Lessons in Golf

BY

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LESSONS IN GOLF

Now, in the swing back, pay particular attention to the point of the right elbow. It should not swing straight out and up from your body, but around it and as close to the side as possible. The right wrist turns slightly out, so that at the top of the swing you still see the finger nails of your right hand. The chief thing in this exercise is to keep the point of the right elbow down and close to the side, and to swing it around the body in a backward direction. The reason why I will give in the proper place.

There should be enough in this series of movements to occupy your attention for the first afternoon of practice. These exercises are not very amusing, perhaps, but they are worth acquiring perfectly in order to prepare for your real start. A little hard, conscientious work now will save you many future hours of blundering and disappointment. And remember my suggestion, that you practice in company with a partner or fellow-student.

LESSON II

Stance, Grip, and Swing

We are now ready for the two-handed swing with the driver. Take up your stance, as already directed, with the left toe just touching the chalk line, and the right foot half way across it. This is the open position, so called, and it is the one used by the vast majority of modern players. There are some golfers who stand with the toe of the right foot two or three inches back of the line, and a still smaller number whose stance is exactly square, that is, with the toes of both feet touching the line. The open position, which I strongly recommend, permits a free follow-through of the club, and the player has a feeling that he knows where he is going to drive the ball. Another advantage is that over-swinging is checked, to a great extent, and the beginner is very apt to commit this fault in striving after what he imagines to be a full St. Andrew's swing.

The grip is taken as follows: Grasp the club in the left hand, letting the thumb lie on the top of the shaft directly in the middle. Now shift the thumb so that it coils around the club handle but rests on the nail of the forefinger. This is a somewhat unusual position for the thumb, but I favor it for the reason that it permits the two hands to be brought closer together. If the thumb simply curls itself around the shaft, its knuckle prevents the right hand from snuggling close up to its fellow. It is important to get the hands to work, as nearly as possible, as one, and this can only be done by getting them together. So much for the grip with the left hand.

Now place the right hand on the shaft directly below the upper or left hand, and gently pressed against it. The right hand should be turned somewhat under the shaft, so that
you can see the finger nails. This is what is called the unequal grip, the left hand being well over the shaft and the right hand a trifle under. It is the grip generally used by reformed cricketers in England and by old baseball players in this country, and at one time it was considered quite unorthodox. My argument is that the underneath position of the right hand permits of a more effective wrist action, and also brings into play the muscles of the right forearm, which means driving power. Of course, it has its disad-

vantages as well. If the right hand is allowed to entirely overpower the left, a pull, or worse yet, a hook, may send your ball to the left of the true line of play. Be careful, then, not to exaggerate the position.

There is another grip which I ought to describe, seeing that it is used by some of the foremost players in the world, including Taylor, Braid, and Vardon, and indeed, I use it myself for all my approach work. It is known as the overlapping grip, and may be described as follows:

Take the club in the left hand, just as you did in the first place, but let the thumb remain in position on top of the shaft. Slide the right hand partly over the left so that the little finger of the right hand rides upon the forefinger of the
left. In this grip the right hand is generally more over the shaft than in the cricket grip already described; in other words, you see the back of the right hand and not the fingernails. The left thumb is entirely covered by the right palm;

There is no doubt about it that this overlapping grip gives the player great command over the club, as it prevents the possibility of the two wrists working against each other.

This is the reason why I use it in my short iron work, but I prefer my ordinary grip for all full shots. After giving the
overlapping grip a fair trial I have convinced myself that
the other has more driving power in it. Vardon himself
admits that he gets a longer ball with the ordinary, or “V”
grip, but he thinks that he can keep straighter in the over-
lapping style. My experience is that I can control the ball
quite as well with the “V” grip, and I can unquestionably
hit harder, and so get farther. And distance is what we
want in the long game. I ask you, therefore, to give the
cricket grip a trial, and I hope to tell you how to keep
straight with it. As we shall learn the overlapping grip
anyway for the short game, you can later on decide for
yourself whether or not you will use it altogether. Once
acquired it is perfectly easy to use both grips interchange-
ably. Let me add that with either grip the club should be
held as much in the fingers as possible, and this admonition
particularly applies to the right hand. Under no circum-
stances should the shaft be buried in the right palm. It only
remains to add that I hold the club, for all full shots, with the
left hand at the extreme end of the shaft. Otherwise you
are simply depriving yourself of valuable leverage; other
things being equal, it is the longer shaft that drives the
longer ball.

