

MACDONALD SMITH AT TOP OF THE BACKSWING

This picture of MacDonal Smith at the top of the backswing for a full shot should be studied in connection with that on the opposite page as depicting the action of the golf stroke from the top of the backswing to the finish of the stroke. The idea is to suggest the full completed action of swinging the club as one continuous movement, in which legs, body, arms, and hands co-ordinate properly in producing the complete sweep of the clubhead

MY SYSTEM OF TEACHING GOLF

Expounding the Theory of Control of the Club in the Swing

By ERNEST JONES

I HAVE been asked to describe my system of teaching golf. My problem is to condense into a few words the fundamentals of a game that I have played, studied, and taught for some thirty years; to point out obvious, simple facts about the golf swing to players who have always overlooked them, and to round out a subject that has no ending—rather a tall order.

Fundamentals in golf cannot alter, the difference lies in the manner in which one man teaches them and another man applies them. It is possible to standardize the teaching of golf but impossible to standardize the player, for each golfer misapplies his power in a different way. In golf we are dealing with human beings, temperaments, and physical limitations, not with machines; we are dealing with an art, not a science.

I want to bring in just a bit of personal history to show that my "system" of teaching, as it is often called, is not so much a system or routine of instruction as it is an evolution—the discarding of unimportant theories, the revaluation of what is fundamental and what is resultant in the golf swing, the substitution of positive teaching for the orthodox and recognized negative.

I have played golf almost as long as I can remember. By the time I was thirteen years old I had won the annual caddies' tournament for three years running. My actual work in golf started at that age, as I then started to work as assistant in the Golf Shop. I played in my first Professional competition when I was sixteen and had rounds of seventy-five and eighty-three, but never attempted to give a golf lesson until I went as head assistant and clubmaker to Jack Youds, at Chislehurst Club. I won numerous professional tournaments between that time and the world war in 1914. After the war I won a few events, playing, however, on an artificial leg. I soon found the physical strain too great and gave up active competition in 1920, in order to devote all of my time to the teaching of golf, which to me is very fascinating.

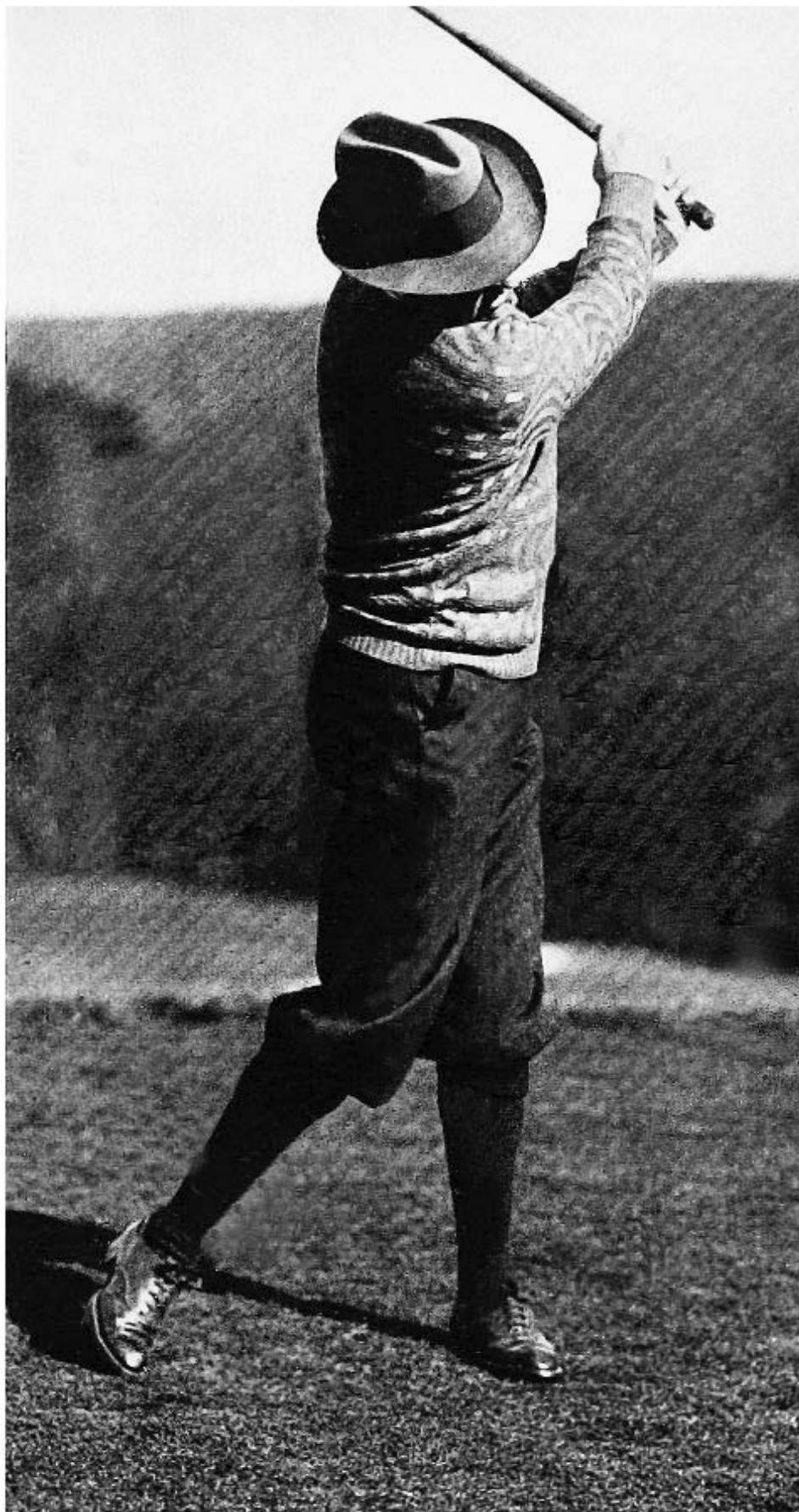
When I look back to my earlier days of teaching, I feel sorry for those first pupils. I felt very much like a boy who can throw well being asked, "How do you throw?", and not knowing himself having to answer, "I don't know, but I will show you." The difference "between playing and teaching golf was brought home to me with considerable force, as I then realized that I had no way of imparting to my pupils my knowledge of what to me was a perfectly natural action.

