teed off, they scooped up clumps of dirt, molded it into small hills, and set their balls atop it. In the 1890s, rubber and paper tees began to appear but failed to gain popularity. In 1899, an African-American dentist from Boston, Massachusetts, Dr. George F. Grant, developed a wooden tee because he got "darned tired" of picking up dirt whenever he wanted to play golf. The tee consisted of a tapering base and a concave shoulder to hold the ball in place. With no interest in profit, Grant gave his tees away. Another American dentist, Dr. William Lowell, patented a wooden tee, and his sons marketed the "Reddy-Tee " in 1920, profiting enormously.