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GOLFERS IN ACTION

By Mr. Recorder Weir, D. C. L.

I.—MR. WALTER J. TRAVIS

Photographs by T. C. Turner

IT is almost trite to say that Mr. Walter J. Travis is our leading amateur golfer. He leads not only the amateur contingent at a long distance, but, as shown by his achievement at the Open championship of 1902, when he tied for second place, the majority of our professionals as well. So steady and accurate, indeed, is his public form that Mr. Travis has been dubbed "the machine," but he should rather be called "the student," for he plays with his head. Constantly alert, observant, and reflective, his genius as a golfer is simply once more the capacity for taking infinite pains. He possesses the wit to economize time and strength in preparation; knows that the laws of dynamics are to be depended upon; that a slice or a pull, a top or a scuff, may be traced to some defect, and the defect he does not delay to trace. He has neglected no side of the game, but has studied clubs and balls, winds and turfs, as well as stances and swings, and has therefore succeeded in winning the premiership which undoubtedly is his to-day.

Success beyond the average in golf depends upon the possession of three things: an equable temperament, a clear mind or intelligence, and physical power. The excellent golfer is therefore cool, brainy, and strong. These three qualifications are not equally important, and I venture to think I have graded them in their proper order, putting temperament first. The temperament that is not thrown out of balance by either occasional failure or brilliance,—by good or bad luck,—comes by nature. The golfer who is irascible by nature is foredoomed to failure. Mr. Travis is endowed with a fortunate temperament; he is never unduly elated or depressed by the incidents of play. Being also very intelligent, a keen observer and a thinker, it follows that he is a good golfer, even though his physical qualifications may not be extraordinary. Doubtless he has gained in strength of arm and wrist and general control of his muscles since he took to golf, but the chief factor in his success seems to me to lie—if the new psychology will permit the distinction—in his brain and in his temperament. To a certain and rather an uncertain extent, therefore,

Success beyond the average in golf de-

golfing comes by nature. *Golferarius nascitur non fit*. Mr. Travis is a self-taught player,—entirely so, but must possess much natural adaptability for the game. Still, it may encourage those who have been discouraged by the tradition that your excellent golfer, like Dr. Johnson's tolerable Scotchman, must be caught and trained young, to learn that when Mr. Travis took up golf in October, 1896, no less than thirty - five seasons had come and gone over his head. And yet in 1900 he was 'Amateur champion! His struggle with Mr. Douglas in the finals at Garden City that year was, by the way, as much a triumph of temperament as of anything else. The decisive holes were played in torrents of rain. At the sixteenth hole Mr. Travis was 2 up. The storm increased; pinches of sand for tee

purposes were impossible; the putting-greens were lakes, and the balls landed with a splash. To quote from the vivid account of "Oldcastle" in *GOLF* (August, 1900): "The play on the green at the last hole will not soon be forgotten by the few who saw it. Devereux Emmett, the vice-president of

the Garden City Golf Club, stood near the hole with a broom trying to sweep the water away, and having the same success as Mrs. Partington with the Atlantic Ocean. The water grew deeper every minute, but the game had to be finished. Putting was out of the question, for the balls would not roll an inch.