I immediately bought all of the available books on golf and studied them until I had mental pictures of the positions of the body in every part of the golf swing. I then went through a stage in teaching in which no one could have been more insistent than I on the "straight left arm", or the "bent right elbow", etc. I remember giving one man a number of lessons in trying to keep his wrists under the club at the top of the swing, and insisting on the perfection of this movement before going on to the pivot, the bent left knee, the straight right leg, the left shoulder around until you looked over it, and so on and on; there was always something wrong.

I found that after two or three years of working with a pupil there would be no further improvement, and that he would begin to develop all kinds of strains and contortions. The "straight left arm", for instance, would become a stiff left arm, "keeping the right elbow in to the side" would develop into both elbows being cramped into the body, and "keeping the head perfectly still" produced an unnatural stiffness. It worked out that every supposedly correct action would be exaggerated to the extent of becoming a contortion. Needless to say, I went through a great deal of mental anguish. I had a chosen profession; it was my job to improve the golf of my pupils and to make the game more pleasurable for them, instead I had made it a mental and physical struggle. I decided there must be a simpler way.

I previously mentioned that I had studied all of the writings on golf that I could obtain, and now after reading the books of Harry Vardon, James Braid, and J. H. Taylor, I began to study their play whenever the opportunity offered. I discovered that they did not look like the pictures in their books, and that whatever positions their bodies assumed, due to their swings, were unimportant and incidental compared with the fact that they were masters of the club itself. These masters of the game had *Control* of the club the moment they took it in their hands and had *Control* to do what they wished with it.

When I learned (Continued on page 47)



MACDONALD SMITH NEARING THE FINISH

Looking at this photograph and referring back to that on the other page, one notes that the shoulders have swung through an angle of approximately one hundred and eighty degrees. In fact the entire body position here is almost the exact reverse of that in the other picture. Only when the stroke has been a full free swinging action, without restraint can such a result in the swing be possible. And only when the action is rightly co-ordinated do we find it

MY SYSTEM OF TEACHING GOLF

(Continued from page 25)

this most important fact, that *Control* is the only definite fundamental principle in the golf swing, I started to teach golf properly. I have figured out to my own satisfaction exactly what *Control* means, but at first I was unable to define it. Since that time I have found, in my experience in teaching, that not only is the struggling beginner very vague about *Control*, but that the very good golfers do not appreciate that it is a very definite thing. I have said to a great number of leading players, "To play a golf shot you must have *Control*," to which remark they agree immediately; however, when I ask them to explain it, the answer generally amounts to: "I don't know how to describe it, but anyone knows what *Control* is," which in my mind is most unsatisfactory and most inadequate.

