

# Playing Lengths for Select Elite Competitions, ca. 1897 to Present

## 1. Introduction

This paper examines available playing length data for courses and holes used for elite competitions circa 1897 to the present to determine whether there has been a general increase in playing lengths over time.

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## 2. Major Championships

### 2.1 The Open Championship

Figure 1 shows the evolution of playing lengths of golf courses used for The Open Championship over time, and Figure 2 shows this broken down by course.

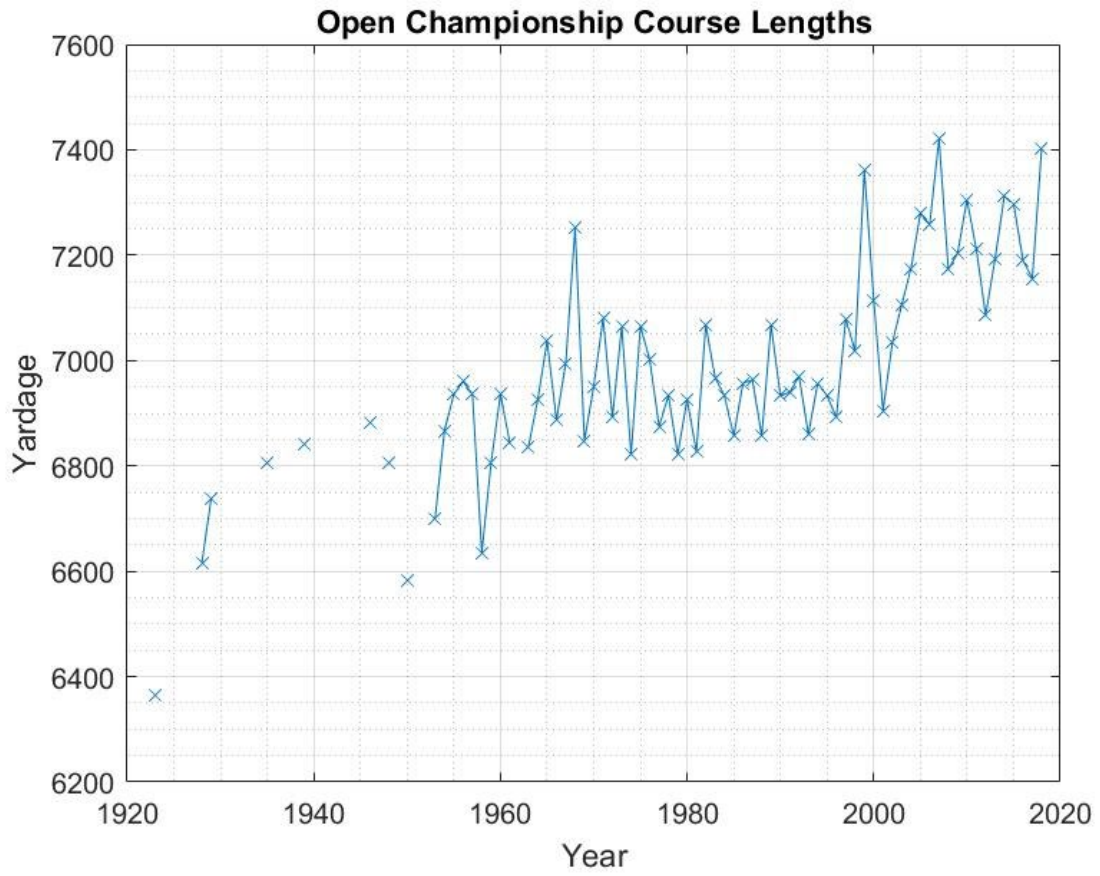


