

ALTERNATE SUBORDINATION OF THE ELBOWS

To Us This Article is One of the Most Fundamental and Revealing that has been Offered to the Devotees of the Game in Some Time. While the Method Described is Not New in Practice, it is the First Time, to Our Knowledge, that it Ever has been Expounded by Any Authority. It is Sound in Principle and is Especially Recommended as a Probable Handicap Reducer

By ROBERT STANLEY WEIR

Both before and after perusing the main text of this article, the summary of the author's philosophy of the swing should be carefully considered, as it discloses a point of view which, singularly enough, has never yet been presented in any of the numerous text-books on golf. Nor has it, so far as our experience goes, been yet expounded by any professional teacher or player. Also examine attentively the accompanying pictures of the masters of the game at the finish of their swings and note the invariably passive subordination of the left elbow as the swing finishes.

IN the following observations and reflections I do not pretend to have discovered anything new; but rather to have uncovered something as old as the swing itself; obscured, however, by pedagogic oversight and misunderstandings. My discovery is something new only in the same sense that Tutankhamen's tomb is new.

There is a right and a wrong way to do anything, says Emerson, if it be to boil an egg. The wrong way, infinite in its variety, has had quite a vogue. I propose to expound the right way—nothing new, as I have said, but something very old, although long overlooked by theorists and instructors; this will explain and perhaps justify what is repetitious in these columns. The Bellman in *The Hunting of The Snark* says, "what I tell you three times is true." The reader will please pardon me if I say some things twice or thrice.

In golf, to a greater extent, perhaps than in any other game, a conscious conception of the *modus operandi* of the swing is essential; and should be consciously and intelligently grasped by anyone who would enjoy the game to the full and to whom it does not come by nature as Dogberry thought writing and reading did. True, the player's aim should constantly be to make his play automatic and subconscious, but none the less should he first be sedulous to grasp the meaning and method of the swing. For golf is difficult to play; not only by reason of the smallness of the ball, which has to be despatched from wherever it may lie after the initial blow; not only by reason of the relatively long clubs which experience, by the usual method of evolution has devised for play; but by reason of the central fact that its clubs have to be manipulated by both hands that do not function (contrary to the prevalent notion) in precisely the same way; and are quite prone to interfere seriously and unsuspectingly with each other.

This central fact, indeed, discloses the chief misconception in the game. The difficulty in golf is one of correct conception, as to the alternate functioning of the arms. A simple recognition and removal of the misconception should go far to simplify

SUMMARY

1. The follow-through is not a following of the line of the ball with club and arms as commonly conceived and thought, but is simply the full carrying-through of the club, in its own special orbit over and above the left shoulder. The ball thus goes one way and in one plane, but the arms and the club do not follow in the same identical path or plane; they proceed upward and around the body and over the left shoulder in a plane restricted by arms and club.

2. The current misconception, therefore, that the plane of the club's swing should coincide with the plane of the ball's flight, i.e., that the club should go well out after the ball, instead of by its own natural orbit over the left shoulder, is wholly wrong and results constantly in a serious interference of the left arm with the right at the climax of the swing, i.e., the impact, and in a weakening of the stroke.

3. The arms do not function in the same way: It is essential that the difference in function be understood.

4. The correct swing, with the correct and differing functioning of the arms, calls for the alternate flexing and backward sliding of the right elbow in the up-swing and of the left elbow instantly after the impact in the down-swing.

5. It follows that the left arm dominates the up-swing, seeing that here the right arm flexes or "breaks" at the elbow and that the right arm should dominate the down-swing, seeing that here the left arm flexes or "breaks" at the elbow.

6. The essential feature of the swing, therefore, is the alternate flexing and backward sliding of the right and left elbows in the up-swing and in the down-swing, respectively; necessitating the alternate dominance of the left and right arms in the up and down swings, respectively.

7. An important corollary flows from these propositions, viz., that only a feeble ball, in the feeblest, can be dispatched if both elbows are thrust forward.

A NEW GOLF SWING PHILOSOPHY

By CHARLES EVANS, Jr.