I teach that *Control* is the fundamental principle of the golf swing, that *Balance* is fundamental only to the extent that it is a resultant action of the body giving easily to the controlling swing, and that *Timing* is fundamental only in that it is a coordination of *Control* and *Balance*. I will try to make clear my interpretation of these three definite factors in the golf swing.

Let us first discuss *Control*. I have seen it stated by one of our greatest writers that "Anyone who has played golf two or three months knows there is a lot more to the game than swinging the club." Yet, "*Control*" means being able to feel what you are doing with the club itself, and what you should be trying to do with the club is to swing the head of it. There may be more to it than "swinging the club," but the one main principle I try to get my pupils to understand is that it must be a *controlled* swing. I tell them that after, *after* they have complete control to swing the club correctly, they may do whatever they wish, but so far I have never met anyone who has reached that stage. Even your greatest golfers, after describing every motion of their bodies from their fingers to their toes, concede that it is "a swing" and not "a hit." I often put it this way: *You* swing the clubhead and the *clubhead* hits the ball. It is not possible to hit the ball harder than you can swing your clubhead.

I believe that it is only possible to do one *Controlled action* at a time, and that when anyone teaches with the idea of several actions to be thought of while making a golf swing, I think they are looking for trouble. A popular fallacy most people have is they think of the golf swing in terms of wrists, arms, hips, and body, instead of realizing that a golf swing means being able to swing a golf club, and that all other motions are merely responsive movements to the action of swinging the clubhead, which in turn is set in motion by the hands. If you swing the club correctly, your wrists must bend, your left arm does give to its fullest extent, your right elbow is bound to be bent in a natural manner, *but*, and it is a big *but*, if you try to make a conscious action of using your wrists or arms or body, you cannot possibly feel what you are doing with the clubhead—you've lost *Control*.

Very few people understand that swinging a club and levering a club are totally different actions, and yet all good golfers agree that a properly executed swing feels the same as though one were swinging a weight on the end of a string. It would be impossible to use a piece of string as a lever for you have no actual *Control* of the string itself, but use it to sense the *Control* of swinging the weight at its end. In a recent article Bobby Jones states—"I think always that the predominating sensation to be had from a well directed stroke is one of pulling, and pulling hard against something." Precisely! A pulling force is centrifugal force and you cannot create a centrifugal force with leverage. I try to teach my pupils to cultivate the feeling of using centrifugal force, not to waste their energy by trying to use any form of leverage; I point out that all other motions of the golf swing are, or should be, subsidiary movements to the action set up by swinging the clubhead.

In a discussion of *Control* the subject of *Hands* is almost synonymous, for it is only possible to feel what you are doing with the clubhead through your hands. Your hands are the only part of you that comes in contact with the club; therefore, they are the only things that set the clubhead in motion, and they are responsible, in the last analysis, for whatever happens. One cannot pay too much attention to the proper use of the hands and one can never over-emphasize their importance.

Personally, I know nothing of anatomy, and though many Doctors have told me that you use this and that sort of muscles to do this and that, I feel sure that neither Bobby Jones nor Babe Ruth attained their proficiency through a study of muscular power. I often use a simple illustration of turning a key in a lock to prove to my pupils that an action is done with the fingers, and that to turn a key they use their fingers, not their wrists, forearms, and shoulders.

It seems to me that the more simple a thing is the more definite it is, and yet many things are simple to understand and elusive to do. One can see, for example, that golf is a two-handed game, yet the most natural failing is to let the right arm overpower the hands from setting the clubhead in motion. It is, therefore, very important to cultivate the feeling of the left hand being in control of swinging the clubhead. For example, anyone using an axe or a heavy hammer would find that the hand holding the *end* of the handle would not lose the control of swinging it, though the lower hand might be sliding up and down.