For the present we will not put down a ball, for I want
you to practice the two-handed swing before you attempt
actual driving. But you must have something to aim at, so
you may pick out a daisy head or use a bit of white paper
to represent the ball. Notice that the latter’s position is
about three inches to the right of an imaginary line drawn
from the left heel to the right-angled line of play on which
the ball is resting. I do not tell you in actual inches how
far away you must stand, nor give you any empirical rules
of measurement by means of the club or otherwise. It must
appear evident that the proper distance away will vary for
every individual case. All I can tell you is to stand with
the knees and elbows slightly flexed and the club laid
squarely behind the ball. You should feel comfortable, and

this you cannot be if you are under or over reached. If
you stand too near, the stroke will lack power; if too far
away, you will not be able to keep your balance. With both
knees and elbows slightly bent you cannot be far out of the
correct position.

I cannot tell you again just how wide apart your feet
should be. A straddle that is too narrow tends to over-
swinging, and one that is too wide stiffens the stroke and
prevents proper hip action. Use your common sense and
adopt the golden mean.

One final admonition—keep both toes turned slightly out-
ward, as this is an aid to the proper balancing of the body.
And remember to keep the weight well on the heels.

Now recall your exercises for the right and left hand with
the walking stick or umbrella. The important thing with the
left hand was to turn the wrist slightly in towards the body
as the club went back, while with the right you were to let
the point of the right elbow swing back around the body
close to the side. Start the club with the wrists or rather
with the fingers of the right hand, and then let the arms
come in to help with the swing. The club will have gone
far enough back when your left arm presses gently against
the chest. This is not a full swing, for you have not found
it necessary to lift the left heel clear of the ground. Indeed,
it is little more than a half swing, but if your wrists have
worked properly and the right elbow has begun to swing
back, there is considerable power in it. You will notice
that I have not told you to bother about the line in which
the club head is taken back. That will take care of itself,
provided that the right elbow swings around and close to the
side. J. H. Taylor puts great stress upon this movement of
the right elbow, and says that without it his swing would lack
power. He does not give the reason why, but I have a
theory of my own on this point, and I may as well enunciate
it now.
All the old authorities and textbooks will tell you that in the down swing the left is the master hand; that it should pull the club down from its position at the top of the swing. This I believe to be quite wrong, at least for my grip and swing. My theory is that the power of the down swing comes from what I call the “throw of the club.” If the club is started by a left hand pull it is apt to come down too straight, and the arc described by the club head will approximate that of a true circle. Moreover, with the left hand in command, the left elbow swings away from the body as the club comes through and the effect is to cause a depression of the right shoulder, which means an instant loss of power, for the ball is whipped up into the air instead of being driven straight through.

Now, the true course of the club head in all full driving shots is that of the slightly flattened circle—an ellipse, if you want to use the mathematical term. All the doctors agree on this latter point, and the only difference is the method by which they make the club head travel in this slightly flattened circle. The usual explanation is that the circle is swept back in this elliptical curve in the up-swing, or rather it must be if the down-swing is to take the same course. The older treatises, such as *Badminton*, expressly taught that the club must be taken back as close to the ground as possible, and in a direction that was the backward prolongation of the ball’s line of flight. The club was swung *out* and away from the body and in consequence the swing was nearly perpendicular. Now, the modern practice, with the open stance, or the right foot advanced, does not permit of an upright or perpendicular swing. The movement, as I have described it to you, more nearly approaches the horizontal. If you swing back the right elbow the club head must travel around the right leg and the player cannot stretch out his arms in order to let the club head “sweep back as close to the ground as possible.” Of course the new school players do not lift the club straight up as they swing back;
otherwise they would be chopping at the ball. They secure the flattened arc of the true swing by the backward movement of the right elbow. Try it for yourself and you will see the difference at once. With the right elbow moving out from the body the club is taken up very much straighter than when the elbow moves back, keeping close to the side. This is one reason, then, for Taylor's insistence upon the importance of this point. Its second office is to create driving power, and this is secured by what I have called the "throw of the club." To make you understand what I mean, it will be necessary to resume our exercise in swinging. I told you to stop the back or up-swing of the club so soon as you felt the left arm gently pressed against the chest. I did not ask you to swing down again, for the exercise was intended merely to accustom you to the proper starting of the club and to ensure that the wrists were working properly. We will now go a little further.

