

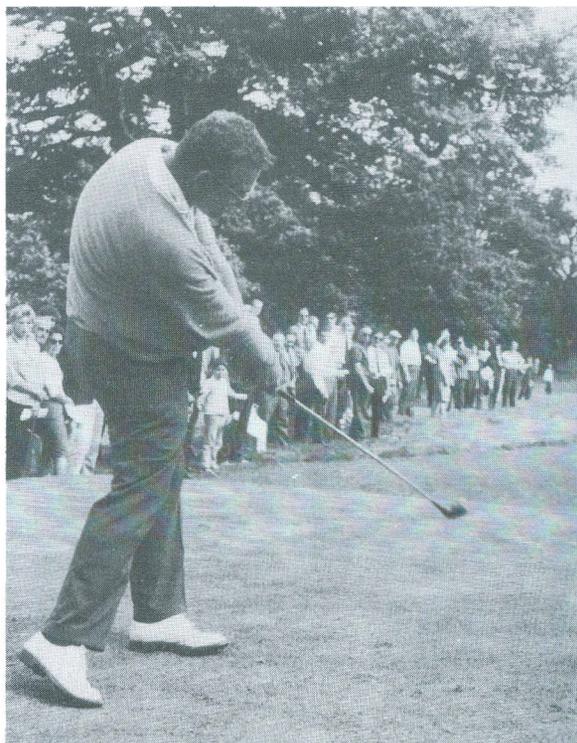
On Dave Thomas

There was a time when David Thomas was one of the longest and straightest drivers in the history of the game. He tied for The Open in 1958 and lost the play-off. He was also runner-up again in 1966. I think he was very unlucky not to win in 1958. He went through the back of the 71st green at Royal Lytham with a glorious second shot: the ball rolled over the top of a little bank behind the green, and it couldn't have been more than five yards from the flag. Down in two would have put him in the clear lead. But the short pitch was a shot he couldn't play. The grass was a bit thick, he couldn't really take his putter to it as he used to do for safety when he could and so he chipped it – jerkily as usual – and finished well short of the hole. Dave missed the putt, finished in a tie, and then lost on the play-off to Peter Thomson.

I have known David Thomas since he was a very young man and he had a fabulous gift, he could go through the ball in one piece with his driver and hit it miles absolutely squarely, and on the upswing, using a high peg. He was a

wonderful tee shot player, and one winter he and Guy Wolstenholme, both giants came to Mougins Golf Club, behind Cannes in the South of France, to train at the course where Toots and I played regularly. We played together for a whole month. I had already finished competitive golf and Dave was just in his prime, but the odd thing was that on that course, which was on the short side, he rarely beat me. This was largely because he could be counted on now and then to hit a shot thirty yards or so over a green and into the jungle or out of bounds and lose a hole that he could reach with a driver and a lofted iron while I was often taking two big shots to get on. It was so ridiculous that I began to query whether he could really see well. So I said to him on one round, 'Can you read the numbers on that tee box?' He nearly said, 'What box?' so I asked him to shut one eye, then the other eye, and he said, 'Yes, with one eye I can just about read it. But with the other eye I can't see anything, the box looks a blur.'

We finished that round and the next morning



on the way to the golf course I took him to a local optician. He wasn't an eye specialist but he tried him with some of those test glasses, doing the usual changes of lenses, and found that David had one eye which wasn't very good, but could be helped with a suitable lens, while the other was more or less O.K. So in a couple of days Dave had a pair of spectacles which he hadn't realized he needed. From the moment on he judged the ball much better. But his main golfing problem remained: he simply could not pitch the ball. If you gave him a good lie and a shot from forty yards or less to a green, he would make an awful mess of it. If the ball was lying badly, in a divot mark for instance, as it was when he played the shot in the photograph, he handled it perfectly. The problem remained throughout his career. I tried to help, every other player, friend and coach tried, but we never achieved any lasting success in making Dave play this length of pitch shot well. Now he has wisely given up tournaments and is a successful golf architect.