Some years ago, when playing in Canada, I met a distinguished jurist, R. Stanley Weir by name. He was a member of my gallery in a certain Red Cross match, and there were many circumstances concerning that game that served to fix it in my mind. The course we played upon was a very beautiful one, the players most interesting to me, the Canadian gallery highly stimulating, and the game was in every way enjoyable. Time passed, however; my acquaintance of the gallery and I did not meet again, and the players and the picturesque setting became pleasant memory. Then, one day, out of a clear sky dropped a letter from Dr. Weir with the cheering news that he had arrived at a dictum, a tip, or maxim about the golf swing that no book on golf has expounded, and no pro that I have ever talked with has yet made known. He had put his idea in writing, he said, and added that if I felt interested he would send the manuscript to me.

It is my custom to let nothing concerning golf escape me if I can prevent it, and therefore I wrote at once asking to be favored with a sight of the manuscript. I acknowledge that I had misgivings as to its being new to me, for golf tips naturally come my way, and I have spent a good part of my life investigating methods warranted to make all of us champions. The longer I live, however, the more I am impressed with the motto: Live and Learn, for of this essence all of the progress of the world is compounded, and golf has gone far since simple shoptalk, first heard of it on the bleak hills of Scotland. Therefore, in spite of my distrust, I seized the manuscript with much eagerness, and by the time that I had finished it I felt strongly convinced that it should be given to the public.

For the last few years I have been teaching the game of simplified golf instruction, and when I had read Dr. Weir's manuscript I felt that he deserved great credit, aside from his originality for bringing the game down to a brief thought that the busy man can hold and build into a firm foundation. Disciple of simplification though I be, I am not among those who think that good golf playing can be reduced to any one small thing; but it may be only a small thing that is ruining a golf stroke, although it is a fine combination of many things that makes the perfect one. Nevertheless every golfer must start from a good foundation, and I am convinced that Dr. Weir's theory which, simply stated, is the alternate flexing of the elbows, provides such a base.

I do not think that Dr. Weir's theory has ever been practically taught, and I agree with him that there is a decidedly false impression abroad in regard to the follow-through. If this article should serve no other purpose than to correct this misunderstanding it will have done well. It has been a long time that golf has been spoiled by the poor subordination of the left elbow on the follow-through. Dr. Weir's theory of the alternate flexing of the elbows is admirably stated. I believe strongly in the importance of the subordination of the right elbow on the back stroke, and have called attention to the fact that the elbow should come in a good deal towards the side. I have written much about "the bent follow-through," which may be something of Dr. Weir's theory in practice, but Dr. Weir has expressed his idea so brilliantly and so well that I only mention mine because I had just written a book on simplified golf before I had seen his manuscript, and had not been able to express the idea with the novelty and ability that Dr. Weir has shown.

I think that I am largely in accord with Dr. Weir's ideas—perhaps I am using them and I am particularly interested in what he says about the orbits in which the hands travel. I can earnestly commend this brilliant and informing article to the golfers of America. It furnishes the good instruction we all so sadly need, and it offers a maximum that may be the very thing most essential to perfect our game. For my own use I would consider this little warning. The alternating brief a time for the club face at the time of impact to be at right angles to the direction line. It is well nigh impossible to keep a golf ball straight if the striking surface is at right angles to the imaginary direction line for no greater distance than an inch. A space no greater than this will mean variation in direction no matter how skilled the golfer may be. This whole statement means that I am against opening the face too quickly on the backward stroke and shutting it too quickly on the forward stroke. I believe, too, that the best golfers try to make their hands work as one, and that the nearer they are able to bring this about the better their game is.

and wonderfully improve many a game, thus making golf to hundreds of hitherto mediocre players the delight it is to masters of the game. The chief misconception in the manipulation of the golf club, be the strokes big or little, arises from the fact that while both arms are employed in swinging the club, their functions, although mutually accommodatory, are in important respects quite different.