Figure 1: The Open Championship playing lengths by year

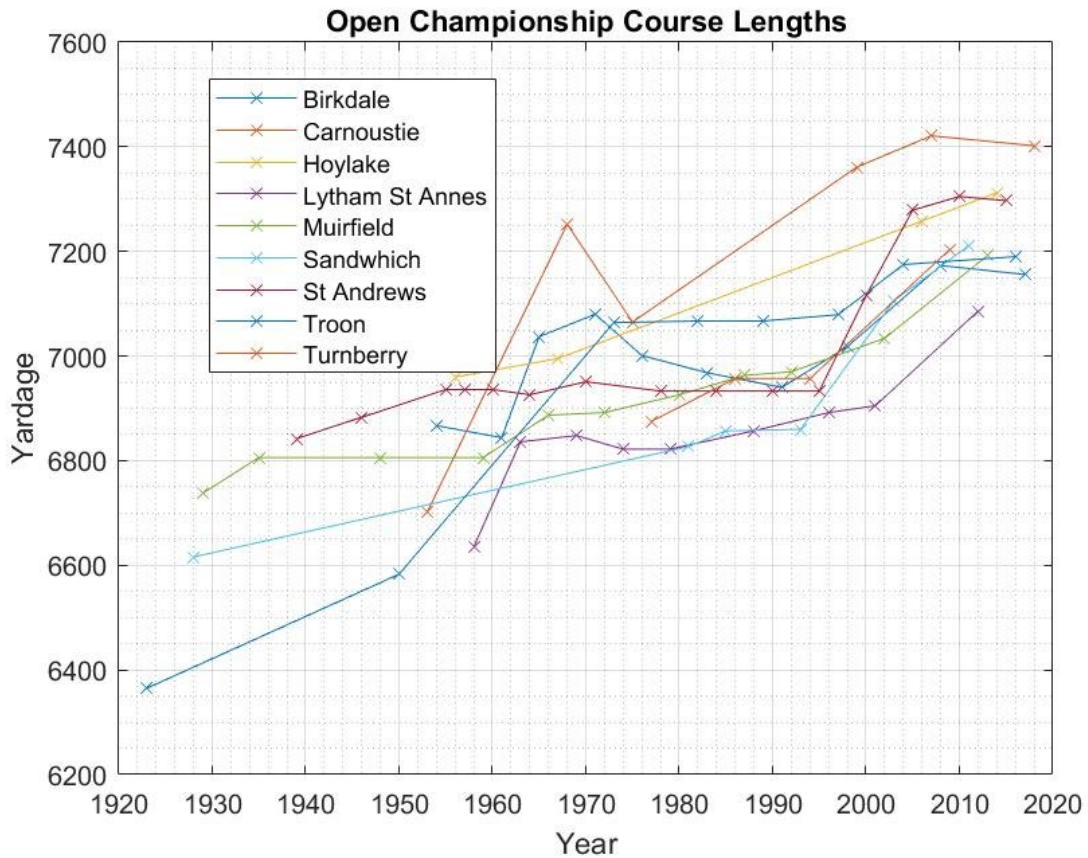


Figure 2: The Open Championship playing lengths by course

There is a lot of variability in Figure 1, due to The Open being played at a number of courses. Figure 2 illustrates that the playing lengths of golf courses in The Open rotation have all increased since the first playing at that course. The biggest increase has been at Troon, which has increased by 825 yards from 6365 yards in 1923 to 7190 yards in 2016.

Figure 3 shows the maximum playing length for a hole at each Open Championship where data are available.