Start as before, the right fingers beginning the backward swing and the arms joining in as they are needed. As the club swings farther back and up you will have to turn your body to the right, and to accomplish this the left knee will buckle in towards the right leg and the left heel will be pulled a little way off the ground. Remember your "setting up" exercise and be sure that you keep the body in a vertical position, with the head looking downward, and not moving by a hair's breadth to the right. Again I remind you that the knees should be bent a little, so as to throw the weight on the heels, and the arms should be slightly flexed at the elbows. Otherwise the stiffened arms will form one straight line with the club shaft, which is wrong.

When the right elbow has swung as far back as it conveniently can, the club will be nearly perpendicular, pointing vertically to the sky. Now bend both wrists sharply towards the point of your right shoulder and the club will then be in a horizontal position behind your neck. You will understand, of course, that in the actual swing there should be no distinct divisions in this up-swing, the different movements all blending into one harmonious whole. There should be nothing like a break in the swing at any point of its progress.

It will be well to stop here at the top of the swing to see if the wrists have been properly turned. With the club firmly held in its horizontal position back of the neck, drop the right hand from the grip. You will then be able to look around at the club head. Its toe ought to be pointing to the ground like a pear hanging from a branch. To give you a more definite guide, notice the maker's name on the club head. It ought to be about horizontal as you look at it. If the wrist action has been wrong the toe of the club at the top of the swing will be pointing not downward, but sideways, and the maker's name will be nearer the vertical than the horizontal.

This should be plain enough, but a caution is necessary. It is quite possible to exaggerate the turn of the wrists to such an extent as to lose all leverage from them. In this case the club head will be, apparently, in the proper position, but there will be no power left in the wrists for the downswing. The wrists must turn, but they must be kept "creamed-up," to use an English expression. If you allow them to become slack and flabby from overturning, you will have no leverage for the "throw of the club."

I told you that near the top of the swing the wrists must be bent sharply towards the right shoulder. (Note that this bending is different from the turning of the wrists.) In this way you set the trigger for the "throw of the club"—you feel the weight of the club head poised for the downward sweep. If you allow the wrists to become too slack, you inevitably overswing and so lose the sense of the set trigger, and the club head becomes a dead weight which must be lifted back to its proper position before you can use it. At this point both wrists will be under the shaft, their proper position.
With the right elbow well to the back and close to the side you must now reverse this inward bend of the wrists. Throw them back and out as sharply as possible, and when the club head is some two feet away from the ball let the right wrist take command. This is the “throw of the club” and upon its proper execution depends in great measure the power and accuracy of the stroke.

One further point, and a most important one, although I have never seen it brought out in any of the previous textbooks.

As the club comes down on the ball, do not allow the left elbow to swing out and away from the body. It must be kept back so as to allow of the “snap of the wrists” at the critical moment when the ball is struck. If the left elbow swings away an instant too soon the hands go through in advance of the club head and the result is either a slice or a loss of power. A favorite phrase nowadays is “timing the club,” by which is meant the securing of the full power of wrists, arms and body at the moment when the actual hit is made. The phrase is a good one, but unless the coach can explain how to bring about this desirable result the mere words will not help the beginner much. My theory is that this “timing” is dependent upon keeping back the left elbow, thereby enabling the full force of the stroke to be brought into the ball.

