

Comparison of Iron-Club with Wooden-Club Play

Downward Blow Essential for Satisfactory Shots with Iron Club

By ROBERT STANLEY WEIR

THE difference between play with iron clubs and with wooden clubs has nowhere, so far as I know, been clearly pointed out. Some authorities, indeed, say that there is no difference, but such are certainly wrong. Others say, cryptically, "As soon as you begin to swing an iron you go wrong." But what are we to do with our irons if we are not to swing them? Such counsel is dark, indeed, and helps nobody. Others say, "Grip tighter and hit harder with the irons than with the woods," as though that made all the difference. Is there not then some clear-cut distinction between wooden and iron play that the average player can visualize for the improvement of his game? We think there is, and propose to elucidate it in the few paragraphs which follow.

The primal and outstanding distinction between a full shot with a driver or brassie on the one hand and a midiron, cleek or mashie on the other is that play with the wooden club is horizontal, i. e., at the time of impact the club is more or less parallel with the ground, the ball being, as it were, whipped up and away; whereas play with irons is distinctly downward play. "Voila tout." This simple distinction discloses the hidden truth in the maxim that you go wrong when you swing any iron club. You go



Ray's Stance for Iron Clubs. The Right Hand Will Pass Over the Left at the Time of Impact.—Photos by Sport & General.

The reason why cleek players so often fail is that they use that club too much like a driver and not enough like an iron.

There are exceptions, however. Just as driving methods may be slightly changed when it is necessary to play into a strong wind, or a maximum of run is desired, so there are occasions for an ascending blow with the iron, such as when playing a short running shot up a little hill, or when playing a cut stroke. But we may lay it down as a cardinal rule that all forceful irons, whether full or half shots, must be delivered by a descending blow with appropriate stance and address. Observance of this principle solves all the difficulties of manipulating the whole iron family, whether cleeks, midirons, mashies or niblicks.

As to the grip, no player need worry about changing his grip for iron play. If, for example, he has cultivated the Hiltonian slide in his right fingers at the top of the drive, he may quite safely do so with his irons, provided that he comes down on the ball. There is, however, less relaxing of grip in taking back the iron, simply because, the swing being shorter, much relaxing at the top is not necessary.

May I next point out that the rapid passing of the right hand over the left at the time of impact, with the left elbow



Correct Stance for Play with the Cleek and Other Iron Clubs.

wrong when you swing it level as you do your driver, but not if you swing it with a descending blow.

The intelligent reader will perceive with this simple explanation why the excellent player of irons usually stands with the ball nearer the right foot and his hands somewhat in front of the ball, the better to deliver the downward blow. And he will also perceive why the excellent player sometimes takes turf, say when his ball is lying pretty close to terra firma; it is not for the fun of taking turf; there is no fun or magic in taking turf; but, in delivering a descending blow with the iron, unless his ball is lying pretty free he necessarily must take turf.

This, then, I submit, is the distinction between play with wooden and iron clubs. The wooden club is, as a rule, level and parallel to mother earth; the hands at the address are in line with the shaft and club-head, and are slightly behind the ball, save, perhaps, when playing into a strong wind, when they may be slightly advanced. The iron club, however, with the hands slightly in front of the ball, is taken back somewhat more vertically, so that it may come down with an appropriate smash. The iron does not whip the ball up; it comes down and its loft causes the ball to ascend.



Stance for Push Shot with the Cleek and Other Iron Clubs.

touching the left side momentarily in the follow-through, which is a characteristic and perfectly natural feature of the stroke in the golf drive, is also a feature of iron play and is perhaps more easily observed in iron play because of the shorter shaft and the heavier head. This is, indeed, the great climax of the swing, and knowledge of it makes easy that clip or snap which features all good play. It operates in the use of all clubs (save when push shots are employed) and the greater the loft in a club the more important it is. But beware of topping or even half-topping; beware also of taking turf before you reach the ball; that way disaster lies. The right hand, we are told, should be the master in iron play. What does this mean? Simply that the right hand passes over the left with a turning, not a bending wrist, and most players like to accentuate this movement. Quite as good results, however, can be obtained by accentuating the left hand; the right hand passes over all the same.

