

# THE DRIVING SWING

*With Some Advice Concerning Clubs and the Grip*

By HARRY VARDON

A GREAT deal of unnecessarily bad golf is played in this world. The people who go on playing it, year in and year out, with unquenchable hope and enthusiasm, constitute the game's mainstay, for their zeal is complete, and zeal that remains unabated in the face of long-sustained adversity is the most powerful constituent in the whole fabric of a prosperous pastime.

All the same, these chronic sufferers from fozzling would like to play better than they do. And they could play better. There is no reason why a physically-sound individual who takes up the game before old age with the determination to succeed at it should fail to develop form justifying a tolerably low handicap—say, 5 or 6. After that, everything must depend upon the person's inborn faculties as a golfer. As a rule, it is some very simple error of ways that retards progress; an error that becomes more or less perpetuated in the system.

There are various theories as to the best method of learning golf. I have no hesitation in saying that the struggling player should first make himself master of the swing with the wooden clubs—the driver or the brassie. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that, for most of the shots in golf, the principles of the swing are the same. To the unpractised eye, a first-class player may seem to wield his mid-iron differently from the manner in which he swings his driver, but the variation comes only of the fact that the former is the shorter club and that, therefore, he has to stand nearer to the ball for it. The effect of the shorter club and the position closer to the ball is make the swing more upright, but the good golfer is not conscious of any effort to change his manner of swinging.

The mashie and its stout brother, the niblick, call for a swing which is rather different from the others, and the putter is a thing apart, but for all the shots from the tee and through the green until we take the mashie for pitching up to the hole, the swings are—or should be—identical in their main principles.

Before discussing the golf swing, we ought to consider the player's set of clubs and his manner of holding them. More than once I have heard amateurs say: "No wonder professionals play so well; they always pick the best clubs." It is not so much a matter of choosing the best—everybody does that—as of selecting those which are in the nature of brothers. The golfer needs what I might call a family group of clubs. The "lie"—that is, the inclination of the club as it is held on the ground in the ordinary position—for striking—should be similar in his set in the sense that the full extent of the sole of each club should be capable of resting naturally on the ground when the player is standing ready for the shot.

When the heel of the club touches the ground and the toe is slightly cocked up in the air, or *vice versa*, the results can hardly be good. Yet thousands of golfers are influenced solely by the "feel" of a club. They will use it in spite of the fact that its "lie" is ill-adopted to their stance, and frequently when, in the end, they discard it in despair, they cannot make out what is wrong with it.

I always advise the novice, or the person who is still in the throes of fozzling after several years' application to the game, to concentrate for a time on four clubs, the brassie, mid-iron, mashie and putter, and to leave the mashie alone until he can use the brassie and iron with some effect.

I recommend a brassie at the start, not for playing shots from the turf, but for learning how to drive. It has a stiffer shaft than the driver, and, as a result there is a greater chance of keeping it under control. You want a little loft on the face of the club so as to help in getting the ball into the air; this element of loft gives confidence to the novice, and even, if sometimes there is luck in the circumstance of his making the ball rise (or if, at any rate, he would not have met with such success with a straight faced club), the encouragement that he derives from the feat is worth a lot to him. He should accustom himself immediately to a low tee; if he suc-

cumbs to the temptation to poise the ball an inch or so clear of the ground for the drive, every shot that he has to play from the turf will seem twice as difficult to him as it should be.

It is sound policy to confine your attention to these two clubs for three weeks, assuming that you practice for an hour several times a week. If you want a chance, the putter may be tried because there is no harm in experimentation with a variety of stances and methods where this club is concerned. None of them will interfere with the fixed principles which you are trying to introduce into your system for the proper manipulation of the other instruments.

As time progresses, further clubs will be added to the bag, and a person who has been playing for two or three years ought to know what clubs suit him best. By that time he will have bought a great number in the hope of lighting on at least a few that seem divinely inspired, and very likely he will have fallen into the way of taking out with him a large collection.

