

Building Up A Game

V—The Grip

Fifth of a Series of Articles Taking Up in Complete Detail a Course in Golf Instruction

By Walter J. Travis

In a golfing sense the hands in a way really work in opposition to each other at the crucial moment, the moment that counts, that of impact between the club-head and the ball, **the left arm stopping at the wrist for an infinitesimal fraction of a second as the ball is struck, accelerating the speed of the club-head.** This momentary stoppage is not discernible to the eye, but it exists just the same. It is commonly known as getting the wrists into the stroke. It is a combination of swing and hit, the swing coming almost wholly from the left arm and the hit from the right.

Kirkby, all three noted as long drivers; "Chick" Evans, who is peculiar in that he has both thumbs down the shaft, and Francis Ouimet, who interlocks, as the late Willie Anderson did.

It is just as much open to question how far, if at all, the game of these men might have been improved had they adopted the Vardon grip as it is if the exponents of the latter were to go back to first principles and use the orthodox grip. Doubtless most of them have experimented with both. It by no means follows that that which suits one man will necessarily suit the next. There is no royal road to success through the medium of a mere grip.

No Gain in Accuracy

I AM quite at a loss to see any gain even in accuracy with

I know of one prominent professional who was brought up on the old-fashioned grip, with which all his success was achieved. He got the idea that his game would be improved by going in for the overlapping grip. So he had all his handles changed, as the Vardon method is employed to better advantage with thinner grips. A couple of days, and back he went to his regular way, necessitating the removal again of all the leathers.

He see-sawed back and forth for over a month, finally winding up with an utterly demoralized game and uncertain which method possessed the greater merit, for him. In my own case I have repeatedly tried overlapping, but it does not suit me, due doubtless to my having small hands and short fingers. I am satisfied that unless a man has powerful hands and fingers he would better use the regular grip, and be wary of experimenting. *(Continued on page 26)*

THESE are two recognized modes of gripping a club—the old-fashioned or V, with the fingers and thumbs wrapped around the shaft, and what is commonly known as the Vardon grip, from the fact that Harry Vardon was one of the first great players to adopt it and thus bring it into especial prominence. It consists in having the left thumb rest against but not around the inner side of the handle and in the palm of the right hand, with the little finger of the latter overriding or overlapping the knuckles of the first finger of the left.

Largely by reason of Vardon's example, his grip has been slavishly imitated by thousands of players. Practically all the modern school of professionals are wedded to it. So far as I can ascertain, it has two distinct points of merit, so it is claimed. It enables the hands to work more in unison, and it tends to minimize the power of the right hand, thus guarding against hooking.

Let us examine these claims. In the first place, I am quite unable to perceive how any greater unison is brought about than with the old-fashioned grip. Take a club and place the head against the leg of, say, a chair. Try to move the chair with either grip. You may learn something you never knew before. Try it with both grips and with either hand alone. It will be found the left hand *pulls* and the right hand *pushes* the club through. The action of the hands is identical in both cases, the only difference being a sense of greater power with the V grip. But so far as unison or harmony of effort goes, the results are alike.

the Vardon grip. And I am quite sure it does not communicate as much power as the old-fashioned one. It is all right for those endowed with great muscular strength in the fingers, but for the comparatively few who are so blessed there are thousands who are not and for whom the overlapping grip is quite unsuitable.

There are many eminent golfers who do not affect it—Abe Mitchell, credited with being the longest hitter in the world; Ted Blackwell, who in his day had no rival in length; John Ball; H. H. Hilton; Jerome D. Travers; Jesse Guilford; Gardiner White and Oswald



Illustrations of varying grips in driving, described in the accompanying article, by reference to numbers as follows: Circular from top to bottom, No. 1, left hand under; No. 2, left hand over; No. 5, right hand under; Figure A, palm grip; Octagonal, upper, No. 3, grip at top of swing; lower, right hand over

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A POINT is made in favor of the Vardon grip that it robs the right hand of a certain measure of power, thereby preventing it from becoming the dominant hand and offsetting a tendency to pull. This is a misconception. Pulling is caused, largely, by the right hand turning over too much, or too soon, at the moment of impact. Given that the grip with the left hand is as tight as possible at this stage. I hold that it is impossible to have too much strength in the right. The left hand, the left side of the body, does practically all of the work in a properly executed swing up to within a foot or two of the ball on the down swing. Then the right comes in, for the first time, and supplements the work of the left with all the power it is capable of.

