

China: The Home of Golf?

By Lane Osborne

As I write this article the 2009 British Open has just concluded and unbelievably, Tom Watson, at 59 years of age, nearly won his sixth British Open title, losing in a playoff to Stewart Cink.

Every year when this championship rolls around I'm reminded of the history of our great game. The Open is, after all, our oldest championship with this year marking the 138th playing of the event and the fourth time it's been held in Turnberry, Scotland. I (probably like you) have always read that Scotland is the home of golf. You've undoubtedly seen the same photographs I have of Old Tom Morris posing for posterity with a brassie in hand addressing a feathery golf ball lying on the hallowed grounds of St. Andrews. You may have even heard that golf courses in that early era were mown by sheep that grazed and that bunkers were hollowed by those same sheep from where they would repetitively lie at rest. That story of golf history seems so organic, textured, and right. However, is it accurate?

We know basketball was invented by James Naismith and that Walter Camp is consider "the father of American football," but who invented the game of golf?

"Professor Ling Hongling of Lanzhou University says he has uncovered evidence in a book called the Dongxuan Records that proves golf was played in China in AD 945," offered one Sports Illustrated writer who went on to say "The book, written during the Song Dynasty from AD 960 to AD 1279, claims the game was called chuiwan and was played with 10 different jewel encrusted clubs, including a cuanbang – equivalent to a modern-day driver – and a shaobang –the ancient three wood."

China is rich in culture and history and their inventions are numerous including paper, the compass, firecrackers, kung fu, and chicken lo mein...but golf? Are you kidding me? Quick: name a famous Chinese golfer, Chinese golf course, or Chinese golf tournament. Drawing a blank? Me too.

The St. Andrews Links Trust doesn't seem too worried about anyone else buying into this myth. In that same Sports Illustrated article, a spokesmen for the Trust was quoted as saying "It has long been clear that there were many different variations of this rudimentary pastime but the game of golf as we know it today was first played here at St. Andrews."

Think about it. If China was the home of golf, then every July the world's oldest championship would perhaps be held somewhere outside of Shanghai and not at Turnberry, Carnoustie, or St. Andrews. The dulcet tones emitting from the foggy mist would not be from a kilt clad bagpiper, but instead a Hanfu clothed man playing a bamboo flute. And storylines of going from Old Tom Morris to the Tom Watson of old would not likely exist.

I admit if given the choice I would almost always choose chicken lo mein over haggis, but at the end of the day wouldn't we all rather hoist the Claret Jug rather than a Ming vase?

JUSTINBOUNDZ™ BY LANE OSBORNE



"Says here that this vase dates back to the Ping Dynasty."

Lane respects Chinese culture and loves Chinese food, but believes the sport of golf originated in Scotland.

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