There are many golfers who feel that they must have at least a dozen or fourteen. Seven or eight ought to be ample—the driver, brassie, cleek, iron, mashie, niblick and putter, with perhaps, a particular fancy in the way of a spoon or a jigger added to the equipment to give a sense of security. The spoon is a good substitute for the cleek when the latter proves to be in a peevish mood, and some golfers prefer the jigger to the mashie. The jigger, with its longer blade, strikes them as being the easier to use. I confess that, on important occasions, I carry eleven clubs, but three of these are spares and are seldom employed. It is a sound argument, too, that the more moderate the player, the better chance will he have of improving by pinning his faith to a few clubs.

Now as to grip. I am told that I have acquired a reputation for laying down a kind of dogma that nobody can hope to excel at golf unless he adopts the over-lapping grip. I really do not deserve such distinction because, while I am convinced that the grip mentioned is the best, it has never occurred to me to tell anybody that it is the only proper method. Undoubtedly it is to be recommended very strongly to a beginner, who requires only a little patience in order to master it, but when a person has been gripping in another manner for a year or two, it is not always wise to effect a radical change in principle unless that which he favors is hopelessly incorrect. It is reasonable to consider this matter of the grip with all due regard for human fancies and foibles. But we must not lose sight of the fact that some styles of gripping are so bad as to constitute insurmountable barriers to success.

As a rule, the involuntary way in which a novice takes hold of a club is wrong because he generally holds it deeply in the palms of the two hands, with the knuckles well under the shaft, and has the hands

slightly apart. These dispositions are the two arch enemies of correct hitting. It is an inexorable rule that, to make the ball fly straight, you must have the back of the left hand facing the way that you are going, so that it shall control the club to the extent of giving it a straight face at the impact, and that the two hands must be touching, if they are not overlapping, in order that they shall not work against one another.

These are all-important cardinal points on which to base our mode of procedure. I take it that in every game in which a ball has to be struck with a club or bat or stick, there are right and wrong ways of holding that instrument. Certainly such is the case in connection with cricket, billiards and other pastimes which I have had opportunities of studying. But in no game is as important as in golf because whereas you may conceivably score if you hit the ball in an unintended direction at cricket and the like, you cannot do the right thing by getting off the line at golf. And yet there are thousands of players who say they like to grip in the way that feels most comfortable and that they are not going to try anything else.

It is a very unprofitable attitude to adopt. In point of fact, the way that feels most comfortable is wrong in four cases out of every five.



STANCE AND ADDRESS:

The grip is all important, the one I advocate being the two V overlapping grip, formed by the thumbs and fore-fingers. To achieve this the ball of the right thumb should rest on the back of the left thumb with the little finger of the right hand over the middle joint of the forefinger of the left hand, thus bringing about a perfect union of the hands while playing. Weight evenly distributed on both legs; no stiffness of body



**BEGINNING OF UPSWING**

Head still. Note that left knee has begun to turn inward, making the body start to pivot at the hips. The left wrist also turns and with it the club face. Throughout every stroke the eyes must be kept on the ball

who wanted to be instructed in the rudiments of the game in my garden school at Totteridge. This lady confessed that she had never played before, and she arrived with a brand new set of clubs of impressive appearance. Following my custom, I asked her to execute a few swings in the way that came naturally to her so that I might estimate the style that suited her. I noticed that she was gripping curiously, but said nothing at the moment.

Something possessed me to stand in front of her. As a rule, I stand well to the right of a player to see the swing. She fixed her eye on the ball and then like a flash of lightning pushed the club straight out in front of her. How she proposed to hit the ball in that manner I do not know; what I do know is that she very nearly hit me on the point of the jaw. If I had not jumped back I should have caught it beautifully. That pupil had her first lesson after her first swing.

There are three golf grips which are more or less correct. One is the old-fashioned palm grip in which the player holds the club well in the palm of the right hand with the knuckles under the shaft but has the back of the left hand facing the direction of play. Mr. John Ball and Alexander Herd are the most illustrious golfers I know who adopt this method, and certainly they do very well with it.

