

HOW TO PLAY GOLF

BY

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WITH FORTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON



Harry Vardon

position for a shot. It was fixed to the cap by the fish-hook.

All this may seem somewhat weird, but as to the value of the instrument I have not the slightest doubt. It is an extraordinarily effective means of practice for the indifferent golfer—or even the good one who finds that he is doing badly and knows not quite why. Lessons and hints from a human instructor are none the less desirable, but this contrivance enables the player to decide, when shots do not come off in practice as they ought to do, whether or not he is moving his head, which is the fault productive of most bad strokes.

Let us assume that the aspirant is at work with one of these posts. He takes up his stance, the thread being stretched, with perhaps an inch of slackness permitted, from his cap to the piece of tin at the bottom of the upright. He cannot see any part of his training-machine because his eyes are fixed on the ball. He swings. What happens? If he moves his head the metal indicator begins to run up the post, tinkling merrily the while. It affords irrefutable evidence against him. In effect, it shouts to him the instant he starts to make the old mistake: "Hi! you're shifting your head," and it is not the smallest use for him to protest that he is doing nothing of the kind. He stands convicted by the tinkle, and when he hears it, there is little object in his continuing the stroke, for, with his head moving, there is but a poor chance of the shot being a good one. He must settle down to the task of working out his salvation by practising and practising until he can make full swings without stirring the indicator. When he can do that, he has mastered the greatest difficulty that golf presents to the average beginner. There are, of course, other things that he may do

wrongly, but they are generally capable of easier remedy than this first and most frequent fault. The chances are that he has now acquired the way of turning properly from the waist and thus distributing his weight properly. I have submitted Colonel Quill's simple contrivance to many tests. I have tried full swings and followed through to the fullest extent. When I have been playing well, there has been no suspicion of a tug at the thread and consequently no warning note from the indicator. In all sincerity, I say that it is the best form of preparation that I know for an indifferent player who suffers from the common falling, and who wants to improve. If he cannot go to the links more than twice a week, he can practise swings in his garden, or even in the house if his ingenuity be such as to enable him to induce the contrivance to stand on the floor. In these limited areas, he cannot be sure—unless he use a captive ball—whether he is topping or even missing the globe altogether, but if his efforts leave the metal undisturbed, he can rest assured that he is getting into the way of the true golfing swing.

I have given foremost position to this matter of keeping the head still, because the neglect of it is the cause of so much bad golf, but, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is absolutely necessary that the club should be gripped in the proper way. In a sense, there are two proper ways. There is the old-fashioned grip, in which the hands meet on the shaft of the club but do not overlap, and there is the overlapping grip, which, personally, I think is by far the better and which is now adopted by nearly every professional of note. These, however, are both two V grips, in the sense that the thumb and forefinger form V's down the shaft of the club.

So that here we come to the first important point concerning the grip. It is that, whether the hands overlap or not, the thumbs and forefingers must be placed so as to shape into V's. Sometimes you see players holding a club as they might seize a rope for a tug-of-war. They place the implement deeply in the palms, and the knuckles are almost hidden from view beneath the shaft. That style is bound to be fatal, because, in order to take the club right back, it becomes necessary to loosen the grip with all the fingers. And such loosening must inevitably weaken the shot. If, then, you decide to employ the old-fashioned grip, it is necessary to have the two V's in evidence, and it is even more important to remember to keep the hands wedged well together. If you separate them only a little, it is the same as having a club in each hand, the one trying to do something different from the other.

This latter statement is an established fact, and it is the desirability of having the hands contiguous which constitutes the great recommendation of the overlapping grip. For, with that method of holding the club, the two hands become practically one. They are wedged, and if the ceremony of wedging them be properly performed and a little forbearance be shown at the outset, when minor discomforts may be experienced, I can promise that they will give very happily together ever after. The illustrations will perhaps convey the idea of this grip better than I can explain it. The simplest way to obtain it is to take the club in the left hand, the shaft pressing into the top (or little) joint of the forefinger. As the wrist should be turned so as to show the knuckles, the thumb will be urged past the shaft. Bring it back, and place it down the shaft. We now have the left thumb firmly on the club, and the top joint of the left



The ordinary grip in which the hands touch but do not overlap. Amongst leading professionals it has been almost entirely superseded by the overlapping grip.



