

MISCONCEPTIONS IN GOLF

Pointing Out Errors Which Have Won the Credence of Golf Theorists

By ROBERT STANLEY WEIR

OF these there are too many in golf owing in part to the defective nomenclature of the sport. Often they are positive misnomers. The basic principles of the game involve no mystery save when we try to square them with fallacies accepted unthinkingly and with the misnomers. Then, indeed, mysterious troubles beset us.

The case of the "Follow-through," already dealt with in GOLF ILLUSTRATED, is in point. There is, of course, such a thing and basic principle as the follow-through of which every good golfer has conscious or unconscious knowledge, but the thing and the principle are not the follow-through of practically all the books and nine-tenths of the oral instruction. The term is misleading, in short, as in the article referred to, we endeavored, not unsuccessfully we believe, to show.

Then there is the so-called Push Shot, of which we shall only say at present that it has been most unhappily named, being neither a "push" nor a "shot" nor a combination of the two, but simply the square-faced hit or *vis a tergo* which any dictionary will tell us is a propelling force applied to some object from behind, e.g., a football or other kick.

There is also a widely prevalent but very vague use of the word "Timing" which merely conceals non-recognition or at least great haziness regarding another basic factor of which we shall have a word or two to say.

Finally (for the present) there is the hitherto unchallenged fallacy, first promulgated by the Badminton book and weakly and unreflectively followed or accepted by almost every theorist since, that, as the ball is struck both feet are, for an instant, flat upon the ground. Practically this dictum is ignored as prescriptive of an impossibility but nevertheless the doctrine never having received expurgation or quietus is persisted in to the added perplexity and unhappiness, not merely of neophytes, but of those who have long passed their novitiate.

THE MYSTERY OF TIMING

Reverting to what is called "Timing." Has anybody ever yet read or heard an intelligible definition of the term? And yet no word is oftener on the lips of well-meaning instructors and on the tongues of temporarily self-accusing or self-excusing players. "I am not timing them right," says the foozler, the slicer or the puller, flattering himself with a mere meaningless word. For what Timing is, more than hitting the ball at the right time, it would rather "stump" him to say; even if he achieved what is so obviously a mere paraphrase. Timing (we shall hazard a definition which we hope, is something better than a paraphrase at least) is *the harmonious blending of body-rotation and arm-swing of the club*. We mis-time, that is to say, when the swing of the arms and club fails to synchronize with the turning and re-turning of the body. The body enters into the stroke but neither in advance of the arms which wield the club nor after them. It enters *with* them. This co-incidence of movement between the quarter-rotation of the body upon its axis and the wider swinging arms and club is what constitutes Timing. It involves that agreeable "see-sawing" from foot to foot with alternately rising and falling heels—the inside of the larger toes preserving the balance and the body rhythmically turning and re-turning—which the veriest neophyte will understand and recognize at once as a peculiar feature of golf.

Our foozling and self-accusing friend is probably right in blaming himself for failure to "time" correctly but, having no clear conception as to what constitutes Timing and its coincident rhythms of the arms and the body, must be pronounced to be often in a parlous predicament.

We assume, as we fairly may, that our friendly foozler is obedient to all the maxims. He is not unduly pressing; he keeps his eye upon the ball and keeps his head still. Perhaps he has at last solved the mystery of "Timing." Can it be that he is the victim of another deluding fallacy—the fallacy of the STRAIGHT LEFT ARM?

In proper, even improper golf, be it said positively, there is no such thing

as the "straight left arm." In fact, there are no straight lines in golf whatever; except in a good putt on a level green. The *aerial* flight of every golf ball, good or bad, and of all good body action synchronous with good action of the arms and swinging of the clubs, is in *curves* or in arcs of circles. The left arm does not describe a straight line as it takes the club back, even if it be the putter, but describes a curve or arc and does so in a perfectly natural and unstiffened way. Even the wrist-joint, as it bends the club to or towards the horizontal at the top of the swing, does so in a curve which is part of one continuous unflexing but bending movement of the arm. The player then, if he be wise, will not bother himself about the so-called "straightness," which, as a matter of fact is literally impossible and should never be striven for. The *curved* straight arm, a continuous curve terminating with a bending, not a suddenly flexing wrist joint as part and parcel of the one ball movement, is the great desideratum. The "straight left" is nothing but a mischievous misconception and should be anathema to every pious golfer and dropped from the vocabulary of golf as well as from his conceptions of the game.

THE MISCONCEPTION ABOUT THE FEET

Another error in golf, which has singularly enough contrived to win the credence of golf theorists innumerable, is the idea that, at the moment when the ball is struck, both feet somehow should be flat upon the ground. The precise and exact language of the Badminton book in this regard may be quoted that the reader may see that we have not misinterpreted the curious current doctrine. Mr. Horace Hutchinson, the author of Badminton, declares, in words that have the reinforcement of italics, that the great secret, and he half-apologizes for using such big words, is as follows:—"Your body, your arms—all the members of your frame—ought to be in the same relative positions at the moment of striking as when you addressed yourself to the ball. This," he continues, "is the secret of accuracy."

Now, I am quite satisfied that the words of the Badminton book just quoted are most misleading if they are intended to include the feet. Nothing is more evident, of course, than that during the full swing there must be body-rotation or turning. The action of the shoulders makes this abundantly clear as the left shoulder finds its way to a point underneath the chin and the right shoulder turns correspondingly behind. This action may, with sufficiently approximate accuracy, be described as quarter-rotation. But it is important to note the action of the feet while this is going on. As every golfer knows, there is a raising, first of the left heel and then of the right heel—a kind of see-saw, as we have said, from left to right and then back again from right to left. At the top of the swing the right foot alone is plantigrade; at the finish the left foot, in its turn, is plantigrade. Somewhere in the middle of this see-saw the ball is struck. It will be found that this "somewhere" is just as the left heel comes to terra firma and the right heel begins to rise. And the inner edges of the big toes alternately maintain one's balance. This alternation in the raising of the heels to permit of the see-sawing we have mentioned is another illustration of that alternation which we have already noticed as characteristic of the elbows (see our Article of September 1924). There is a beautiful bi-lateral symmetry in feet and arms as well as in retiring elbows, which is essential to proper golf action and timing. The two feet do not both come to the ground until all action has ceased, no more than they do in walking or running.

I venture to hope that my provisional definition of Timing also partakes of the nature of an elucidation and the dispelling of a rather hazy mystery; also that the phrase straight left may be replaced right up to and including the wrist-joint by the vastly less misleading "A Curved Left."

SUMMARY OF ARTICLE REFERRED TO

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 fact, the feeblest, can be dispatched if both elbows are thrust forward.