



The first international golf/colf match?

Tradition has it that the Duke of York, later King James II of England, was the initiator of the first international golf match between England and Scotland on Leith Links in 1682.

Two English noblemen claimed that the game of golf was of English origin and not Scottish. The Duke challenged the English noblemen to a match between them and himself and a Scotsman of his choice to prove Scotland's claim. After a thorough search the Duke chose John Patersone, a cobbler and local golf champion, as his partner. Largely through the cobbler's prowess the Englishmen were defeated and the rival claims settled once and for all. ('GOLF A Pictorial History', Henry Cotton, 1975)

Many authors consider this match as the first international golf match.

This legend as we may say is full of inaccuracies. First of all golf was an unknown game in England in 1682. Although the Blackheath Golf Club claims the date 1608 as the year that the club was instituted, it is generally accepted that the 14th May 1766 is the beginning of the club. The members were primarily Scots.

It is rather unthinkable that the English noblemen knew the game, let alone could play the game; they would never have claimed the game to be English.

It took until c.1700 before 'short golf' or 'churchyard golf' ceased to exist and that the 'humble' town players took to the links. This could mean that John Patersone was a short golf player and used very simple golf equipment. How could he play 'far and sure' with clubs and balls he never used before on the wide open fields, an unknown playing field for him, in the company of the duke?

The first tournament resulting in a winner, called champion or captain, was in 1744. In the time of John Patersone there were no tournaments and as such no 'champions'.

It is rather doubtful that the future king would play together with lower class people while he could choose from so many aristocrats.

Other than this legend we have found no references to the duke being an avid golfer. It is known that the duke was a regular caets player (hand-tennis); a game that was popular with the Scottish aristocracy.

The first international match between the Republic of the United Netherland's and Scotland in 1668. Painting of Scottish golfers and Netherlandish colvers playing a match against each other on a frozen lake near the city of Haarlem. – Adriaen van de Velde, 1668 – The National Gallery, London

Nevertheless, suppose that the match as described indeed took place in 1682 and suppose that colf in the Low Countries was (as said by so many Scottish writers) indeed a golf game, the title of 'first international golf match' had to go to a match between two unknown Scottish players and two unknown players of the Netherlands played 14 years earlier on the frozen 'Haarlemmer Lake' near the city of Haarlem.

This claim is based on a 'winter scene' painted in 1668 by Adriaen van de Velde in which two Scotsmen in quilts, perhaps mercenaries, businessmen or diplomats, played against two Netherlanders.



An interesting variant on the above is the suggestion that the Scotsman playing *colf* on the ice near Haarlem was an officer in the 'Scots Brigade', a British military unit in the armed forces of the Republic of the United Netherlands, consisting of on average of 1,000 soldiers. These soldiers were recruited mainly from the Scottish Highlands in accordance with the agreements with the Stuart King. A large number of these soldiers were from the 'Mackay Clan' from the far north of the Highlands. Because the golf game was probably unknown in that part of Scotland, it is unlikely that they would have taken golf clubs to the 'battle fields' on the continent. Further it is rather doubtful that these soldiers went back to the Highlands to build a stronghold for the game of *colf* in Scotland because their homeland was not particularly suited for such a game.

When in 1668 Adriaen van de Velde painted the officer wearing a tartan kilt, the man was not a member from the Mackay clan because of the difference in design of the tartan colours.

Therefore the Scotsman must have been a merchant buying cloth or selling wool.

The painting is full of interesting details. Behind the back of the Scotsman a 'fore caddie' is just visible probably attending the 'target pole' at a distance of several dozens of metres. To the left of the player a small boy, probably the caddie, is carrying a spare club.

The way he looks at the player shows that he is not impressed with the swing quality of the 'foreigner'. The merchant is playing with a standard lead-headed colf club and a white leather ball filled with cow hair. He is wearing ice-spurs to have a firm stand on the slippery surface of the playing field.

They are playing probably the last 'hole' near the '19th hole', a large tent with benches and a bar where the landlord awaits the players with hot chocolate, biscuits and 'zopie'. Zopie was the traditional winter drink, a blend of bock beer and rhum with a mixture of eggs, cinnamon and clove.

As you see the Netherlanders knew already in the 17th century how to entertain their customers with a 'round of colf'.

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