I would not dissuade any player from favoring it if he felt that it was the only way in which he could hit the ball, but it is disadvantageous in a heavy lie because, as the club meets the turf, it is likely to turn in the right hand. There is no check on it to prevent it turning unless you hold very tightly with the right hand, and an intensely hard grip is bad for the reason that it tends to render taut all the muscles of the arm, whereas they should be flexible. However, it is possible to play some good shots with this grip, especially when the lies are clean and the ball can be picked up without the club having greater contact with the turf than to clip through the closely-cropped grass. If you must adopt such a method, I would

say only: Be sure that the hands are touching.

It is a mistake to suppose that, by putting the back of the right hand under the shaft, and holding the club deeply in the palm, you get more power. Or, perhaps, I should say that it is an error to suppose that you profit by getting more power in this manner, supposing that you do obtain it. As a matter of fact, you ought not to be conscious that the hands in particular are doing a lot of hard work. Their function is to put the club-head into the proper position for hitting the ball; not to do

the hitting. They are to all intents and purposes a connecting link between the arms and the club—nothing more. It is the swing—the swing of the club, the hands and the arms acting as one piece of mechanism—that produces the power and makes the ball travel.

If you try to hit with the hands, you are almost sure to spoil the effort by holding too tightly with the right. The player who falls into this error generally slices. The hands in their desperation arrive opposite the ball before the club-head reaches it, and the latter is therefore drawn across the ball. You will notice that a good golfer usually finishes with most of his weight on the right leg. That is because, having depended upon the swing to secure the distance, he drops on to the right leg to check the club. If he were to hit with his hands, his body would forward with the follow-through and the bulk of his weight would be on the left leg at the finish.

It is because the old-fashioned palm-grip encourages—and, in bad lies, necessitates, a tight grip with the right hand that I think it has a defect. You need to hold a club firmly, especially with the thumbs and forefingers, but not like grim death. There is no earthly reason why so many golfers should have corns on their hands—the consequence of very tight gripping. Personally I never have a corn on either of my hands except near the little finger of the left hand, and that is caused solely by the fact that I wear a ring on the linger mentioned. The palm gripper nearly always has a lot of corns.

So much for the ancient method of gripping, which is still very extensively practised, especially among amateurs. The second acceptable principle represents the stage before the overlapping grip. Very little change is necessary to alter it to the latter. The club is held so that the two thumbs rest on the shaft, and with the forefingers, form Vs. The right hand, instead of being under the shaft, is brought 'round, and the back of that hand faces away from the line of play. The back of the left hand looks towards the line of play.

Here, then, we have the hands nicely balanced—the backs of the hands facing in opposite directions and the thumbs and forefingers formed into Vs with their apex uppermost. This is a sound grip so long as you remember to make the hands meet on the shaft. They must not be apart even to the extent of the tiniest fraction of an inch.

To proceed from the grip described to that known as "overlapping" all that you have to do is to bring the right hand a little higher up so that the ball of the thumb rest on the back of the left thumb and the little finger of the right hand deposits itself on the forefinger of the left. In this way, you make the grip more compact and render the union of the hands complete. Some people like to bring the right hand so far up that they overlap with two or three fingers of it. There is nothing to be said against the scheme if the golfer prospers on it, but personally I think that the ideal feeling of freedom is obtained when one overlaps only with that little finger of the right hand.

These, then, are the three grips suited to the game, and it is not too much to say that all others have faults.



**TOP OF THE SWING**

The left knee has continued its inward movement, while with the head kept perfectly still, the turn of the hips has been completed and the even distribution of the weight of the body maintained



**START OF DOWN-SWING**

The club head line reached this stage from the top of the swing with only the arms having moved. It is at this point that the left knee begins to straighten and the right knee to bend so as to allow the hips to pivot for the hit



**FINISH OF THE SWING**

The body has turned so that the player faces the line of play, but the position of the head has not altered. The hips, it will be seen, have completed their pivoting, so that the left hip has turned half-way round