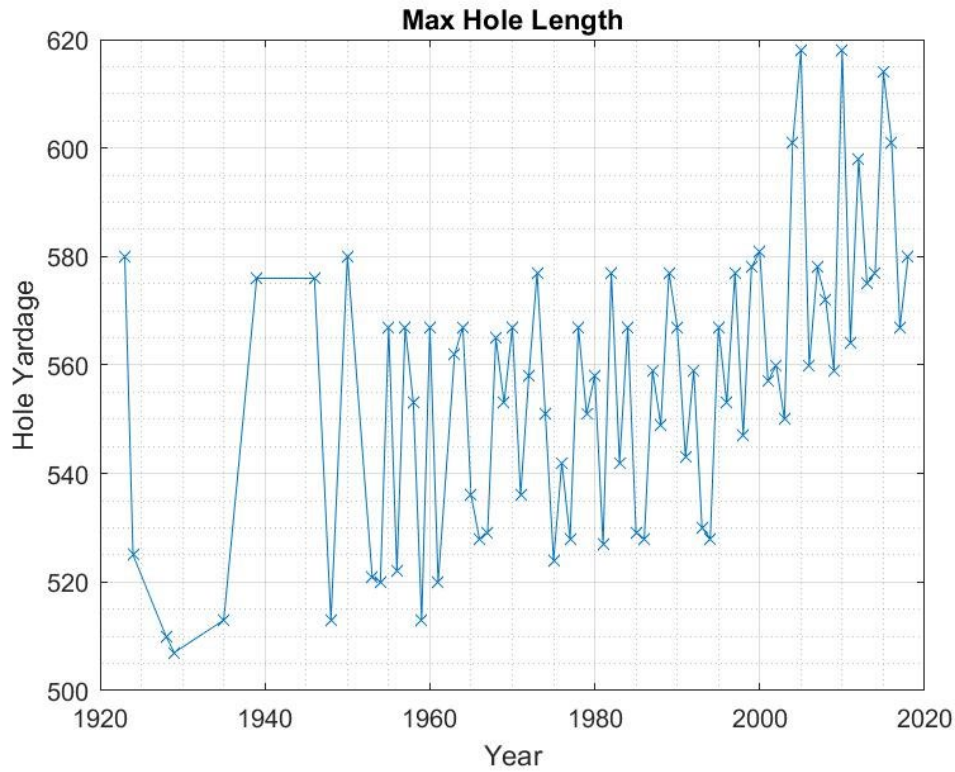


Figure 3: Max hole length by year at the Open.

It is interesting to note that the longest hole played until 2000, given the data available, was the 6 hole at Troon in 1923 and 1950. Since 2000, some courses have increased their maximum hole length.

## 2.2 U.S. Open Championship

Figure 4 shows the playing lengths of U.S. Open courses by year, and Figure 5 shows the maximum playing length for any single hole each year where data is available. Courses longer than 7000 yards have been played as U.S. Open Championship venues from as early as 1937. Further, it is interesting to note that holes as long as 580 yards were being played as early as 1935 in the U.S. Open.

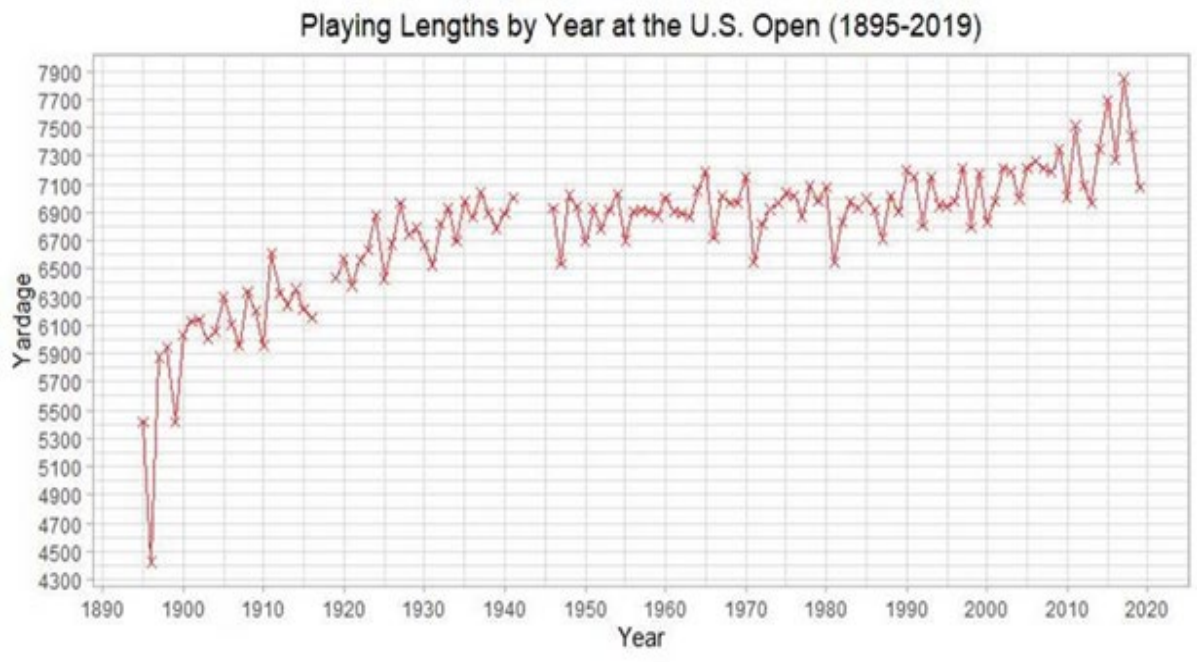


Figure 4: Playing lengths by year at the U.S. Open Championship.