The left arm, it is generally conceded, is the chief director in taking the club back; but its duty in this respect is performed without stress or stiffness. Its motion rearward and upward, at an angle the golfer must determine by advice or experiment, is a movement with the right as humble assistant only. The much talked-of "straight" left arm results from simply flexing the hand at the wrist-joint when arriving at the top of the swing. The left arm, then, with its indispensable hand as leader takes the club back. But it must be particularly noted what the right arm is doing at this time. Besides acting as friend and helper (for the clubs are longish and require both hands) it is quietly and smoothly getting out of the way. It "retires by the right," as the military say. J. H. Taylor, five times British Open champion, has drummed the value of this into all his pupils. He exhorts them to let the right elbow "slide" round by the right side and his advice is good, although the movement must never be exaggerated to stiffness. Nor does it mean that the elbow is glued to the side—it is simply subordinated and flexed. The orbit of the right arm in the upswing is thus noticeably shorter than that of the left. Curiously, however, Taylor, like everybody else, has omitted to give corresponding advice about retiring the left elbow in the downswing.

Having arrived at the top of the swing, chiefly by the left arm and of course, by the indispensable terminal flexion of the wrist-joints, both hands unite for the important business of bringing the club down and despatching the ball to its destination. They have the feeling of being pulled down or of pulling the club down. Certain it is that the right arm, hitherto largely passive and quiescent, has now begun to wake up and assert itself strongly, while the left arm shows also no inclination as yet to quit the task it has, it is hoped, well begun. Down comes the club, then, in obedience to a double pressure, and sweeps the ball away.

Reaching the crisis of the swing at the impact, it is of enormous importance for good form and good play to note, at this point, the different actions of the two arms that ensue. For a difference there unquestionably



JOCK HUTCHISON

Note that the left arm is the principal guide and director in the up or backswing; the right elbow, during the movement, subordinates itself completely.

orbit of their plane over the left shoulder; or, to repeat *sans phrase*, the ball, having been swept or smitten *in transitu* merely goes one way and the arms another. However, our two most useful arms, although moving leftward now, have not followed the same orbit or behaved in quite the same way after hitting the ball. How do they act? Why, the right hand and arm become unquestionably dominant, proceeding well over the left shoulder uppermost; while the left, and very noticeably, the left elbow, distinctly and immediately bends or flexes and "retires by the left," subordinately, having taken a leaf out of Taylor's book or rather added one to it, by sliding or flexing round the left side.

This rhythmical alternation of movement by the right and left elbows, flexing or bending and retiring, the one in the upswing and the other in the downswing, is to my mind the infallible test, mark and essential of correct action and of the correct swing. It is a long hidden secret of the game as far as pedagogy is concerned. It means that the true follow-through in golf is not a double follow-through by both hands and arms after the ball, but a follow-through chiefly by the right arm and hand in the longer orbit of its swing and plane upward and leftward over the left shoulder. It means that, immediately after assisting in the dispatch of the ball, the left arm (the bending, retiring or subordinate left elbow being the most distinguishing feature of the movement) restricts its circuit by bending or flexing much as the right elbow did in the upswing; thus avoiding all chance of interference with the now dominant right by retiring by the left as I have said and affording leverage of a highly effective sort for its companion's benefit.

is. The two arms do not, or should not, notwithstanding much foolish teaching about the "follow through," go out together after the ball in the same way. The plain truth about both fact and sound theory is that, in this particular, the ball takes one direction—that of a direct and perpendicular plane in the line to the hole, while the arms take a distinctly different direction by following the

Good golfers are often seen limbering up by twinging the club backward and forward at an imaginary ball or a harmless dandelion. This is sometimes thought to be a useless waste of energy or an affectation, but, if well done, it is a proof that the player knows the swing. For one thing, this limbering up is impossible unless the elbows are alternately subordinated by being bent or flexed, and is therefore an excellent test and illustration of good form. No sounder tip, indeed, can be given to a golfer than this alternate subordination and bending or flexing of his elbows, even if it involves a modification of the traditional view of the follow-through. This is my gospel to exasperated players. I am abundantly satisfied that a peccant left elbow, much too boldly thrusting itself

forward, where it has no business to be, (having already had its "turn") instead of modestly bending and retiring as its neighbor the right has already shown how, is the great *bête noir* of what would otherwise be fairly decent golf.

Now although the management of the golf club requires both hands, yet it is not an implement that usefully calls for the united efforts of the two hands; unless at or immediately preceding the impact. It will be found that they alternately support and guide the club, and then unite to propel it; the left elbow, however, instantly subordinating itself. A right-handed player, for instance, takes his club back to the top of the swing chiefly by means of the left hand; the right, meanwhile guiding and supporting it, and distinctly bending at the elbow, for wooden clubs, at least, are longish. But when it comes to sweeping or hitting the ball, there is little doubt but that the right hand is the chief factor. For one thing, its circuit is longer; for the reason also that the left arm and elbow, as soon as possible after impact, bend and "slide" round by the left; and, again, because a right-handed player naturally hits with his right, just as, when playing tennis (and many golfers play tennis) he plays with his right;



MISS ALEXA STIRLING

The perfection of good golfing style; the left arm and elbow are made subservient to the other and the right arm is not exaggerated. Both arms move leftward, not straight out, as the advocates of "follow-through" erroneously teach

and when he throws a stone he never thinks of using two hands; and only uses two hands in throwing or passing a football because of its greater size. Golf, therefore, in a sense, is a one-handed or one-arm game and, for the majority, a right-handed game; the left arm



HARRY VARDON

This picture of the old master shows clearly that the right arm is only an accessory after the fact at the top of the backswing, the left being the propelling factor in the upswing



CHARLES EVANS, JR.

Who admits that unconsciously he has been following out this idea for years in his shots

If one tries to make the club follow the ball "straight out" with both arms and both elbows, as so often mischievously enjoined, it will be speedily found out how unsatisfactory the stroke is; with all sense of leverage lost. On the other hand, if the true line of the club's sloped swing or plane is followed slightly leftwards, with the right hand in command and left

bending at the elbow and as soon as possible getting out of the way. So played, it is easier to take accurate aim at the ball, and the left hand does not then interfere, as it is apt to do. The alternate bending and retirement of the elbows, too, which I have so strongly insisted upon, becomes more readily automatic.

The follow-through by the right hand in its proper orbit over the left shoulder while the left arm with bending elbow is swiftly retiring to the left side in a much more restricted orbit, sets up a leverage of right against left, which greatly promotes the power of the right as it becomes uppermost and dominant.

To put the matter more technically, the plane of a good ball's flight is perpendicular—"straight out" in common parlance; but the plane of the club's swing is sloping or angular to the other.

The "straightness" of the ball results, of course, from the face of the club being at right angles to the ball during the brief instant of impact; but, after that instant, club and ball, as said, pursue their different orbits. The club, after the impact, I must repeat, does not follow the ball at all, as the current folly about follow-through teaches, but follows its own predestined route, which, if the swing is correct, is towards the left shoulder.

elbow bending, what a gratifying sense and realization of power is secured! The danger, of course, is the absence of rectilinearity at the impact, which is chiefly a matter of stance; but that, surely, goes without saying.

It follows, from the fact that the correct and most forceful swing follows the line of our imaginary sloping hoop, that the left elbow tends, at and immediately following the impact, and almost of itself, to seek the left side, much as the right elbow does in drawing the club back and up. There is, indeed, a singular and similar alternation of movements between elbows which is well worth noting: First, the right elbow seeks the right side, then, what is equally important, the left elbow, in its turn seeks the left side momentarily (for here action is at its swiftest) and then may slightly move out clear of the side while the right hand and arm come sweeping through, unobstructed by the left, and with full power. Follow through by all means, but not in the line of the ball! See to it, also, that the left elbow courts the left side; not stiffly, but in easy natural fashion. This non-rigid keeping back of the left elbow is a marked feature of the true swing. It might almost be said to be the secret of good form in golf; of good action; of perfect balance. It is certainly one of the very first things a golfer should learn, instead of stumbling upon it only after years of play, and perhaps not even then, owing to wrong notions about follow-through.

It will be found that any forward assertion of the left arm or elbow during the down swing, in an attempt to (Continued on page 48)



MISS CECIL LEITCH

The complete absence of "follow-through" as traditionally conceived is quite evident here

WALTER HAGEN
(right)

These two powerful hitters and masters of so many different types of shots illustrate that in the dispatch of the ball the left elbow retires by the left and is not thrust forward as believed by many and taught by scores of professionals. Its circuit is considerably less than that of the right arm and elbow, the right therefore having the greater power. Rhythmic swing is only possible by the alternate subordination of the elbows—the right in going up or back, and the left immediately following the impact. Both are good examples of perfectly natural and unforced subordinations of the left elbow.

JOE KIRKWOOD
(left)