

#SPORT

From a Wood Sphere to a Smart Ball

Tracing the centuries of innovation that sent the golf ball on a wild ride through history



A selection of spalding balls from the late 19th and early 20th century.



From left, a feathery ball, c. 1830; a red gutta-percha golf ball, c. 1860; and a spalding ball, late 19th or early 20th century.

Historians speculate that the first golfer was likely a shepherd who grew bored with his work one day, swung his crook and made contact with a rock that went flying. He hit more, and 'purely by accident, one of the stones disappeared into a hole,' legendary sportswriter Herbert Warren Wind mused in 1949. Once a second shepherd appeared to compete, or perhaps as soon as one of them began cursing over a misdirected ball, golf was invented.

The earliest man-made golf balls ever uncovered were primitive spheres made of hardwood on the east coast of Scotland in the 14th century. By the early 1600s, players were using balls of cowhide stuffed with goose feathers. When doused with water, the leather shrank, and the feathers expanded, and this rough-hewn ball would have flown well for the day, enabling golfers to make truer shots. But the craftsmanship was expensive, creating a sport primarily enjoyed by the well-off. With the advent of golf country clubs that required membership fees during the next century, it officially became a game for the elite.

The idea for a greatly improved permutation came in the 1840s. Robert Paterson, a young Scottish divinity student, became transfixed by the possibilities of gutta-percha-dried gum of the Malaysian sapodilla tree, which he found as protective filler in a package from Singapore containing a statue of a Hindu god. Paterson heated the sapodilla gum and massaged it until he'd formed a sphere and painted it white. The so-called gutty ball was bouncier, easier to control and much more affordable, making the game

more accessible. The inventor of the modern ball was Coburn Haskell, who had an epiphany while strolling through the B.F. Goodrich rubber factory in Akron, Ohio. Sporting piles of elastic, Haskell had the idea of winding up some of the rubber yarn into a golf ball. Haskell eventually added a solid rubber core and a cover. Legendary golfer Bobby Jones, co-founder of the Augusta National Golf Club as well as the Masters Tournament, described the Haskell ball required less skill and more strength for long shots, and lamented that larger courses were needed to accommodate the greater distances that the new balls sailed.

Golfers eventually discovered that scuffed golf balls were traveling farther than new ones. Dimples were soon added, between 300 and 500, depending on your taste, after physicists confirmed that air flowed more freely over these balls, minimizing drag, and the increased spin created more lift. And recently, some players have begun sharpening their game by using smart golf balls, with embedded sensors that enable golfers to collect analytics about their shots, identify strengths and weaknesses in their game, and, of course, to help locate those pesky lost balls.

For many enthusiasts, these innovations make the game more appealing and even addictive, enabling duffers on public courses to command drives and putts that golfers floundering on the sandy Scottish links, more than 600 years ago, could never imagine.



Was POK's First Information Chief An Indian Spy?



Indian soldiers landing at Srinagar airfield during the 1947-1948 war.

● Iftikhar Gilani

This is a true story. G K Reddy, journalist, editor, and India's man inside Pakistan, who held ministerial meetings, drafted propaganda, but quietly fled in a military plane, switched identities, and handed secrets to Nehru.

It was a sultry afternoon in May 1948 when the telephone rang at the Weekly Blitz newsroom in Bombay. Editor R K Karanjia, the flamboyant voice of tabloid journalism, picked up. On the line was none other than M. O. Mathai, private secretary to India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Mathai said, "A man will arrive tomorrow at your office. He is carrying explosive revelations from Pakistan-administered Kashmir." Mathai further said that it was Nehru's own suggestion that Blitz should put the story on its front page, in the national interest.

The next morning, Karanjia found a lean young man in a white safari suit standing outside his cabin in the Blitz office with a briefcase in hand. He introduced himself as G K Reddy, who, till a few days ago, was Director of Information

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G K Reddy.