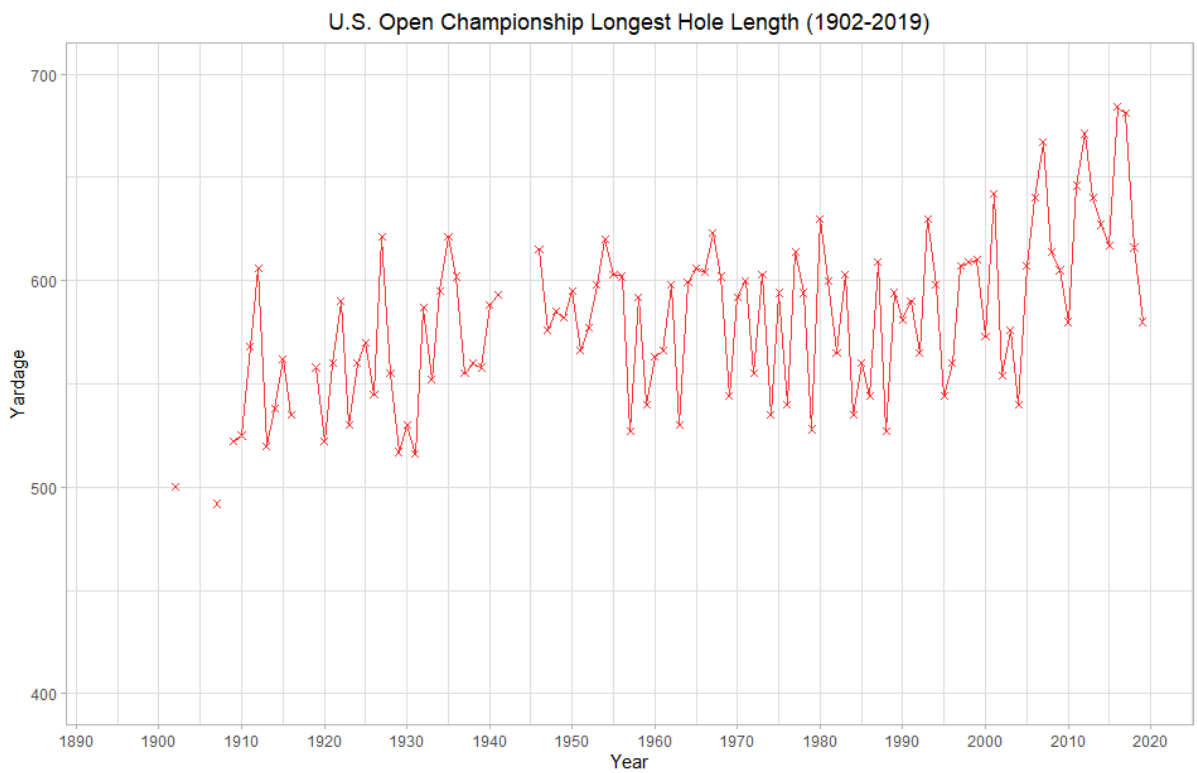


Figure 5: Longest hole played at each U.S. Open.

### 2.3 Mean Hole Playing Lengths by Hole Par

Figure 6, Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the mean hole length broken down by par at The Open Championship and U.S. Open Championship.

