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Golf Theoretical and Practical

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TO how many players is not golf, a game of irresistible fascination, a game also of almost painful uncertainty? Is not the number legion of those who, standing upon the teeing-ground or fairway, looking many times alternately at the ball and the distance, wagging the club again and yet again in mingling hope and fear, knowing that in a moment they must swing the club and smite yet dreading to do so, finally commit themselves to the great adventure of the stroke in absolute uncertainty of resultant hit or miss and wholly without confidence that the ball will not be sliced into some morass, pulled into some bunker, or scuttled some few ignominious yards? The number is indeed legion, and it is the object, surely praiseworthy, of this and the articles that follow to reduce the number of this not wholly happy yet wistful throng by a few practical suggestions based upon sound theory, assuming only docility in the mind of the reader if he be one of them, and the complete eradication of any delusion in him that golfing, like Dogberry's reading and writing, comes by nature.

It may be that the suffering but aspiring golfer has fed himself upon the nostrums and tips with which the books abound and of which the very worst is that which bids him ignore all precept and simply hit the ball. Let him, the writer begs, abandon and discard all such that, even upon flattering experiment, do not reveal cause and effect in convincing operation.

For example, he is told to take turf with his mashie. Why, he is not told. The nostrum is not altogether worthless, yet is often mischievous inasmuch as it does not justify itself by any apparent

GOLF

It is a science—the study of a lifetime, in which you may exhaust yourself but never your subject. It is a contest, a duel or melee, calling for courage, skill, strategy and self-control. It is a test of temper, a trial of honor, a revealer of character. It affords the chance to play the man and act the gentleman.

It means going into God's out-of-doors, getting close to nature, fresh air, exercise, a sweeping away of mental cobwebs, general recreation of the tired tissues. It is a cure for care—an antidote for worry. It includes companionship with friends, social intercourse, opportunity for courtesy, kindness and generosity to an opponent. It promotes not only physical health but moral force.

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reason. A little science, however, will tell him that the important thing is to hit downward with his mashie, trusting the club to do the work; and incidentally will remind that, unless the ball be sitting up clear the club will naturally take turf in transit and that there is no need to take turf at all when the ball is sitting up clear.

SO is it, too, with other well known maxims of golf wholly empirical in form and urgently requiring clarifying and restatement. Empiricism is indeed the stock in trade of the average preceptor and, one makes bold to say, of almost all books of instruction; it is also the nebulous style of old tradition, once well understood but now vague and misleading. The sedulous aim of these articles will be to avoid it altogether and to show, if possible, a more excellent way by substituting reasons for maxims.

For golf is a mental as well as a physical pastime. Its postures, rotations and

swingings are far from being automatic or mechanical. A good player is sentient to his finger-tips. And as he plays his mind broods. For this reason he greatly prefers silence as he proceeds from stroke to stroke. When at his best he is in an ecstasy, thrilled and silent. He rather resents intrusion lest the spell be broken, for all the while he is busy with reflections, anticipations and resolutions. But it is sad when these fruitlessly revolve about ancient saws that reveal no fundamental principles whatsoever. The education of the sincere student is then quite haphazard.

It will be seen that the attempt is here made to lay bare what the ancient saws have sought, but failed, to say. It is hoped that counsel is not darkened by mere words or phrases and that the reader who is also a player will be thus made wiser and happier when engaged in the best of all pastimes.

I HAVE mentioned the lack of confidence in their shots that worries many golfers. Equally perplexing and annoying is the feeling, after a well meant stroke, of power wasted or misapplied: the hard hitting and incommensurate results. It is a constant mystery to many what distance mere lads, scarcely in the middle of their teens, can get with driver or iron, let alone what the accomplished professional of no extraordinary physical powers can do. Enquiry as to the secret is met by the stereotyped answer: Timing of the stroke, which, of course, is a mere phrase, purely cryptic and uninforming. Clearly some secret or knack there must be, but I have never met any professional who could give a satisfactory account of it, nor have I read in books or magazines any convincing theory. In this and the

article which follows it an humble attempt is made to throw some light upon the question, for with Virgil the writer can truly say *Non ignarus mali*.

If we swing any club with the arms alone, keeping body and legs quite still, we shall feel at once how weak the movement is for any other purpose than putting. A similar sense of futility in the use of field clubs is experienced if we sway forward with both arms and body. It is clear, therefore, that the body should not be allowed to enter into the stroke by the method of sway. The only other method for making use of the body that the genius of golfers has devised is that of rotation.

Put to the test of observation and experiment, we find that rotation of the body and swinging of the arms are the two movements that can be clearly distinguished in any good full stroke. (Foot action which accompanies the first need not be discussed.) It is therefore highly important to discover how they are related.

ROTATION of the body and the swing of the club as controlled by the hands are seen to be two separate orbits, the body describing (as a view of the shoulders will best show) a relatively small segment of a circle, while the club describes a part of a relatively large ellipse. Now let us pause to remind ourselves that the body rotates or pivots upon an imaginary unmoving axis running down its center, to ensure the accuracy of which, and for no other reason, we keep the head still. Moreover, to facilitate the rotation we shift from a plantigrade right foot to a plantigrade left. The rotation, as we have said, describes the segment of a circle. As a matter of fact it is about a quarter of a circle in the upswing and a semi-circle down. The rotation is thus a free movement of trunk and shoulders, but its limits are strictly fixed, as in fact are all the movements of golf. It is pure rotation and neither lunge nor sway nor stay.