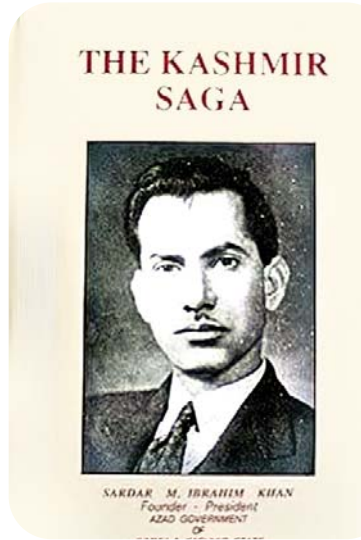
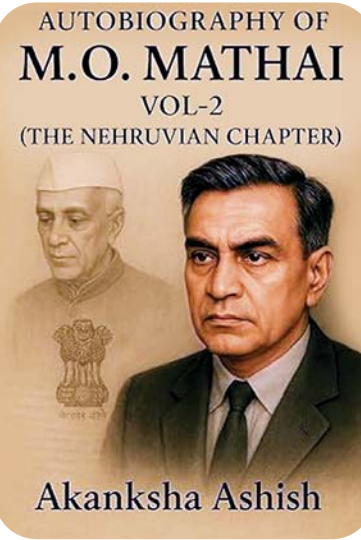
#CROSSBORDER



Khan Bahadur Abdul Qayyum Khan.



Sardar Ibrahim.



Rustom Khurshedji Karanjia.

Prasad Sharma and Pandit Gosha Lal Kaul. Documents suggest that it was later acquired by Bombay Congress leader Abdul Rehman Mitha, who made Reddy his private secretary in Kashmir.

By 1945, Reddy was reporting for the Associated Press of India (API), also from Srinagar and had close ties with Prime Minister Ram Chandra Kak. His Anti-National Conference stance and opposition to Sheikh Abdullah's Quit Kashmir movement solidified his friendship with Kak.

But as Kak's fortunes dwindled, he became a liability for the next Prime Ministers, Janak Singh and then Mehr Chand Mahajan, leading to his expulsion from the state on October 15, 1947. While leaving the state, Reddy and Mithai were arrested near the Domel post, accused of possessing seditious material. Coinciding with this incident, in Srinagar, journalists Prem Nath Bazaz and Prem Nath Kanh were also jailed under similar accusations of conspiring at former premier Kak's behest.

The press, deeply factionalised even then, launched campaigns demanding Reddy and Mitha's permanent expulsion.

Disgraced and unemployed, Reddy approached API's Amritsar

office to settle his dues. Manager Rai Bahadur Ratan Lal Sethi directed him to Lahore to meet liaison officer Zahid Umar. From there, things escalated.

The Srinagar, representative of API, was still working under the Lahore office. Sethi arranged a jeep for him to visit Lahore.

Reddy was welcomed by Mian Iftikharuddin, who introduced him to Governor Francis Mudie. Soon, Reddy was invited to become a Pakistani citizen and appointed Minister for Minority Affairs in a planned interim 'Azad Kashmir' government.

His Lahore office soon became the nerve centre of propaganda operations. One night, Reddy received a trunk call from Lt Col Alvi of the Pakistan Army's PR wing. Alvi warned of an imminent raid from Ramkot and instructed that no reports originate from Pakistan. Instead, Delhi should receive the news first, and then 'Azad Kashmir' would issue daily bulletins with Pulandri datelines.

From October 1947 onwards, Reddy found himself privy to war secrets. He was taken to Rawalpindi and introduced to Sardar Ibrahim Khan, the first President of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, who appointed him the first

Director of Information. He took calls from Pakistani Army officers. He received intelligence about tribal raids and was tasked with drafting daily press bulletins for the 'Azad' government-press releases, timed for Pakistani radio, but carefully worded to appear homegrown.