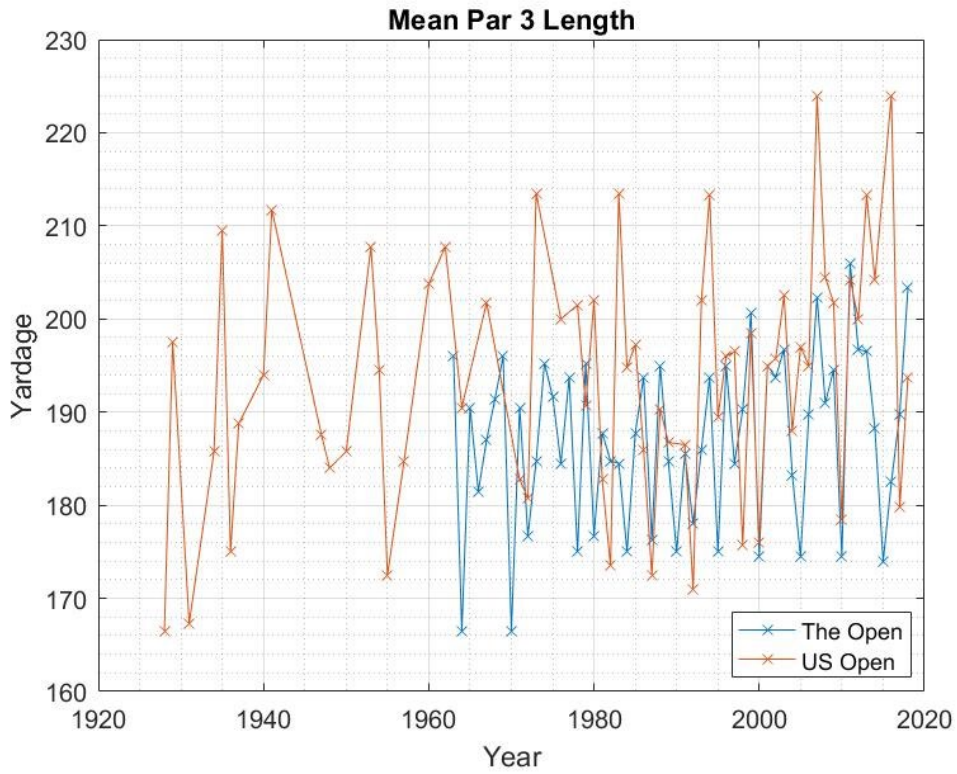


Figure 6: Mean length of Par-3 holes at The Open and U.S. Open.