The books place great emphasis upon the finish of the stroke—the “follow-through,” as it is called—and the beginner is assured that unless he can get his arms to reach out after the ball the stroke will be a failure. This is a rock upon which untold myriads of golfers have foundered, and so perished miserably.

Now, at the risk of being pronounced hopelessly heterodox, I am going to tell you that you need not bother about the follow-on at all. In my theory of the swing the power of the stroke depends on proper hip rotation, the correct turning of the wrists, and the position of the elbows. Pro-
Showing turn of wrists after club head has passed the ball.

STANCE, GRIP AND SWING

vided, that the right elbow moves around and close to the body on the up-swing and the left elbow is kept close to the body until after the ball is struck, the stroke will be a powerful and accurate one, the arms finishing as shown in the illustration.

To avoid possible misunderstanding, let me say again that my method is not the only one in which golf may be played. A firm distinction must be made between the two schools of swinging—perpendicular and horizontal. If a man plays with an upright swing, then of necessity his stance will be with the right foot drawn back; the club head will be carried back in a long sweep close to the ground; the right elbow will swing up and away from the body; the club will be pulled down by the left arm and both arms will be stretched out in the direction of the ball's flight—the follow-through. But if you adopt the horizontal swing, which is the modern practice, and best exemplified in the play of J. H. Taylor, you must do none of these things. The club goes back around the right leg; it is thrown down by the power of the wrists, particularly the right one, and the right elbow is kept close to the body on the up-swing, with the left one held back until after the impact. The perpendicular style is more of a sweep; the horizontal rather in the nature of a hit. Concentration of force is the characteristic of the horizontal swing, and if you have ever seen J. H. Taylor play you will understand what I mean. There is no wandering away of club head, arms or elbows. Everything is kept under severe control, but not an ounce of power is wasted or misapplied. The old-fashioned loose-jointed style of swiping at the ball is very pretty to watch, but it is an art that can only be learned imitatively and in youth.

It will be well in practising the full swing to stand with the sun directly at your back. You will then be able to detect any sidewise movement of the body or head, particularly to the right. Accuracy depends upon keeping the body strictly perpendicular, and the head as immovable as possible.
The rotation of the body should come from the hips rather than from the shoulders. Otherwise you will be apt to move the head or depress the right shoulder, and either fault inevitably spoils the stroke.

Our preliminary practice has been long and arduous, but have patience. In our next lesson we will get out upon the teeing ground with the real ball at our feet.

LESSON III

Off the Tee and Through the Green

Now we are on the teeing ground and ready for business. I don't mean, of course, that we shall start in at once to play matches. That sort of thing is bad practice, or rather no practice at all, and our aim should rather be to learn something about the different strokes that make up the actual game.

The full drive is naturally our point of departure. There are people who affect to sneer at long driving, and who will tell you that the real science of golf lies altogether in the approaching and putting. It is quite true that no one can win many matches unless he plays the short game well, but good driving makes the approaching and putting easier; I need not enlarge upon a truism so obvious.

Again, driving is said to be the easiest department of the game. So it is when you learn how. But unless you start doing the right thing you may fool along for years unnumbered, ever searching for the magic secret and never finding it. I don't know of a harder or more hopeless task than that of the bungler who habitually misplays all his full shots. A top, a slice, a clean miss—what vexation of soul is not summed up in these simple words! There are some duffers who, by virtue of perseverance and a naturally good eye, manage to evolve what they call their drive. They may even achieve a kind of steadiness, but it is invariably at the expense of length. And distance does count, no matter how expert you may be on the putting green. Moreover, full free driving off the tee and through the green is one of the most pleasurable sensations of the game; indeed, there are few things in the world that can compare with the joy that animates the golfer's heart when he has just got
ALEX SMITH

Alex Smith, the open champion of the United States, was born in Carnoustie, Forfarshire, Scotland, thirty-three years ago. Like all the Carnoustie boys he was in the habit of swinging a golf club from his earliest years, and it would be impossible to say how old he was when he made his first appearance on the links. Realizing that at golf more than at any other game practice alone makes perfect, Smith devoted himself most assiduously to the game, with the result that he attained proficiency at a comparatively early age. In 1895 he was placed among the scratch players of his club, and in 1896 the committee rated him so highly as to put him in that select class who had to allow strokes to the scratch players. At one time or another he won most of the trophies of his old club. His first big victory was when he secured the Gold Cross (scratch) and this was followed up by his securing twice in succession the handsome silver kettle presented by the Caledonia Club to its sister club on its Jubilee in 1892.