As we have seen from our experiment with the chair, the left does the pulling and the right the pushing. In other words, the left arm does the swinging all through the stroke and the right, at the proper time, the hitting. The stroke is a combination of swing and hit, and the more power there is in the hit the longer is the ball. Any tendency to pull may easily be guarded against by going through the ball with the knuckles of the right hand underneath the shaft. If the knuckles of the right are *too much* on top at impact the face of the club is turned in, and more or less pull is inevitable.

How often one hears one's opponent exclaim, when his ball curves off to the left, "Too much right hand!" No, not too much right hand, merely a misuse of that member—power improperly applied. And don't forget that the left hand is also at fault—although perhaps not primarily responsible.

The left is the governing hand. There are two major ways of gripping with it—under and over—as illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2.

Let us first take that shown in Fig. 1. It will be observed that the knuckles are fairly well under the shaft, only the first knuckle being visible as viewed by the player. This may be said to represent the position assumed by the majority. Now, in order to get the club into the proper position at the top of the swing (as illustrated in Fig. 3), it is absolutely necessary to pronate the left hand, i.e., twist it from the wrist, so that all the knuckles are in plain view at the top of the swing. This twisting or rolling movement originates from the wrist, carrying with it the arm up to the shoulder. The wrist must not bend. It simply twists, or rolls, and there is no bend of the wrist until just before the top is reached. At that stage the wrist bends in to throw the club into a horizontal position.

Applying Power

THE object of this twist, or roll, is to get the left hand in the most commanding position to communicate the maximum amount of power in the down-swing. Without it the knuckles would be too much underneath, only the first being exposed to view, and

in the position the club cannot be pulled down with anything like the same degree of speed.

The one great disadvantage of this method is that the roll must be done to a nicety, both up and down. If insufficiently done, a slice results; if overdone, a pull.

In Fig. 2 no such twist or roll is necessary. The hand and arm right up to the shoulder are taken back without any roll whatever, simplifying the swing and reducing to a minimum the chances of any error creeping in.

It is well to bear in mind that the more the left hand is under the shaft, twist or roll apart, the greater is the tendency to slice and, contrariwise, the more it is over the greater the pull. In this connection, consideration should be given to the relative positions of the right hand, for they also are intimately wrapped up in the business. Fig. 4 shows the right hand over. This position does not favor a pull, while with the right hand under, as depicted in Fig. 5, a pull will likely result.

That particular grouping of the hands which will suit you can only be determined by experimentation. No two men swing alike. Never mind how the other fellow grips. Practice until you ascertain just what modification suits you.

Keeps Hands Together

ONE thing is quite certain—no matter what the grip, the hands should be as close together as possible, and the handle should be grasped with the fingers—not in the palms, as shown in Fig. A. And to prevent any possible turning or slipping of the shaft during the swing the forefinger of either hand should be pressed firmly against the leather and this pressure maintained.

Whether to grip tightly or loosely is a question. Personally I find that a tight grip militates against the freedom of the swing and induces an inclination to lift the club up. Of the two hands the grasp of the left should be the firmer. In the actual hitting of the ball both hands should grip as tightly as possible, followed—and this is important—by relaxation in the follow-through, just tight enough to prevent the club flying off into space.

In my own case, I do not adopt the same grip for all shots, as most players do. That for long shots, wood or iron, is constant, but for the short game I bring the left hand more around, more under the shaft, according to the distance desired, keeping practically the same stance and swing throughout. I find that the grip for long shots encourages a pull in the short game unless the stance is changed, and changing the stance means changing the character of the swing. I believe in simplifying the game as much as possible, and it is easier to modify the grip than to alter the swing, as a general thing.

My putting grip, too, is quite different from that for the rest of the game, but we will come to that presently.

(To be continued)