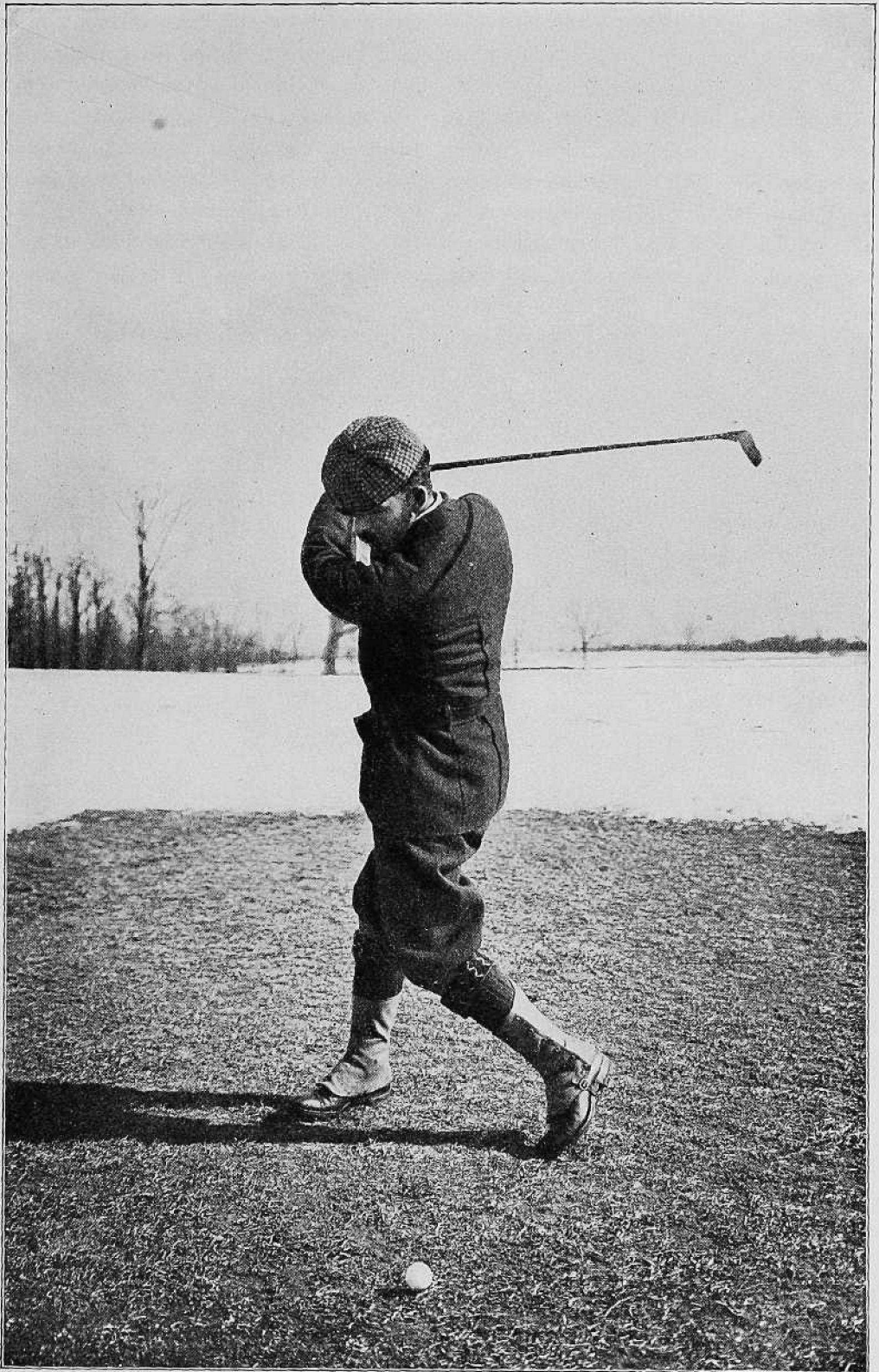
Playing the odd, Douglas did not loft with sufficient strength, going only half-way to the hole, while Travis, making a perfect shot under the circumstances, laid his ball dead with a flop in six inches of water, and so won the Amateur championship of America by 2 up."

Our portraits of Mr. Travis at the finish of a stroke from the tee make a highly interesting study. The most striking feature of them is, perhaps, the thoroughness of the follow - through. So completely indeed has the club been carried



AT FINISH OF STROKE.

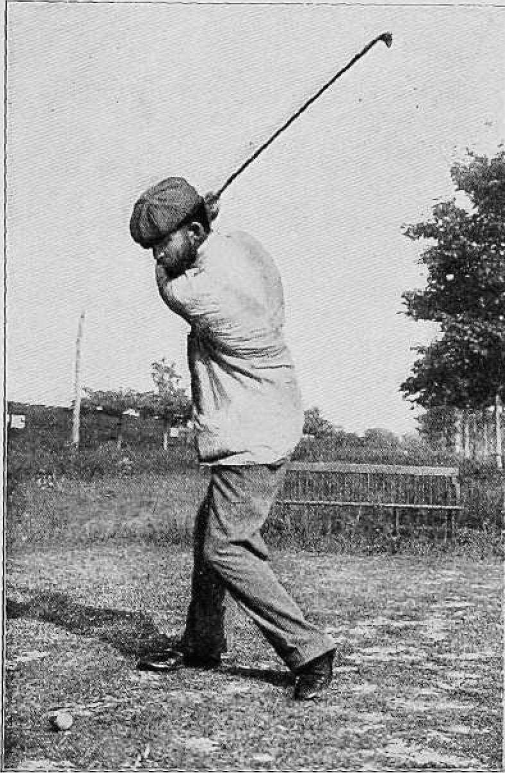
round that it has almost reached its direction when at the address. At the same time nothing of exaggeration or pressing is suggested by the general pose of the body. The weight has been effectively transferred to the left leg, aided by a very free turning on the right foot and toe, but there is no forced follow-on, no



