

SOME PROFESSIONAL TIPS

Here Are the Answers to Many of the Questions You Would Like to Ask Famous Players

By ROBERT STANLEY WEIR

DURING a recent golf tournament in which I was an absorbingly interested spectator I entertained myself, not only by the closest observations possible—toward which I found a pair of excellent field-glasses the best aid, owing to the activities and prohibitions of the field-stewards—but also by questioning as many expert performers as I could interview as to the secret of accurate and efficient strokes, whether with woods, irons or putters.

Some of those interviewed could give me no satisfactory explanation of the faith and skill that was in them. These were more accustomed to deeds than words. One of them, with a touch of impatience, said: "I just look at the ball and hit it," which was perhaps as excellent an epitome of the art of golf as anyone could frame. The others for the most part took refuge in the well-worn and nebulous maxims that convey so little: timing the ball, keep your head still, slowback. None of them, however, kept his head still for more than an instant; none of them obeyed the maxim slowback. I was left, for the most part, to my own guesses as to what was meant by timing the ball.

But there were some fine fellows who had taken the trouble to frame in their own minds and to put into words their own pet theories and were good enough to communicate them to me with full permission to make private or public use of them. Accordingly I am setting down, almost at random, a selection of the tips, pointers and cautions thus gathered for the benefit of all and sundry.

A Western champion told me this: "In all my full shots I try to turn at the hips and get a full *round* swing. Unless I get a circular swing I do not get a sweet ball. The shorter strokes are like parts of the circle to me. There are no straight lines in golf." I thought this both epigrammatic and good; even though the full swing be more elliptical than circular. The *feeling* for circularity must be sought after.

Another, a Canadian, said: "There are two ways of hitting the ball. One is with a turning face of the club, the other with an open face; the first gives you the maximum, the second the minimum run. For the first the right forearm passes smartly over the left as you hit the ball, for the second you prevent such a motion." George Duncan has since committed himself to similar doctrines in one of his syndicate articles.

An English pro, not long in this country, confided to me his astonishment at the extension motion for the right and left arms which were often taught by professionals in this country. Said he: "The right elbow should keep well in during the first part of the swing while the left elbow should do the same in the second part of the swing. If either elbow leaves the side to any great extent, mischief is sure to result. I have no faith at all in wide extension motions. The swing should be compact as well as free." This was also well worth saying and noting.

Speaking of iron play, another expert said to me: "Have you ever noticed how the blade turns sharply inward as you hit the ball with an iron? When I point this out to my pupils they expect to pull sharply and this sometimes does happen with the mashie. Turn the toe of the club out slightly at the address, however," he continued, "and proper correction is supplied." This turn, as he explained, results from the right hand passing over the left, and is necessary to get a good crisp ball. "Moreover," he continued, "the club takes the longest possible direction toward the hole by this method."

Another told me that he never tried to take turf. "I simply try to get properly *under* the ball and if the shot is not successful it is because my club was not sufficiently lofted or I did not get to

the very bottom of the ball." Another tip I got was the following: "The best club for a chip off the fairway to the green is not always a mashie. I prefer a light iron or a short cleek. There is no stroke that pays better than the successful chip shot."

Singularly, one question to which I got very few positive answers was: Do you hit chiefly with your right or left hand in your drive? The majority seemed to plump for the right—some, however, for both hands and a few positively for the left. The straightest, if not the longest, driver of the tournament confided to me that he opened his right palm freely toward the top of the swing and his left to a less degree; coming down he gave the ball the back of the left hand or the feeling of this. In his opinion this prevented both pull and slice by its control of the right wrist which, when too much turned, caused a pull and, when not turned but bent, caused a slice. As I had worked out an identical opinion in my own case, I was naturally pleased to hear it from a more authoritative source.

Another said to me: "I have great faith in hitting, either with the left hand chiefly in a back-slap sort of way, or, chiefly with the right hand. In the latter case I hold the left hand back a bit at the moment of striking so as to allow the right hand to get in its work. This is the way to get snap." This reminded me of one of Aleck Smith's theories and still more of what an English professional, Charles Clarke has advanced in a little book entitled "Common Sense in Golf."

I got a similar pointer from another pro on this debated question. He was a great believer in holding the left hand back at the impact, thus allowing the right hand to come smartly over with snap. He advocated this particularly with irons. He also favored keeping the left hand back in putting. It would seem, therefore, that one may play with either right or left hand in command or with both in equal unison, as Vardon recommends. The Vardonian counsel, however, is one of perfection to many and to these the pointer about right and left above quoted may prove useful.

Speaking of putting, the same pro remarked: "More putts are missed through timidity than any other cause. Get your true line, gauge the necessary strength and then trust to Providence or your muscular sense. Don't be afraid of the holes." I thought this very sound doctrine.

What is the push shot? I asked another. And his answer was: "The push shot is a shot in which the arms and body come down on the ball together, with the full face of the club and not with a turning face."

From another pro who had been very successful on the greens I received these counsels: "On smooth wet greens I play with follow through. On dry greens for holeable putts I shorten the follow through. In every case the putting swing should be slow so as to assure accuracy."

What do you understand by timing the shot? I asked another whose play I greatly admired. His answer was this: "Don't hit the ball too fast. When a ball is mis-timed it is hit too quickly." Was he right? I think so.

Still another professional said in reply to a query on putting that the position of the feet is not an important matter, as is proved by the variety of the positions favored by different players who are all first class in this department of the game. Whatever position is chosen, however, it should be as natural and easy as possible, because then it is certain also to be well balanced. This teacher observed that if there is one position which seems more than another to eliminate any tendency towards setting of the muscles, it is the stance much favored by American professionals, with the heels close together and the ball opposite the toe of the right foot.