The iron shot as we have described it gives us maximum distance, i. e., maximum pitch and run modified by the varying degrees of loft in the various irons, for I am using the word as including the whole family. But on the hard greens and fairways of America the golfer's chief difficulty is not to get distance so much as to put "stop" on the ball. Hence the gradual substitution of the niblick for the machie, and still later the use of ribbed and corrugated clubs. I am of opinion that ribbed and corrugated clubs should be barred inasmuch as by the use of the push shot, difficult though it be,



Stance for the Mashie Approach, a Downward Blow, But Without Exaggeration.

unribbed clubs and even clubs of medium loft can serve the golfer's purpose sufficiently well. This leads us to a brief consideration of the push shot, not quar-

reling with the name. What is the push shot? It is simply a downward blow in which the face of the club comes down full on the back of the ball and is in common with the right hand, restricted in its natural tendency to turn to the left. As in the case of other iron shots the ball is nearer the right foot on playing the push shot, or, what amounts to the same thing, the hands are a little in front; the arms, however, are held more stiffly in the delivery.

The recognition of these two ways of manipulating iron clubs—one by the natural twist of the forearms, causing the club's toe rather than its full face to look towards the hole, and the other by restricting that twist—is one of the most interesting features in golf. Only practice and experience can reveal to the player the better choice of method in given circumstances. The cut stroke, it may be remarked, is made by means of this restricted turn or open face. To add an illustration, let me say that the putt is a miniature push shot as regards the movement of the club-face.

Finally let me remind the neophyte, at least, that the hands are the great power in golf; it is the hands that bring or should bring every club down to the ball, and every other motion of arms or shoulders or body or limits is contributory and secondary. The man who plays with his hands plays with his head. The feeling is that of playing with the wrists, justifying the following distich as a maxim for free-arm play.

"Smite the ball as with the wrist,
Use the forearms with a twist."

Some Golfing Observations

THOSE golfers who have seen the hitting performed by Abe Mitchell, while ready to grant the tremendous carries (there was one of 314 yards at Norwood, one of 310 at Washington, one of 300 at Skokie and one of 295 at Grassy Sprain) are still puzzled as to the secret of the length. They see him take the ordinary back swing, crash down and not through, but at the ball, and then purposely choke off that longish follow-through which for years was considered the acme of a golfing style. The ever keen desire to follow the flight of the ball, the rush of galleries, the quickness of the golf swing all make concentration on his driving form difficult. But Mitchell has analyzed the reasons for his methods, a number of which he enumerates.

A follow-through, says the British professional, be it ever so fine, is of little value if the ball has not received the full weight of the blow, for if the power is spread all over the swing and not on the ball, the drive cannot ever be one of extra length. A golf ball to fly far must get up a good initial velocity, for the blow has to overcome an object at rest. That is best done by a blow direct on to the ball and not through the ball, that

process on which so many depend for their exaggerated follow-through.

The most common fault of the average player is to make an effort to follow through with the club instead of concentrating on hitting the ball. It is all right to sweep the ball off the tee, as do those golfers who finish with a splendid swish over the left shoulder, but that sweep does lack the crisp nip in the shot which gives added impetus.

If the golfer will hit the ball firmly the follow-through will take care of itself. Many players would be well advised if when they reach the top of the swing they were to hit at the ball from that point.

SOME very fine advice has lately been given by George Duncan, with respect to the differences in standards between the good amateurs and the good professionals.

The former will usually be more careful and hence a trifle better on the putting greens, while the "pro" will be somewhat longer from the tee, not much, perhaps, but he will be found off the line on far fewer occasions. But, says Duncan, when it comes to playing iron shots to the green the professionals are

greatly superior. Why does this disparity exist? Chiefly because the iron shot more than any other in the game, is dependent upon the poise of the body, and the professionals, probably because of more practice, have a finer sense of balance.

The professional, as the club goes back, moves his body gently but firmly forward, so that the bulk of the weight is transferred rhythmically to the left leg. And, most important of all, he keeps his body forward, and therefore his weight forward till the end of the shot.

That is the professional secret. The ball is hit a descending blow; it is not tossed up into the air. It creates backspin and controls flight impossible in any other way.

The amateur, although he may know that he ought to perform this little moving forward, does not remain forward. He feels he must lift the ball at all costs, he falls back, and the result is a sorry effort. Or, if that does not happen, the weight is kept back all the time and the ball is spun up into the air, with no definite control over it. He ought to be its master. He ought to lean forward toward the line of play and thump the ball to its appointed place.