What Reddy delivered to Blitz were not just exposés, they were state-level intelligence dumps. He revealed that the so-called General Tariq leading the tribal assault was actually Brigadier Russell Heath, an OSS officer (predecessor of the CIA) disguised as a tribal commander.

These revelations, published by Blitz with photos and maps, were later tabled by V. K. Krishna Menon at the United Nations. But as per the memoirs of Akbar Khan, he conceded that he was himself General Tariq.

According to Karanjia, Blitz owed Nehru many scoops, 'but none more valuable than G. K. Reddy.' His unique access to Pakistan's top brass made his coverage of the 1947-48 war unparalleled. Even former Union Minister Subbaram Reddy launched a book of his writings, quoting Karanjia's gratitude for the scoop.

Blitz would later publish these findings in sensational instalments, with photos and maps, which were

eventually used by V K Krishna Menon at the United Nations to support India's case.

But espionage is a thankless business. Three months in Pakistani intelligence began to suspect him. As per Reddy, a foreign correspondent had reportedly blown his cover. He was dismissed and denounced as a 'Hindu and Nehru agent' by Khawaja Abdul Rahim. Tribesmen were incited to kill him. Reddy escaped to Peshawar



Flag of Azad Kashmir.

and confronted NWFP Premier Khan Abdul Qayyum, calling it 'a betrayal of the highest order'.

Qayyum assured him of safety under police protection. But the Pakistani establishment feared that Reddy might reveal everything to India. Meanwhile, Dr. Taseer and poet Hafeez Jalandhari replaced him in Pakistan-administered Kashmir's PR department, only to be dismissed a month later for incompetence.

Then came an ironic twist. During a visit to Abbottabad, Sardar Ibrahim encountered Reddy, who was also in town under police protection, accompanied by NWFP Premier Qayyum Khan. Upon seeing Reddy, Sardar Ibrahim urged Qayyum to persuade him to re-assume his role as head of the Information Department for the Pakistan-administered Kashmir government. He expressed regret over the past incident and offered an apology. Reddy agreed in principle but requested to first travel to Karachi to meet Pakistan's key information officials, Altaf Hussain and Jawad on external PR strategy.

On May 18, 1948, Reddy boarded a Pakistan Air Force plane from Peshawar to Karachi, accompanied by Air Commodore Janjua. Upon landing, he went straight to the Air Services of India office on McLeod Road and learned of a flight to Jamnagar in two hours.

He booked a ticket under a false name to dodge Karachi police surveillance. On May 20, he landed in Bombay. From there, he proceeded to Delhi and was granted an immediate audience with Nehru.

There, he handed over a dossier detailing Pakistan's military involvement and US coordination. Blitz published the series in full.

Reddy passed away in 1987 after a long association with *The Hindu*. Veteran journalists in New Delhi still remember him and his professionalism.

Though largely forgotten, G.K. Reddy's reports shifted the narrative in global forums. Ironically, decades later, a social media post from Pakistan claimed that the 'Azad Kashmir' flag was designed by a Kashmiri Pandit named G K Reddy, a strange mix-up, since Reddy was not Kashmiri, nor a Pandit. The claim resurfaced recently when a senior journalist of the region, Syed Khalid Gardazi, cited a senior bureaucrat as its source.

Though Reddy was not a Kashmiri Pandit, his imprint on the symbolic and strategic machinery of 'Azad Kashmir' was undeniable.

He didn't just infiltrate a nascent state, he shaped its public messaging, diverted its war narrative, and then vanished with its secrets.

Did Reddy truly design the 'Azad Kashmir' flag? Was he a patriotic Indian risking his life behind enemy lines, or a manipulative opportunist playing both sides? What else did he smuggle back to Nehru's desk, and what remained untold? These are questions that history, for now, leaves unanswered. What is certain, though, is that the fog of war is not always made of gunpowder. Sometimes, it's made of press bulletins, secret calls, and forged identities. In the shadow world of propaganda and intelligence, G.K. Reddy was not just a messenger. He was the message.