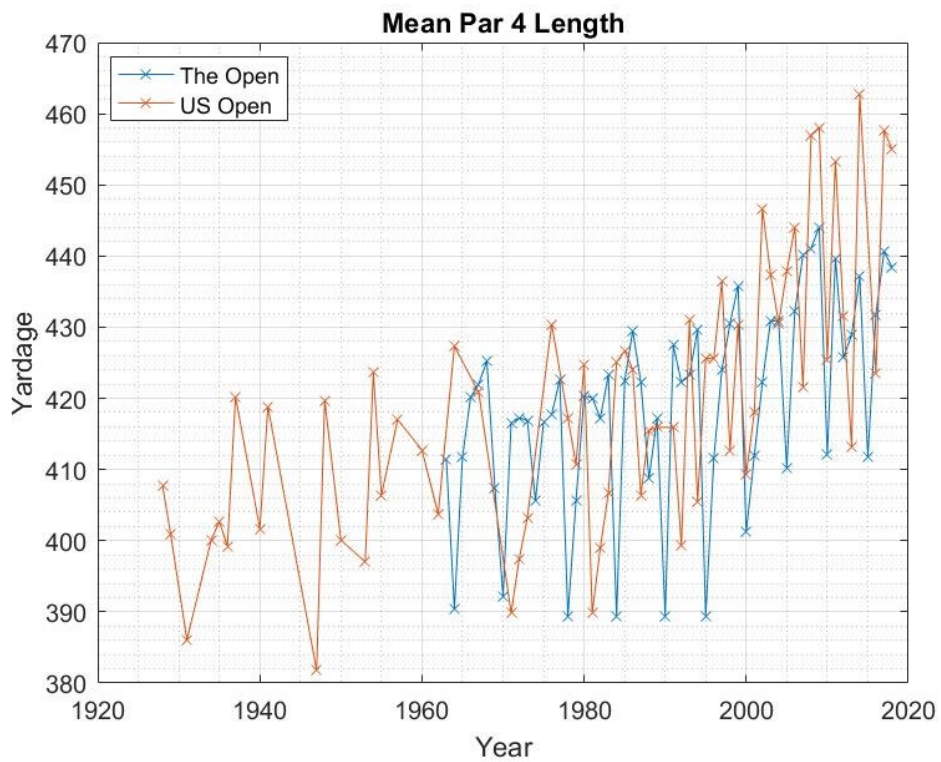


Figure 7: Mean length of par-4 holes at The Open and U.S. Open.

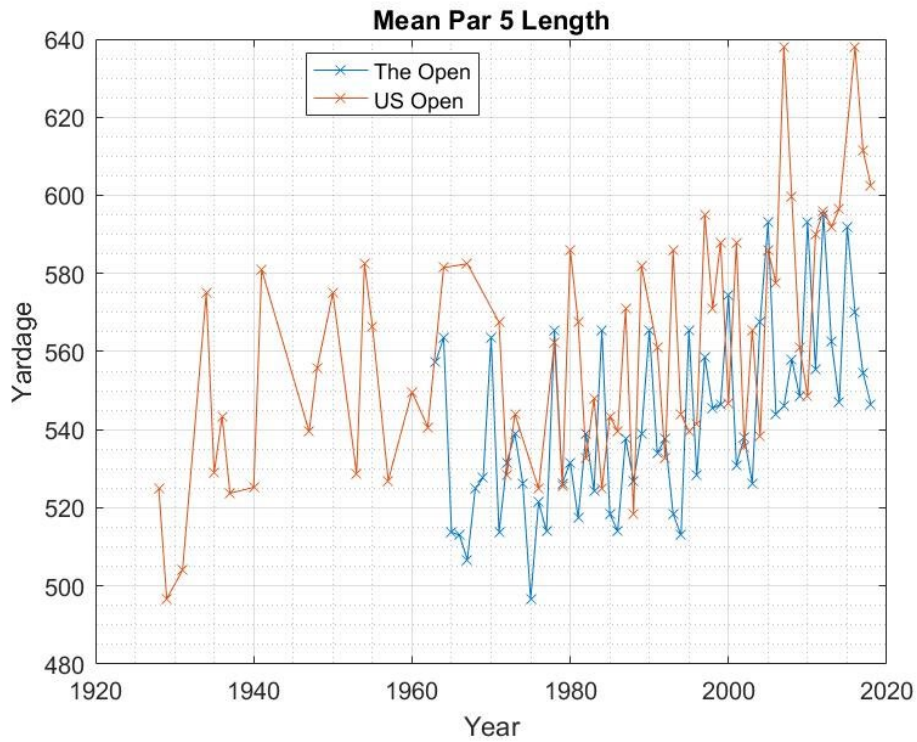


Figure 8: Mean length of par-5 holes at The Open and U.S. Open.

There is clearly a lot of course-to-course variability in these statistics. However, it does appear as though there is a trend for the average lengths of par 4s and par 5s to increase.

### 3. PGA TOUR

Figure 9 shows the longest and average playing lengths of courses on the PGA TOUR since 1919.