AT TOP OF SWING.

undue strain or loss of balance. The head, it is seen, inclines somewhat sideways and downward,—that is, it remains almost in the same plane or angle with the ground as at the address, and if it has moved forward at all, it has done so sympathetically with the rest of the body. The follow-on, as we have suggested, is not particularly noticeable; there is no pronounced leaning forward of the body

To the scientific application of it he attributes the steady improvement in his long game, which has been a noticeable feature of his play from year to year. His average drive is from 185 to 195 yards—a very comforting distance indeed when steadily achieved from the tee. But when conditions are specially favorable this distance has frequently been exceeded by him.



TOP OF IRON-SHOT.



FINISH OF IRON-SHOT.

at the finish such as one remarks in the swing of H. H. Hilton, Sandy Herd, or the late Lieutenant Tait, and yet the freedom with which the body has turned on the right foot and toe shows that the weight has been completely transferred to the left leg, which is sufficient.

An important element in the swing which the camera cannot reveal is the timing of the stroke. It is known that Mr. Travis attaches great value to this.

During the past season (1902) Mr. Travis's game was probably three or four strokes better than during the preceding year, the result being attributable to a general increase of accuracy, which shows that his success in winning the Amateur championship in 1900 and 1901 has not led him to relax his devotion to the motto "Excelsior," which he seems to have set before him.

In height Mr. Travis stands 5 ft. 8¾

in., and his weight in winter is 143 lbs. and in summer 136. These figures we regard as exceedingly interesting. They demonstrate, what has often been suspected but of late somewhat denied, that great physical power is not essential to excellence in the Royal Game. Doubtless there are many who may hit a harder ball than Mr. Travis, but few there be who can so accurately smite at the "psychological moment,"—in golfing phrase who can so accurately "time the stroke."

Our portraits show that although Mr. Travis's swing is not a St. Andrews swing, yet it is by no means a short one. The tremendous follow-through is very instructive. It indicates, we think, that the power has been reserved for and applied at the precise moment of impact, that there has been no waste of strength in the beginning or even the middle of the down stroke. It is the impetus which has thus been imparted at the latest possible moment that accounts for the arms and hands being brought round over the left shoulder with such remarkable freedom.

Even in the long game Mr. Travis does not give the spectator the impression of exerting himself; and yet his balls travel unexpectedly far. In this respect he presents an interesting contrast to his worthy competitor in many a well-contested game, Mr. Findlay S. Douglas, Amateur champion in 1898, and runner-up in 1899 and 1900. Mr. Douglas "sits down" to his ball in most effective and orthodox fashion, and smites his ball mightily and with every appearance of might. Away goes the ball, as it evidently must go after so swift and sure an impact. Mr. Travis, on the other hand, seems to take matters more quietly.

The weight of the body and a certain appropriate wrist action probably enter more into the stroke. Whatever be the difference, and we shall try to discover it more particularly when we come to analyze Mr. Douglas's swing, it is surprising to note what little difference there is in the length of the drives of these admirable golfers. First one and then the other will have the advantage. Good at all points, it is probably in the short game that Mr. Travis is most brilliant. You need never be surprised if the approach putt goes down, or even the pitch with mashie when well off the green.*

On the greens themselves whenever within any holing distance putt after putt finds the bottom with deadly accuracy. It is the man who putts who wins.

Finally, be it said that Mr. Travis makes no secret of his art in golf. The pages of his excellent book *Practical Golf* contain admirably frank and straightforward expositions of the methods which he commends, after having tested them very thoroughly, and he has certainly done the game great service by showing that there is no royal road to excellence in it, and that the player must consciously grasp the why and wherefore if he is to play steadily and accurately. Not least of all, Mr. Travis has also done the game great service by loyally conforming to its splendid old traditions. He has never forgotten, in his own fit phrase, that "It is a gentleman's game any way."

* The pitch with the mashie, however, is not Mr. Travis's favorite method of approach. He prefers, and almost uniformly adopts, the running-up style. Still, the pitch justified itself at Garden City, 1900, as referred to above.

TO BE CONTINUED.