In 1897 he won the Stevenson Cup, a trophy for scratch play, having on the full medal course the fine score of 79. The Dalhousie Club presented a Jubilee cup to the Carnoustie Club, and in the first competition Alex Smith went right through the competition to the final, when he was defeated. In September, 1897, he succeeded in lowering the record for Carnoustie links. For some years it had stood at 75 until Smith came in with 74. In many of the team matches he distinguished himself. Playing against St. Andrew's he had the well-known player, David Leitch, as an opponent, and the Carnoustie golfer had Leitch one down at the finish, a result which was reversed when they met at St. Andrew's.
For nine years he was with Robert Simpson, the famous club maker of Carnoustie, and five of these years he was Simpson's foreman; there can therefore be no doubt of his ability as a club maker.

Alex Smith came to America in 1898 as professional to the Washington Park Club of Chicago, an organization no longer in existence. Fred Herd, a brother of Alex, Herd, shared the duties of professional with him. The year he landed he played in his first American championship, the competition being held at the Myopia Hunt Club, Hamilton, Mass., which then had a nine-hole course of 2900 yards. The Washington Park players carried all before them, Herd winning with 328 and Alex Smith being second with 335. Smith's best round was a 78. Those who played were Willie Anderson, who has turned the tables on him several times since, and who finished third with 339, and Alex's brother Willie, who came in fifth with 340. Willie reversed matters at Baltimore next year, winning the open championship with 315. Alex Smith was off his game and could do no better than 337.

The American Open Championship of 1900 was made memorable by the presence in it of J. H. Taylor, who was then British Open Champion, and Harry Vardon the famous English golfer. American golf was entirely overshadowed by the performance of the two great English players, Vardon being first with 313 and Taylor second with 315. Smith on this occasion was not among the leaders.

In 1901 the Myopia Hunt Club had an eighteen-hole course, generally accepted as being the best in the country, and in the Open Championship held there Smith greatly distinguished himself. Besides good golf he required nerve, and neither was wanting. In the last round he needed an 80 to tie the low score made by Willie Anderson, and it was not expected that he would succeed, for no player in the competition had returned an 80. However, the old Carnoustie player was equal to the task and so he had to play off the tie with Anderson. The play-off was at eighteen holes and Anderson won with 85 to Smith's 86.

In 1901 Smith left Washington Park and came East, being engaged as professional by the Nassau Country Club, of Glen Cove, Long Island, and he has remained with that club ever since. It has a very excellent course of full length and no doubt some of the improvement manifested in Smith's game must be ascribed to the opportunity afforded him of being able to play over so good a green. In the 1902 Open Championship at Garden City, which was won by Lawrence Auchterlonie with 307, Smith was again outside the money with 331.

In next year's Open Championship at the Baltusrol Golf Club, Short Hills, N. J., he did much better, finishing fourth with 316. Willie Anderson, the subsequent winner, and David Brown tying for first place with 307.

1904 was Willie Anderson's year, not Smith's. The former player won the Open Championship at the Glen View Club, Chicago, with 303. Smith taking twenty-one strokes more.

In 1905 Smith made a very distinct advance, and gave the first unmistakable indication that he was soon to be found in that small and select class—the world's great golfers. The first Metropolitan Golf Association Open Championship was held at the Fox Hills Golf Club, Staten Island, N. Y., and it brought out a strong entry list. Smith was notable at this tournament not only on account of his fine play, but because he used a club having a shaft fifty-one inches in length. With this formidable weapon he did great execution, as his winning of the championship shows, but he abandoned it some time after and was content with a shaft forty-six and one-fourth inches in length. He was not dissatisfied with the long-shafted clubs. To use his own words, he gave them up "simply because they were a nuisance to carry around." He and his old rival Willie Anderson tied for first place, with 300, great going
for a difficult course like Fox Hills, and when they came to the play-off, fortune for once was on Smith's side. He had 74 to Anderson's 76.

