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Contents

COVER DESIGN
READY TO HIT THE BALL
BRITISH SEASON OPENS WITH BIG SURPRISE
SPRING SPORT IN CANADA
THE ART OF SOUND PUTTING
REPLYING TO QUERIES
SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR GAME
THE MIGRATORY SEASON IS ON! GOLFING BIRDS OF PARADISE FLOCK NORTHWARD AGAIN
AROUND THE MAP
STALKING THE COMMONEST FAULT
A TALK ON HEAVY ROLLERS
THE LADY OF THE LINKS
PICTORIAL ROUND-UP
EDITORIAL
VETERAN WINS NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TITLE
KANSAS CITY PLANS TO CUT GOLF COST
ON PITTSBURGH FAIRWAYS

James Montgomery Flagg
Grantland Rice
Arthur S. Draper
Earle Hooker Eaton
V. Doran
Sumner Witherspoon
Innis Brown
O. B. Keeler
J. Franklin Meehan
Violet K. Bamber
William A. White
Stalking the Commonest Fault

No. 3—Stewart Maiden Finds They Have a Hard Time Timing

By O. B. Keeler

"NOW about this matter of timing?" I suggested.

Stewart Maiden reflected.

"Well, they seem to have a pretty hard time timing," he said. "I should say that the majority of golfers never get it, except once in a while; sort of accidentally."

"Then there must be a secret about it."

"Yes. That's just it. It's a secret."

"All right. You can't keep a secret like that. So let's have it."

"It's not my secret. I wish it was."

"You can time a swing, can't you?"

"Yes. At least I used to. And I can look at a swing and see that it is well timed, or not well timed—that is, usually."

"Well, then, isn't that all there is to it?"

"Not by a whole lot. The timing device is inside a player. What I see of his swing is the outside. That's merely the result of the way his timer is functioning, or not functioning. I can tell him that he is hitting too soon, or getting his hands ahead of the club, or any one of a lot of other things he may be doing wrong. And sometimes that will help him 'set' his timer. And then, again, it won't."

"Why won't it?"

Timing is instinctive; when you get right down to it. There's an open window. You are about forty feet from it. Can I tell you how you may throw a ball through it? If you happen to be a baseball pitcher, it would be a cinch for you to throw a peck of balls through it, one after the other. If you missed it would be an accident—an error of timing. You couldn't cut the ball loose at the right place, cinch for you to throw a peck of balls through that window."

"And then some! In other words, he couldn't tell me just when to cut the ball loose and just how to snap the wrist—that would have to be a developed instinct?"

"Yes. And don't bear down so on that snap. I'll bet Johnson is not conscious of any snap when he's shooting a fast one. He's just throwing."

"And the expert golfer is just swinging? Good enough. But you do tell 'em something about timing, don't you? Say a fellow is lumping at the start and getting the kick into the swing about a yard before the club reaches the ball. Don't you tell him to keep his body back?"

Stewart grinned. "No. On the other hand, I tell him to start his body first."

This was just about the most unorthodox thing, apparently. I ever heard a Scotch Presbyterian say. Stewart knew he was administering a shock. He went on to explain:

"I want the pupil to start the down-swing with his left shoulder and his left hip. As near as I can figure it, they move together. That point is, I want him to begin drawing his arms down with his hands in practically the same position as at the top of the swing. I want him to get his hands pretty well along on the swing, somewhere around the hip level, before the real hit starts. And as near as I can tell you, THAT is timing; holding back the hit until the body has turned and the hips are shot along the line of play so as to produce all the tension possible."

The cautious Caledonian paused, considering, and then quizzed somewhat.

"I should say, that is the way timing looks to me on the outside. Remember, I am not trying to tell you any secret of timing from the inside."

I sought to recapitulate on the outside.

"Start the down-swing with the left shoulder and hip. Keep the hands as at the top of the swing until the greatest tension is gained by the body-turn and shooting the hips. Then add to that the sudden unwinding of the wrists—the turn-over. Get all the spring in your system out at one time. Is that it?"

"Something like it. Then if you hit the ball on the nose you may get a golf shot."

"That's hopeful. And how many chances do you suppose there are for part of the combination to go wrong?"

"I don't know. About seven thousand. Especially if you try to think about it in parts. I don't like this business of taking a swing to pieces. And it's blue ruin to try to make a swing by sections. A teacher has to correct the outward faults that will prevent proper timing, if he can. As to the timing instinct—"

Stewart shook his head, the gesture carrying a strong inference that the timing instinct, if not inherent, must be a matter of fasting, meditation and prayer.

"When did you become conscious of a timing (Continued on page 31)"
Stalking the Commonest Fault

(Continued from page 15)

instinct?" I asked. "Not yet. I suppose a man trying to play golf would sooner be conscious of not having it."

"When did you start playing golf?"

"When I was about five years old. Maybe four. I don't remember when I wasn't playing, as a youngster."

"Did you play by note or by ear?"

"By ear. And, say—that may be a sort of explanation of timing. You know some people can't learn to dance or keep time in music Rhythm, I think they call it. Well, maybe there's a good bit of rhythm in timing. Certainly there is in a proper swing."

"Now about clubs. Some people say a heavy club helps in timing, because you can feel the head through the swing better."

"That's rot. A club should be so balanced that the head may be felt. But that doesn't mean it has to be heavy. Most real hitters prefer light clubs. The slow swingers like heavy clubs as a rule. Bob McDonald doesn't seem to have much trouble timing his big shots, and the last time I saw him he was using wood clubs that weighed 12 1/4 or 12 1/2 ounces. Looked rather like child's clubs. And how he does crack 'em! Not many can drive with Bob."

"I have heard that some people advocate trying to time the swing so that the maximum velocity is reached at a point just beyond the place where the ball lies, on the idea that the ball rides the club some distance and the speed of the club should be increasing after impact—that is, during the follow-through—so that the ball in rebounding from the club would get more of a shove."

Stewart shook his head again. "Too fine a point for me," he admitted. "I think that's drawing it too fine, even if you could do it. And I don't believe one of the high-tension balls would stick on the club while it moved more than two inches at the most. One inch seems more like it. Better not bother about that. Hit the ball! If you can time your swing to deliver all the kick on that ball, you can feel you've done your duty. The ball will get away so fast it won't have time to debate with the club about whether it could get an extra yard of ride if the kick was an inch farther on. Timing is enough trouble when you are trying to fasten it right on the ball, and not some place ahead of the ball."

"So you think the commonest fault in golf has to do with timing."

"I didn't say so, and if I did, you would have what Ring Lardner calls a he-ll of a time sorting out the faults that affect timing. You might say that about seven thousand of the ten thousand or more golf faults have to do with timing. But there is one special fault, now..." "This sounds interesting—tell me more!"

"I'll keep. It's been going on a long time."