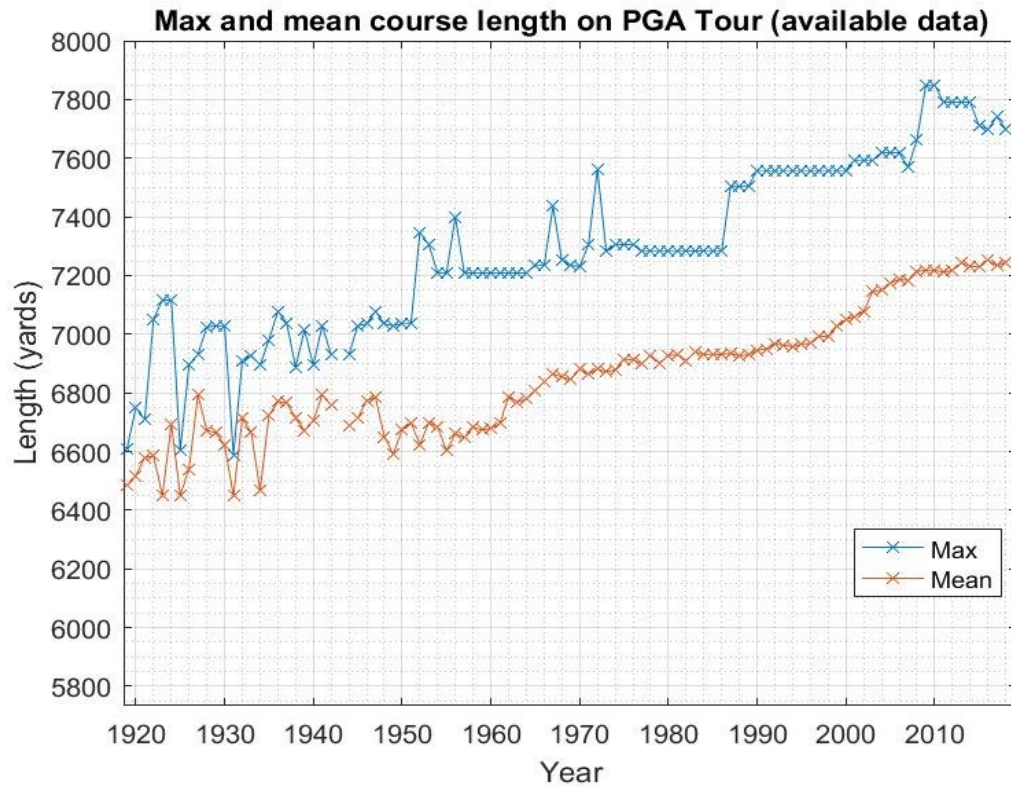


Figure 9: Max and mean playing lengths of courses on the PGA TOUR.

There has been a steady increase in playing lengths played on the PGA TOUR since around 1960. However, similar to the U.S. Open, courses over 7000 yards have hosted PGA TOUR events since as early as 1922.

## 4. Select National Championships

### 4.1 Japan

We have historical data for the Japanese Open, the Japanese Senior Open, and the Japanese Women's Open from as early as 1927. Figure 10 shows the development of playing lengths for these championships over time.