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#CHERNOBYL

Fungi That 'Eat' Radiation

Life emerging, where nothing should be growing



In the early morning of April 26, 1986, Reactor No. 4 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded, releasing more radiation into the atmosphere than both atomic bombs dropped during World War II combined. The surrounding area, including the nearby city of Pripyat, was evacuated, leaving behind a radioactive wasteland that scientists predicted would be lifeless for centuries. Yet, nearly four decades later, something unexpected is happening in this exclusion zone: nature is not just surviving, it's thriving.



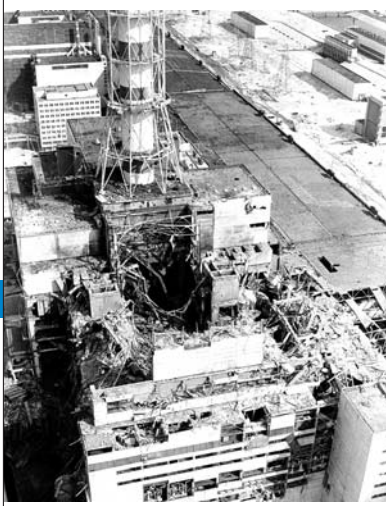
Fungi absorbs radiation.

The Paradox of Chernobyl's Wilderness

The 30-kilometer exclusion zone around Chernobyl was once thought to be permanently barren, a contaminated relic of nuclear catastrophe. But today, forests have reclaimed crumbling apartment blocks, deer roam freely through decaying schoolyards, and wolves, bison, lynxes, and even endangered Przewalski's horses are

reestablishing themselves in this unlikely refuge. Trees and shrubs grow through the concrete bones of the ghost town, and fungi sprout in places still too radioactive for humans to linger. This resurgence has left scientists and ecologists both fascinated and puzzled. How can life flourish in a place so hostile to human survival?

Rewriting the Narrative of Disaster

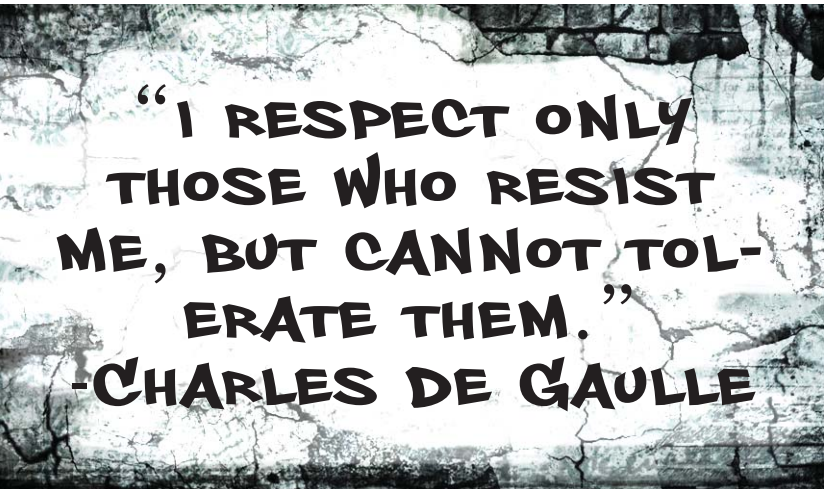


Chernobyl has become a living laboratory for studying the long-term effects of radiation on ecosystems, as well as a powerful symbol of nature's resilience. It challenges our assumptions about environmental collapse and regeneration, offering a cautionary tale and a strange kind of hope: that life, under the right conditions, can endure even in the most contaminated places on Earth.

As researchers continue to study Chernobyl's evolving ecosystem, one thing becomes increasingly clear: where humans have stepped away, nature has begun to write its own script. In a place once considered irreparably broken, life is growing where nothing should be growing.



THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman