

Backspin and Overspin

By ROBERT STANLEY WEIR



OLF being a scientific game, a game, that is, in which effects are traceable to definite and not capricious causes, it is only right that its terminology should be correct and that golfers do not get into the bad habit of using misleading expressions which are in complete discord with facts.

Among the words frequently upon the tips of golfers' pens and tongues there is none more abused and misused than "backspin" or "underspin"; and it is the object of this contribution to correct a much too prevalent practice and misconception.

Standing recently with a friend beside one of the greens at Kanawaki we watched Albert Murray, the professional, play, from a distance of about eighty yards, an excellent approach shot which sailed towards us with moderate loft, slowly, gracefully, dropping upon the green and lazily trickling up to holeable distance.

My friend remarked: "What tremendous backspin Albert puts into his approaches!" I was quite of the opinion that Albert did nothing of the kind, although he certainly did put in it a lot of 'stop'; but the time and place were not appropriate for debate. Albert duly holed out and proceeded to the next tee whence we saw him despatch a clean, sweet ball some two hundred odd yards down the fairway. Some day I shall time the duration of the carry of well-hit balls by a stop-watch; the results will be interesting and not without value.

Well, as I was saying, Albert's well-hit ball soared away, a thing of beauty, my friend and myself following it with admiring eyes. On reaching the ground the ball bounded forward with a lot of run, which led my friend to remark, "Well, there wasn't much backspin on that ball. He put top-spin on that time!"

My friend's comments upon the two shots so different in character were typical of the misconception that exists in the minds of many honest golfers as to the nature of "backspin" and "top-spin" respectively. Even writers of books betray their lack of scientific precision. Edward Ray is no greater an offender than many others, but I may cite him because his brightly written book, *Inland Golf*, is conveniently at hand. Describing his method of obtaining run, Ray says that just as the club-head is striking the ball he turns his right wrist over the left and that this action imparts a considerable amount of "overspin." He then proceeds:

"The first effect that this over-spin has is in assisting to keep the flight of the ball as low as possible. I make no pretence of being able to explain why it should do so, although I have rather a liking for a theory which I once heard and which amounted to this. While a ball is traveling through the air with over-spin, the portion of the ball

which happens to be on top at any given moment is spinning forward, and therefore is moving with greater speed than the part of the ball which at the moment happens to be underneath, because there the spin is taking it backwards in the opposite direction to the motion of the ball as a whole. The result is that the top has always a greater power of overcoming the resistance of the air than has the lower part. Consequently, the top is always trying, as it were, to get ahead of the bottom, with the effect of making the path of its flight tend always to bend down towards the ground."

Now, this is about as wrong-headed an account of what takes place as could well be devised, for the simple reason that a golf

Lines Addressed to a Golf Ball

By Ruth J. Stevens.

**Agitating, aggravating,
Pesky, gutta-percha ball—
Thou will-o-wisp whose baiting
Lures the golfer to his fall.**

**Doctors, lawyers, butchers, bakers—
Nay, a president or two;
Profs, beginners, dubs and fakers,
To thy dimpled self are true.**

**Snugly dost thou grin and balk us
When we fain would drive thee far.
From some bunker dost thou mock us,
When we dream of "holing par."**

**We revile thee, or adore thee,
Being either "down" or "up."
But we all unite to score thee,
Dost thou stop short of the cup.**

**Lo! in summer dost thou taunt us,
By thy weird unusual plights,
But in winter thou dost haunt us,
By the memory of thy flights.**

ball never travels with aerial overspin; at least, if ever it makes a start to do so, it immediately founders. But this kind of writing and talk is exceedingly common, and betrays, as I have said, a very widespread misconception.

If, for example, I had challenged the comment of my friend and informed him that Albert's approach shot, so far from having a tremendous lot of backspin, had relatively very little, and that it was the tee shot which was most charged with backspin and owed its long and successful career to that fact, he would certainly have regarded me with amazement and as either a joker or an ignoramus.

The same unflattering opinion of my golf science would probably be held by nine or ten of those whose notions of the game are either casual or borrowed. The fact re-

mains, however, that a ball struck well below the center, as the mashie strikes it, has less backspin than a ball well struck from the tee by a driver or an iron. So relatively slow, indeed, is the backspin imparted by the mashie that the revolutions of the ball toward the player can easily be observed by an onlooker. Get any friend to play you chip-shots, you standing as close as possible to where the ball will reach the top of its arc, and underspin will be seen. On the other hand, the underspin in a well struck tee shot is so rapid that the eye cannot detect it.

The distinguished authors of "The Winning Shot," that entertaining volume which deals so much with the psychology of golf, also write very loosely about topspin and backspin. Vardon in "How to Play Golf" writes much more guardedly about backspin, but even he, in describing the push shot, is evidently under the delusion that that shot is especially marked by abundance of backspin, whereas it really has much less than the ordinary shot. A strong forward impetus with a minimum of backspin are the characteristics of the push shot; its lack of run is due to this very lack of backspin.

It is interesting to know that backspin is an essential feature of all well struck balls in golf, with the exception of good putts, and golf clubs are made with faces of varying degrees of loft to secure varying degrees of backspin. A club without any loft would be a dangerous club to use, as the result would be a ball without backspin, a ball that would refuse to rise, unless the ball were struck below the center. It is not correct to say the more the club is set back the more the backspin; all one can say is that, given two equally well delivered strokes with clubs of different loft, the club with the greater loft will go higher than the other and with a less degree of backspin. This leads us to say that, notwithstanding the common use of the word, there is no such thing as topspin in well struck balls. One frequently hears talk and may even read whole chapters about topspin in putting, topspin in running-up shots, etc., but the fact is that the only kind of topspin to be seen on the putting-green is the ordinary rolling of the ball, while, in the pitch and run, we have the pitch characterized by backspin and a run which is merely a rolling of the ball following and resulting from the ricochet on contact with the turf. In other words, pitch and run is underspin followed by topspin. Topspin is a feature of the topped ball or of the run which follows the pitch.

Talk about "great backspin" in mashie and niblick shots is, therefore, not only incorrect, but the reverse of fact. The mashie gets well under the center and lofts the ball. It imparts a certain amount of backspin, but nothing like the amount, i. e., the rapidity of backspin which marks say, a good tee shot.

Backspin operates so that all good shots, in addition to the forward movement of the ball as a whole, spin, not away from, but towards, the player. In slow shots with the mashie this spin, as said, can be plainly seen; in swift shots it is too rapid for vision.

All true spin in the air, then, is backspin of varying degrees of rapidity. Aerial top-spin means that the ball ducks to the ground by the shortest route possible.

There is no such thing as backspin in putting pure and simple. The ball simply rolls along the ground. The ball may be putted, that is, it may be rolled, with varying degrees of strength and it may be struck at the center or slightly above, or slightly below, in each case rolling after a somewhat different manner. Here is where the niceties of putting come in; but talk of backspin or topspin when the ball is merely being rolled is absurd.

Pull and slice are the golf terms for swerve of the ball to the left and right respectively. In each case there is backspin, but this is more rapid in the former than in the latter.

It is not, it may be remarked, as though the vocabulary of golf or sport is so restricted that no other word or words are available to characterize the ball that falls dead and the ball that runs than "backspin" and "topspin" so incorrectly used. It would have been quite enough, for example, to say that Albert puts a lot of "stop" on his balls or that he plays them with a lot of "run"; or that he cuts the legs from under the one and gives legs to the other; or that he puts "cut" on the one and sedulously avoids "cut" on the other. In the one shot he either used a well lofted club and gets well under the ball relying wholly upon the loft, or, he played the slightly glancing under-stroke which is the cut stroke. Playing for pitch and run he would avoid getting so much under the ball by using a less lofted club; the forearms roll or twist over each other in the well-known manner and the result would be "pitch and run." Even the drive from the tee is pitch and run; the difference between A's shot and B's in respect of "carry" being due to slight differences in stance and perhaps in grip. The

words "stop" and "run," therefore, are quite sufficient for us.

The whole question was of underspin, I may say, scientifically worked out some years ago by Prof. Tait, himself a golfer and the father of the well known and lamented Lieutenant Tait, whose memory is so affectionately regarded in Britain. Professor Tait established conclusively that the flight of the golf ball was characterized by backspin or underspin as he preferred to call it. The learned professor did not venture upon any comparison between the degree of underspin in different shots with various clubs. This I have ventured to do as a clear deduction from his conclusions, which any golfer may verify for himself by observation and experiment. The shining characteristic of the well struck golf ball, to sum up, is backspin. It is a feature of all strokes except the putt. The more lofted the club or the more pronounced the cut the less the backspin, and for this reason it is more evident to the eye and has, in consequence, led many into the use of inexact terminology.

Odd Plays Interest Golfers

By JOHN G. ANDERSON



THE kind of golf which appeals most to the layman undoubtedly is that of the freak variety. It is none the less interesting to the real homespun golfer as well, but he does not linger over the details with the same fervid enthusiasm.

Many golfers have heard of Sidney Fry, of Mid Surrey, a golfer of exceeding merit who has on several occasions been the favorite for the British amateur title; and although the title has never fallen to his lot, he has made gallant efforts to win it. The chief reason for his being regarded as the logical contender was his uncanny putting. I have seen many a fine wielder of the putting weapons, but can truthfully say that no one can equal in surety even to this day the English internationalist and six times runner-up in important championships.

Fry has been for many years the amateur billiard champion of England, and he proves to a nicety the oft-repeated assertion that a good billiard player always turns out to be a splendid putter. In my last round over Mid Surrey, partnered by J. H. Taylor and playing against Fry and Dr. Sproule, Fry took 29 putts, which enabled him to get a 71. It would be natural, therefore, that a man of such proclivities would be the recipient of putting wagers.

At one time, so they told me at Mid Surrey, a friend wagered that Fry could go round the Mid Surrey links and take two putts to the green, that is, 36 for the 18 holes. At the end of the twelfth hole the wager was paid, Fry was four putts to

the good. Then another wager was made that he could not go round and take the two putts on every green. If he holed in one the bet was lost. This is by no means as easy sailing as in the first instance, for it becomes imperative all the time to play the first putt just the least off from the hole, and on the long ones or those of 20 feet or so there is a danger of holing or leaving oneself a very difficult second putt.

All went well till the seventeenth, although Fry had many a hard putt to make in this freakish system. On the seventeenth hole, trying to lay a 15-footer dead, the ball caught an unseen or trick undulation and popped in for a one putt. The player was round in a 74, and if he had been permitted to hole in one when probable for him he would have been under 70. And at that he lost what is undoubtedly the hardest match in the world.

This brings to mind the few instances where golfers have been able when trying to hole out in successive fours. Undoubtedly the strain on the nerves is trying every hole if there is a wager of a considerable amount, for each stroke is the all-important one all the way round. It would be expected that wee Ben Sayers would take up this form of play over a course where it was possible if not probable, for if there are any forms of freakish golf play which that Scot of slight proportions but great golfing ability has not taken up and tried once in a while we would like to be informed of them.

It was Ben who on a wager did the first nine holes at St. Andrew's in four strokes each, a performance which has been dupli-

cated more than once, but never on a wager. Encouraged by this very worthy feat, wee Ben then set out, again on a heavy wager, to play the Burgess golf links at Edinburgh, an 18-holes affair of fair length, in four strokes for each hole.

And on his very first attempt he was successful, to the surprise of every golfer. It was a ticklish situation, however, on the sixteenth green. Sayers played a straight drive, a fine second, and in a momentary fit of carelessness failed to sight the undulating run of the green. It had been his only lapse of the round and with apprehension did he view the five-footer he had left himself.

Around and around he walked, and on one occasion he had drawn his club back to putt when he changed his mind and walking off said: "Gosh, but I'd 'a'missed that, I know. I felt it in my bones." Then a moment later he stepped up, spoke savagely to the ball, saying, "In wi' ye, ye limmer," and in the ball popped.

The peacock in all his glory never strutted more vainly than did Benny on his walk to the next tee.

In this country perhaps the best performance of that sort of which we have authentic record happened in the Western open championship of a few years ago, when Tom McNamara started off on his last round with 5, 3, 5, 3, and then had a straight string of fourteen 4s for a 72 and the championship. Others have made as many 4s, but for a straight run competitively this holds the record here, and there is little doubt that this record will stand for some time to come.