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John Matthew Shippen

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Shippen, John Matthew, Jr. (5 December 1879, Washington, D.C.–15 July 1968, Newark, New Jersey.) The son of well-educated, middle class parents, his father (John Matthew, Sr.) was an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church. His mother (Eliza Spotswood) was a housewife. Shippen left high school early to enter professional golf, where he competed irregularly and held positions ranging from caddie master to swing instructor.

Shippen's introduction to golf occurred after his father was assigned to the Presbyterian mission on the Shinnecock Indian reservation on Southampton, Long Island. In 1894 local elites financed one of America's first golf courses, Shinnecock Hills. The teenage Shippen took a job as a caddie, became acquainted with the club's professional, Willie Dunn, and even received some informal swing lessons. Two years later Shinnecock Hills hosted its first U.S. Open, and by then Shippen was skilled enough to enter the tournament. Theodore F. Havemeyer, president of the United States Golf Association, accepted and defended Shippen's entry in spite of a threatened walkout by white professionals. After tying for the first round lead, Shippen struggled to a fifth-place finish. He entered four more U.S. Opens (1899, 1900, 1902, and 1913), although he never finished better than fifth.

Aside from being the first African American to compete in the U.S. Open and thereby the first to collect prize money in golf, Shippen was also one of America's earliest native-born club professionals and a pioneer for African Americans in the elite, white world of early twentieth century golf.

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