A frequently seen but unquestionably wrong grip. The right wrist is bent, and the right hand is turned too far under the shaft. The effect will be a scoop rather than a hit.

GRIPS RIGHT AND WRONG

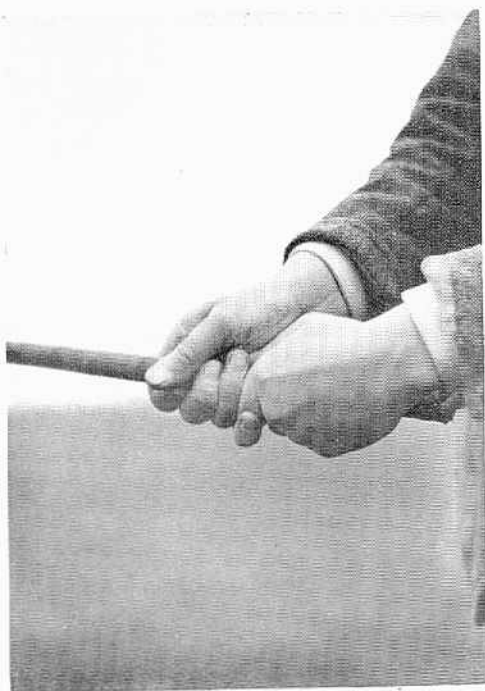
forefinger exercising a determined hold. It is with these two members that we want to grip tightest; that is why we are making use of the strongest part of the left forefinger. In the ordinary way, it is the finger with which we find we apply least pressure when we take hold of anything. It seems to be a law of Nature that the littler fingers shall be able to grip the more securely. Try them, for instance, when seizing a stick. In golf we want them to act chiefly as guides; their superior strength must be suppressed. Consequently, let the second, third and little fingers fall into natural position after a firm grip has been taken with the left thumb supported by the forefinger. In the case of the right hand, the ball of the thumb—that rounded protuberance of admirable proportions—is utilized to place over the left thumb, the top of which alone remains exposed to view. The first three fingers of the right hand clasp the shaft, and the little finger presses firmly on the forefinger of the left hand. Then the union is complete. I have heard people say that this grip is peculiarly suited to me because I am endowed with unusually long fingers. Personally, I think that fingers of more than the normal length are a handicap rather than a help, because one has to find room for them. Anybody can adopt this style of holding the club, and I think that everybody will agree that—theoretically at any rate—it is correct. It forms a perfect confederacy of the hands. I hesitate to say that there is a master hand in golf. A lot of people plump for the left. But the right hand should grip firmly; in fact there should be as little difference as possible. There is no need to press so hard as to make the blood run out of the hands, but in no circumstances should you permit any degree of slackness.

It took me a year of constant experimentation to satisfy myself as to the superiority of this grip over all others. I tried every conceivable means of holding the club, and the one which I have described proved itself to be indisputably the best. It did not come naturally to me, but it was well worth the trouble of acquiring. It seems to create just the right fusion between the hands, and involuntarily induces each to do its proper work.

For the beginner, there is no preparation so good as that of practising for a month or two without playing so much as a single complete round. If, after deciding to take up the game and getting the taste for blood which comes of the first few attempts to hit the ball—if, at this stage, he be capable of such splendid self-restraint as to spend all his time on the links during the ensuing six weeks in taking lessons from one qualified to teach and in practising what he has learnt, his progress will be rapid—far more so than that of the person who takes every opportunity to engage in a match. It is, I know, a counsel of perfection, but men have followed it, and, in an extraordinarily short time, have reached a fair measure of proficiency with the clubs which are called upon to do most of the work. Let the neophyte tackle them one by one without attempting fancy or complicated shots. All that he needs to do at the outset is to learn the proper grip, the way to keep the head steady, and the correct swing. The rest will come later, and the quality of it will depend largely on his inborn talent for the game and his opportunities for developing it. But he can usually learn to play tolerably well in a short time by the exercise of self-denial while he is studying the fundamental principles of the pastime. If he be incapable of



And at the top of the swing



As seen at the beginning of the swing

THE OVERLAPPING GRIP

TWO ESSENTIALS OF SUCCESS 63

such heroics, those principals will naturally take much longer in finding a place in his system. A person who starts wrongly and plays in the wrong manner for several months may prove to be a golfer lost. Salvation is a protracted and painful process when, in golf, a man has been following for some months a false trail.

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