In 1913, a 20-year-old former caddie named Francis Ouimet defeated Harry Vardon and Ted Ray in a playoff to win the U.S. Open title at The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts setting the sports pages aflame – a kid defeated two of the best players in the world.

In the early part of the 20th century in the United States, golf was a game for amateurs. Many amateur events had stronger fields than professional tournaments. The only professional who made his living from playing golf – that is, not having to have a job as a club professional for steady income – was Walter Hagen. Hagen made most of his money on exhibition tours and later on endorsements. There was no PGA Tour as such and most good amateur players remained amateurs.

After his almost unbelievable win in the 1913 Open, Ouimet had a good 1914, finishing T-5 in defense of his Open title, winning the National Amateur, and the French Amateur. He won the Massachusetts Amateur three times, and in 1917, the Western Amateur, but the advent of World War I stalled many a golfer's career. National golf events were suspended for the duration and Francis himself joined the Army.

Ouimet returned to golf after the war and played well continuing to be a factor in amateur events, winning another three Massachusetts Amateurs, the North-South Amateur at Pinehurst and the Crump Memorial twice at Pine Valley. In 1925, Francis was again a factor in the U.S. Open, finishing T-3 in 1925.

Ouimet was chosen for each Walker Cup team from 1922 through 1949, the last four times as non-playing captain.

The National Amateur Championship proved more elusive. He reached the finals in 1920, but lost in the 36-hole match to Chick Evans 7 and 6. From 1923 to 1930, Ouimet frustratingly reached the semifinals of the National Amateur five times, only to lose and failing to make the finals.

Queried on this, Ouimet said, "did you ever hear of a fellow named Jones?" Bobby Jones defeated Francis three times in the semifinals, 1924, 1926 and 1927.

As Francis put it, "I can only describe a match against Bobby [Jones] in this manner. It is just as though you got your hand caught in a buzz saw. He coasts along serenely waiting for you to miss a shot, and the moment you do, he has you on the hook and you never get off."
Jones retired from competitive golf after his "grand slam" year in 1930, and Ouimet was ready to make up for past struggles.

In 1931 Chicago’s Beverly Country Club was selected as the site for the National Amateur. Beverly was designed originally by George O’Neil, improved by golf course architect Tom Bendelow, but in 1918 it underwent a redesign by Donald Ross.

Chicago native Chick Evans, who won both the National Amateur and the U.S. Open in 1916, and the Amateur again in 1920, described Beverly as "a happy selection" for the 1931 Amateur.

At 6,702 yards, Evans noted Beverly's challenge, "there are five holes ranging from 326 to 390 yards – a drive and a pitch of varying length – some of those holes are among the best on the course by reason of good design and trapping and the necessity for accurate placing of shots. . . . In general, the first nine plays long, but most of the lies are on level ground and there are but a few trees. The second nine is shorter, but more hilly and wooded."

Evans was correct in thinking of Beverly as a good test. He failed to qualify for match play there for the 1931 Amateur.

After casual rounds at home in Boston as a warm up, Ouimet arrived at Beverly and developed a game plan, "I decided it was one of those tests where putting was to be a great factor, along with accurate tee-shot making.

"After each tee shot [in practice rounds] I chose the club that would fetch me to the middle of the green, regardless of where the pin was placed, and I paid no attention whatever to a score. Hole after hole I played for the centers of the greens, and then putted casually at the hole, caring little whether or not I got the par on the hole."

The Beverly routing has no two consecutive holes running in the same direction, and is laid out on a rectangular piece of property bisected by three streets and a railroad line. Ross designed five of the holes on the front nine to run along a ridge which was once the shoreline of a long lost lake.

Beverly is a thinking man's course, and Ouimet had his plan thought out. Hit the ball in the fairway, get on the green and rely on a trusty putter. Forget distance off the tee and don't be tempted to hit to tight pin positions. This was match play. Let the other fellow make the mistakes.

First, though, there was 36 holes of qualifying. Again Ouimet had a plan: "I am one of those chaps who feel you can do more harm by intensive practice than too little. . . . It is easier to come up to form than to get there quickly and have to stay there."
On the Sunday before qualifying began, Ouimet skipped a practice round and went to a baseball game. (Francis would later be president of the Boston Braves baseball club.)