Despite a bad attack of malaria, he did great work in the Open Championship at the Myopia Hunt Club a month later. Willie Anderson came in first with 314, and Smith was second with 316.

The year 1906 was almost a season of unbroken success for him. He was victorious in almost every competition in which he took part, and closed the year with a record such as had never been attained by an American golfer. The first great open event of the season of 1906 was the Western Open Championship, held at the Homewood Country Club, Flossmoor, near Chicago, a quite difficult course of 6,144 yards. On this occasion the National Open Championship was to be held at the Onwentsia Club, Lake Forest, near Chicago, shortly after the Western Open. This fixture brought to Chicago all the leading professionals of the country, and as the Western Golf Association allowed them to play in the sectional event, it became almost as important as the National Open itself. To start with, Smith had a bad round for him—an 82—and Willie Anderson had a 74—so that he was at the beginning of the second round eight strokes worse than the man who was then considered the greatest golfer in America. His temperament came to the rescue, and this with his good golf led to three subsequent rounds of 75, 75 and 74—very brilliant work—and enabled him to win the Championship with 306.

The Open Championship at Onwentsia, a week later, was made memorable by Alex Smith winning it in 295, one stroke lower than Jack White had at Sandwich in 1904 in winning the British Open Championship and constituting a world's record for an event of such importance. He played four rounds of 73, 74, 73, 75 respectively over a course of 6,107 yards, the last round being played in a downpour of rain.

In the first round he had a 7. The card of this performance is given:

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The Smith family was well in front at Onwentsia. Alex's brother Willie was second, with 302, and his brother-in-law, James Maiden, tied for third place, at 305, with Lawrence Aucheterlonie.

The cream of the Eastern professional talent met in Van Cortlandt Park, New York, in August, in their annual two-days' competition. Here again Smith was victorious, winning the 72-hole competition with a score of 301, the next man having 306.

By two strokes he was beaten in the Metropolitan Open Championship at the Hollywood Golf Club, Long Branch, N. J., that fine golfer, George Low, of the Baltusrol Golf Club—like Smith a Carnoustie man—winning with 294.

He closed the season of 1906 with another great victory, when he won the championship of the Eastern Professional Golfers' Association at the Forest Hill (N. J.) Field Club. Smith had 146, and Alex Campbell was second with 149.

Smith has won the Open Championship of California three times, and has recently won the Florida Championship. To record all his notable doings would require too much space. It is worth mention, however, that he has done his home course at Nassau in 66, figures which speak for themselves.
LESSONS IN GOLF

Introduction

Let me begin by assuming that the reader of these words has never yet taken club in hand. He desires to become a golfer; how must he set about it? The obvious answer is that he should take lessons from a good professional instructor. That is undoubtedly the surest and best method for arriving at results really satisfactory. A competent coach quickly sizes up his man; he discerns his natural capacity for the game, and by the aid of precept and example soon has him started on the right road. The novice has the inestimable advantage of actually seeing how the different strokes are played, and, provided that he is mentally and physically sound, there is no reason why he should not develop an effective game.

But if this statement is true, why am I writing a book; if the practical method is so much the preferable one, why am I putting these lessons down upon paper? This is a fair question, and one that I am bound to answer in the same spirit.

I did advise professional instruction, but you will note that I qualified the words by the adjective, good. Indeed, that makes all the difference between success and failure. There are plenty of professionals, who play a good game themselves, who are yet utterly incompetent to teach anyone else. In the first place, a coach should thoroughly know the theory upon which his own game is based; otherwise it is obviously impossible to make the pupil understand what is required of him. A professional golfer who has developed his game according to the instinctive or natural method, may play very well without taking any thought...