



The Greatest Game Ever Played: Harry Vardon, Francis Ouimet, and the Birth of Modern Golf

By Mark Frost

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THE GREATEST GAME EVER PLAYED is the story of Francis Ouimet and Harry Vardon, who in pursuit of their passion for a game that captivated them as children, broke down rigid social barriers that made their sport accessible to everyone on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond, positioning golf as one of the most widely played games in the world. Ouimet and Vardon were two men from different generations and vastly different corners of the world whose lives, unbeknownst to them at the time, bore remarkable similarities, setting them on parallel paths that led with a kind of fated inevitability to their epic battle at Brookline years in the future. This collision resulted in the 'big bang' that gave rise to the sport of golf as we know it today.

For Mark Frost, Francis Ouimet and Harry Vardon represent everything that's right about sports in general and sportsmen in particular; gentlemen, champions, teachers, leaders, and each in their own quiet way, heroes. In THE GREATEST GAME EVER PLAYED, Frost attempts to create penetrating studies of both of these men, along with over dozens of the game's seminal figures, within the dramatic framework offered by the tournament when they finally met, one of the most thrilling sports events in history, the 1913 U.S. Open.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This first nonfiction effort by Frost, who is a novelist (*The List of Seven*), television producer (*Twin Peaks*) and scriptwriter (*Hill Street Blues*), deftly tells the story behind the legendary 1913 U.S. Open, in which Francis Ouimet, a 20-year-old golf amateur from Massachusetts, shocked the genteel golf world by defeating British champion Harry Vardon, the most famous pro golfer of his time and the inventor of what today is still considered the modern grip and swing. Frost knows he has a good story and manages to touch on all the right elements of the plot: Ouimet and Vardon not only represent two different social worlds and two different generations, but also share a number of key personal facts and traits. Ouimet was "the boy-next-door amateur, young and modest and free from affectation," while Vardon was the consummate professional whose record of six British Open victories has never been matched. Yet Frost superbly shows how both shared a steely drive to succeed that helped Vardon overcome a long bout with tuberculosis and Ouimet to overcome a working-class background in which golf was seen (especially by his father) as a wealthy man's game, the perfect example of the evils of capitalism. Frost beautifully weaves history into his narrative, clearly showing the long-term impact this duel had on the game and how it helped propel the U.S. Open into the arena of world-class golf. Frost's final chapters on the last two rounds of the 1913 Open have all the page-turning excitement of a blockbuster novel.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review The story of Francis Ouimet, the first amateur to win the U.S. Open tournament, is just too good to be true: it's *Rocky* without the sequels, it's *Jack* without his beanstalk, it's *Tiger* without Nike. But it's true, and as told by veteran thriller writer Frost, it's the most compelling sports book since Laura Hillenbrand's best-selling *Seabiscuit*. Born in 1893, Ouimet grew up poor, directly across the street from The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts, where Boston's blue bloods tried their hands at the new sport of golf. The game caught young Francis in its grip, and despite his father's disapproval, he became a caddie at the club and taught himself to play. Frost jumps between Ouimet's story and the surprisingly similar saga of British champion Harry Vardon, who was also born poor and contended with a disapproving father. Frost builds his characters--not just Ouimet and Vardon but also Francis' caddy, 10-year-old Eddie Lowery--with the skill of a novelist (occasionally but believably using invented dialogue). The climax of the narrative--the recounting of the 1913 U.S. Open at Brookline, where the unheralded, 20-year-old Ouimet beat both his idol Vardon and the other reigning British professional, Ted Ray--is genuinely exciting, a marvelous re-creation of a signature moment in golf history. Underdog stories have become among the sappiest clichés in pop-culture's arsenal, but this one reminds us why they worked in the first place. *Bill Ott*

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Review

"One of the best golf books ever written."

?Travel & Leisure Golf Magazine

"Stirring Frost tells this story at the perfect pitch."

?New York Times Book Review

"The most compelling sports book since *Seabiscuit*."

?Booklist

"Anyone who loves golf, history, or just a great story will relish this wonderful book."

?Scott Turow

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bobby Bagwell:

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Donald Cortes:

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