In 1931, the USGA used sectional qualifying to get into the field of 150 for on-site qualifying, with 20 different sites around the country. This idea was to give all capable players a chance at the national title without having to go to Chicago. Site qualifying would leave 32 qualifiers for match play out of the 150 who qualified for Chicago.

Ouimet qualified safely at 152. Nothing fancy and no dangerous attempts for the medal. Three tied for medalist honors, John Lehman, Arthur Yates and Charlie Seaver, the father of baseball great Tom Seaver. Oddly, the draw pitted two of the three co-medalists, Yates and Seaver, against each other in the first round.

In Ouimet’s first four matches, the average age of his opponents was 21. Francis was then 37 years old. Ouimet dubbed the event "a father-and-son tournament," the young boys against the father figure.

Ouimet won his first three matches 4 and 3, 5 and 4, and 8 and 7, the latter a 36-hole quarterfinal match against young Paul Jackson, a streaky player who had beaten co-medalist, John Lehman, in the first round.

The semifinals pitted Ouimet against 19-year old Billy Howell, who had never before played golf outside his home state of Virginia, but had shown his ability by beating a tournament favorite, Johnny Goodman, 2 and 1 in the first round.

Ouimet must have wondered where all these young unknown, talented players came from, just as Vardon and Ray must have wondered about Ouimet in 1913.

Ouimet was one down to Howell at the end of the morning 18. After lunch the match went back and forth. One up at the par 3 17th hole, the 35th hole of the match, Ouimet’s ball ended up 20 feet from the pin, and Howell hit into a greenside bunker. Advantage Ouimet.

But Howell exploded from the bunker, just inches from the cup for a sure par. As the gallery ran to the next hole, Ouimet calmly rolled his ball into the cup for a birdie to win the semifinal match 2 and 1.

In the finals, Jack Westland, a three-time Chicago District Champion, was a formidable, experienced opponent for Ouimet, but Ouimet started with birdies on the first two holes and was four up after the first nine with 27 more to go.

In the afternoon, Ouimet extended his lead. "I was now leading by seven holes with thirteen to play. A position such as this frequently produces overconfidence," Ouimet wrote
later, "and I fought against this as well as the natural tendency to let down – one of the most fatal of all golfing sins." A gallery of 5,000 was watching and rooting for the local favorite, Westland. However, Ouimet’s plan of attack on Beverly worked and his stamina and putter never failed him. Westland fell to Francis, six down with five to play.

Known as an amiable fellow off the golf course, Francis was also known to be sober as a judge on the course. "I finally allowed myself to smile," said Ouimet after his win over Westland.

Ouimet may have been the old hand playing against youngsters, but he was also part of a new wave. The year before, Bobby Jones won all four majors using hickory shafted clubs. In 1931, Ouimet won the Amateur with a set of Wilson steel shafted clubs. Ouimet commented, “One advantage in having a good set of steel shafted clubs is this: The shafts remain the same at all times and while a good hickory is fine at the same time the shafts are apt to get soft from constant use, dry out in the winter time or change radically in some way.”

Ouimet’s win was 17 years to the day he won the 1914 Amateur against four-time Amateur champion, Jerry Travers, and by the same score, 6 and 5.

In defense of his 1931 Amateur title the following year at Five Farms, Baltimore, Ouimet made it to the semifinals, losing to Johnny Goodman, 4 and 2. While Ouimet still played in other events, the 1932 National Amateur marked the end of his competitive career.

Due to Ouimet’s years of involvement with the Walker Cup from 1922 until 1947, either as a player or non-playing captain, to many young American players he became a confidant, friend, teacher or even a father figure. While he was serious on the golf course, he was always complimentary about his opponents, so much so it was hard to know whether Ouimet had won or lost. He was engaging company and best described as companionable.

In 1951, Ouimet was the first non-Briton to be elected as Captain of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, and in 1955 he was the inaugural recipient of the Bob Jones Award for sportsmanship awarded by the USGA.

As golf writer and historian Herbert Warren Wind aptly said of Ouimet, "he was the great boy who became the great man."