The movement of the arms coincides with that of the body as to time. They begin and end together. At the impact,

while the rotation of the body is proceeding within its strict limits, the arms and club are flying out and up in their own orbit with great momentary freedom and speed, applied to the ball with, let us hope, satisfactory results. But as the body is holding fast to its segment of rotation, there is nothing for the arms to do but to come home again, executing thus a swing from shoulder to shoulder.

If a player will visualize these two movements or orbits and distinguish one from the other, while also preserving their beautiful interdependence, he will abstain from the much too common fault of substituting lunge for rotation, for lunge mars the whole rhythm, symmetry and balance of the swing. And he will also abstain from the equally base fault of staying or holding back the body instead of allowing it to turn freely; but strictly within the limits of rotation.

IT cannot be too strongly affirmed that it is the arms only under the direction and leadership of the hands or, if you will, the fingers and thumbs, that swing and sweep and hit contributing direct power and speed. The body's function is purely accommodative and regulative, and this without other effort on its part than pure rotation. "Keep the body out of the stroke" is therefore an excellent maxim, provided that we understand that it must pivot freely but strictly upon its axis, thereby allowing the real motive power of the hands, etc., to have full play while at the same time confining them to their predestined orbit.

It is not necessary to examine the pretty question as to whether the hands as they swing or the clubhead as it is swung parallel the movement of the shoulders, i. e., whether these movements are concentric. What we find and feel is that the hands and shoulders and perhaps the clubhead, too, complete their orbits in the same duration of time, although in some swings the clubhead seems to add a little movement of its own, probably the turning of the wrists and the shaft.

It is this simultaneous triple or at least double action that constitutes what is meant by that mysterious phrase "timing

the stroke." If either shoulders or hands hurry or lag behind each other there is no proper timing. Does not this clear up another cloudy maxim, I ask the reader? Does it not also explain the maxim "don't press?" The simultaneous movements referred to are thrown out of gear if any one of them fails to keep time. To press is to throw the movements out of gear. We may hit as hard as we please if we do not disarrange swing and rotation.

One other point must be mentioned. We are often told to swing the arms straight out after the ball. Followed literally, this always gives the arms a painful jar and a feeling of futility. It must be remembered constantly, however, that the swing of the arms is necessarily a swing round the body and may be likened to a big sloping hoop touching the ground and passing round the neck; in reality it is more elliptical than a circular hoop, but that may pass; the point is that it is not made of straight lines and the arms must follow their natural circular or elliptical course round the body, and not artificially forced outward into some other orbit. The golfer will soon find out how best to do this, viz., by permitting the face of the club to turn inwards by finger action and unbending wrist joints as the club goes through, and by thinking of the stroke as a circular motion from shoulder to shoulder and in rhythm with the rotation of the body. This will give us the biggest and smoothest swing and will not interfere with the natural and essential acceleration of movement called "snap."

I submit, therefore, as a generalization of the full swing that, in addition to the snap of the wrists, which will be considered in the next article, it consists of two related but separate movements: Rotation of the body and the swing of the arms. Practically, this means keeping the body out of the stroke but without interfering with its rotation.

Like the swing, the degree of rotation diminishes as the stroke grows less full until it completely vanishes and is replaced by foot and knee action. When the putt is reached even foot and knee action disappear.

Play Golf and Preserve Your Health

DR. FRANK E. PILCHER, leading physician of Detroit, has this to say about golf:

"Every day physicians are prescribing golf to persons broken down in health from over-work or lack of healthful recreation.

"Give us a public course and golf could be prescribed for almost anyone whose physical condition demands outdoor exercise and recreation of a sane type.

"Always, it would seem, golf is suggested as a cure. It can and should be more than that, though. It is also desirable as a preventive. Start boys and girls on the links, also grown-ups, and immediately we will begin the founda-

tions for a healthier generation instead of one that must constantly be in search of remedies.

"Money always will have to be spent for corrective as well as preventive purposes, but economically it is better that it go for the latter. That reduces the public golf course, one of the links in the great preventive chain which games in the open form, to a business proposition—a paying one that should appeal to every city."

Dr. Pilcher's views are especially interesting since he is not a golfer. In other words, there is no sentiment for the game itself which prompts him to make these conclusions. They are the result of

a cold, dispassionate analysis of the public course situation, and, coming from an outsider, have considerable weight.

"Surveys show that cities with the greater facilities for outdoor recreation, and which include provisions for public golf, have attained the highest points of efficiency in general health conditions," Dr. Pilcher said.

"Possibly 50 per cent of the persons rejected by life insurance companies as too great risks would probably have overcome their physical defects or avoided them had they been active in outdoor games such as golf. And almost 100 per cent of them would have been benefited to some extent."