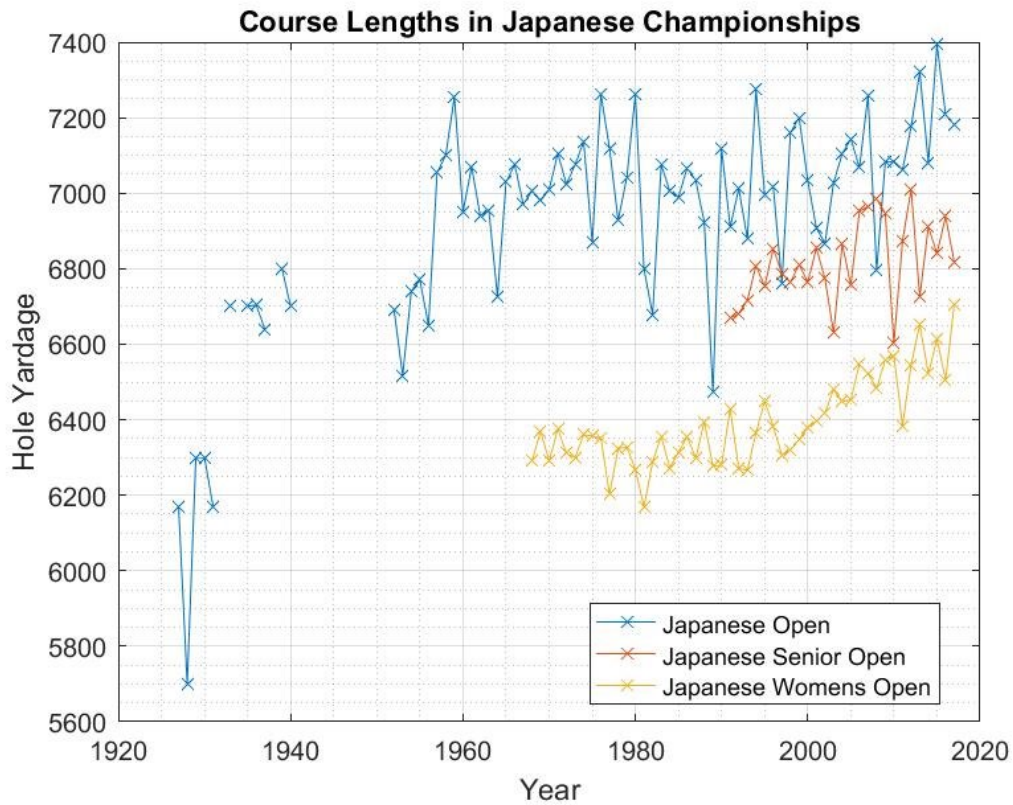


Figure 10: Playing lengths for Japanese National Championships.

Once again, there is a lot of year-to-year variability in playing lengths. There is a general trend toward longer courses, but again we can see long courses being played as far back as 1959, where a course 7255 yards long was played in the Japanese Open.

#### 4.2 Australia

Playing lengths from the Australian Men's Open, Men's Amateur, Women's Open and Women's Amateur are available from as early as 1937. Figure 11 shows the available data.

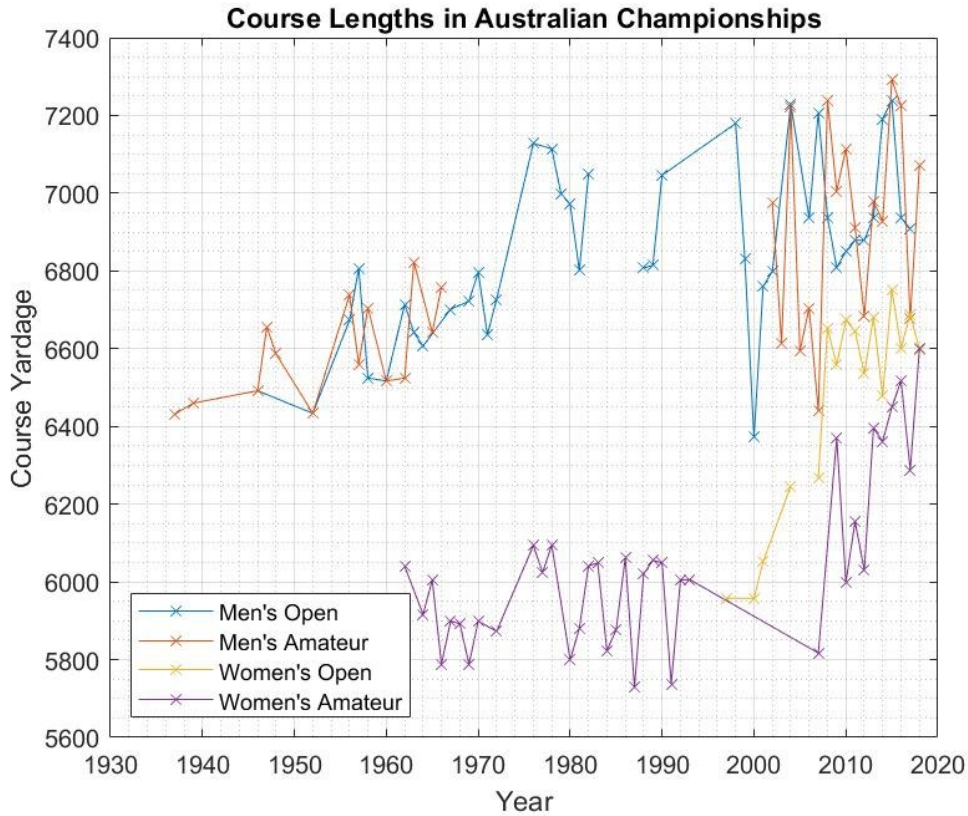


Figure 11: Playing lengths for Australian National Championships.

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