The hands take a natural position on the handle of the club. I often illustrate the fact that the hands take the same relative position, the palms facing each other, when holding the club, in this manner—if you were to take a soft ball and bounce it on the floor, the palm of your hand would face downwards; if you were hitting the ball up on the ceiling, the palm would face upwards; if you were hitting it straight on to the wall in front of you,

(Continued on page 48)

(Continued from page 47)

your hand would face the wall; in any case your hand would be facing the direction you are hitting. And so it is with a golf—the hand faces the line of flight to where you want the ball to stop. Placing the hands too much under the grip is the most common fault in holding the club, for when the hands are opened it would show the palms pointing upward instead of to the line of flight. Again it is the "line of flight" that we are interested in when placing our hands on the club, not the arc taken by the ball, as that is governed by loft of the clubhead.

Another very important point to bring up in any discussion of hands is that the club is held to be able to swing it, and not merely to be able to grip it. Let us first say that we have five fingers on each hand and not four fingers and a floating thumb; the thumb being the principal finger is a fact that few people appreciate. The front fingers are used to sense the moving of the clubhead while the back fingers naturally grip more firmly. I often put it this way—you would use your front fingers to do any delicate action, such as writing, sewing, shaving, etc., but if you were pulling in a tug-of-war you would grip firmly with the back fingers. In the overlapping grip, or the ordinary two-handed grip, the action of moving the clubhead can be felt through the front fingers. It is often said that the front fingers of the right hand and the back fingers of the left hand are used in swinging the club, but this can only be practical with the interlocking grip as used by Miss Hicks, Miss Orcutt, Gene Sarazen, etc.

"How tightly should one hold the club?" is a very common question to be asked. I try to describe the holding of the club as *comfortably firm*. You should hold it firmly enough to be able to use it. If I were to ask you how tightly you held your knife, fork, or spoon, when eating, or how strongly you grip your razor when shaving, you would give me the same answer. Let us leave this part of the golf swing, which I would call *Control*, and speak of *Balance*.

I have said that *Control* is the basic fundamental in the golf swing. I consider *Balance*, the second fundamental, as merely a responsive motion to some definite action, but not a definite action in itself. People are prone to take the movement of their hips and the shifting of their weights as essential factors to the action of swinging the club, instead of realizing that these movements are due to the swinging of the club itself and are purely resultant. I grant you that *Balance* in playing a golf shot is movement, but I also say that there is a vast difference between a conscious action and an unconscious movement.

Let me illustrate my point in this way—walking is the simplest example of motion and balance, and, although

you transfer your weight from one foot to the other, you make no effort in doing it; you are not aware of how straight you put out your leg, or when you bend your knee, or what you do with your shoulders, or how you swing your hips, or what you do with your ankles, or how you swing your arms, or how you hold your head, and so on and on. Just imagine what would happen if you tried to be conscious of making a definite action of every movement that takes place when you do such a simple thing as walk, and yet there are thousands of golfers who are trying to be conscious of every action or movement that takes place in playing a golf shot; there is motion in all parts of the body when either walking or swinging a golf club, but my point is that such motion is unconscious movement.

The simplest definition of *Balance* is to say that it is an *even distribution of weight*. When the player is taking his stance prior to hitting the ball, he should have an equal division of weight on both feet, which is perfectly natural. From that position he gives easily to the swinging of the club. I personally believe it is only possible to do one action at a time, and that anyone who attempts to think of more is looking for trouble.

It is unfortunate for the serious student of golf that most of the literature on the game has been a description of the movements or positions of the body. Motion pictures and diagrams have caused some players to make drastic changes in their style of play with the result that some better shots are made with the counteractions, which, however, soon become worse faults than the old ones. The average golfer is always looking for some trick to improve his game instead of realizing that he can never be right until he is absolutely unconscious of any bodily action and conscious only of swinging the club itself.

Let me again say that *Timing*, the third fundamental in the golf swing, is coordination of *Control* and *Balance*. Skipping with a rope is a very good illustration of timing. One must have *Control* to swing the rope, one must be *Balanced* to be able to jump to the swinging of it, and the rope must be *Timed* to coordinate with jumping. It is peculiar that a child soon learns to get *Control* to swing and *Time* a skipping rope, whereas the adult golfer cannot understand that a golf club is swung in the same easy manner.

In writing of golf there is much repetition, for teaching in itself is merely repetition, and one never finishes in teaching. Although you are trying to teach each pupil the same thing, you cannot use the same formula with any two; and as you learn to play golf by playing, you learn to teach golf by teaching. You can never get enough of either.

