

The Most Valuable Stroke in Golf

The Shot That Can Improve More Scores Than Any Other in the Ancient Game

By JOCK HUTCHISON

British Open Champion

I HAVE heard a good many fine golfers discuss the question as to whether the drive or the putt was the most important stroke in the game of golf. Those who are not driving well, who are finding traps and bunkers and out of bounds from the tee are sure that the drive is the most important. There is certainly very little fun in playing when one is driving badly.

On the other hand, those who are taking three putts to a green, who are missing the short ones of two, three and four feet, are equally sure that the putt is even more important than the drive.

But to my way of thinking, they are both wrong. I am quite sure that the most important stroke in golf is the mashie or mashie niblick approach to the green. If I hadn't thought so I wouldn't have spent more time over this effort than all the rest of it put together.

The Score Saver

IF a golfer is pretty sure of putting the ball reasonably close to the pin from seventy-five to one hundred and forty yards off the green, he is pretty sure of scoring well unless his driving and his putting break down completely.

There are usually more strokes of this type on a course, up to the greens, than anything else. They may come after a good drive where the hole is from three hundred to four hundred yards in length. They may come after a missed tee shot where you have had to play safe or have lost distance from a trap or a bunker or the rough. But you will find on a majority of the holes of almost any course this stroke will be needed.

It was control over this pitch to the green that did more than anything else to win the British Championship. If I had been a trifle off in this respect I would have hardly come close to winning.

It helps both ways. If you are putting well, it gives you your chance to get a birdie. If you are not putting well, you are not constantly left with those long approach putts that usually mean three putts to a green. For a player must be putting poorly to keep taking three putts when he is only eight or ten or twelve feet from the cup. If he is getting his approaches close, he doesn't have to do any fancy putting to score well. But if he isn't, he is generally in trouble, for there are few in the game who can keep on laying long approach putts of forty and fifty feet dead to the pin on modern greens.

Playing the Stroke

I USE a ribbed face mashie or mashie niblick for this shot. The ribbed face helps, but it can be played well without it. I hold the club down near the bottom of the leather grip to keep better control. The ball is on

a line midway between my heels, neither to the front nor to the rear.

Then, in place of laying the face of the club back as so many do, I turn it in slightly. On the down stroke, in place of snapping the club head through first, my hands lead the swing. Both wrists are firm as they come into the ball, the hands, as I suggested, leading the swing.

As the ball is struck the wrists, of course, snap into the shot. But not nearly to the extent ordinarily used, for with me it is as much a forearm motion as it is a wrist motion.



H. B. Martin

Jock Hutchison illustrates his stance and grip for playing his approach with a mashie-niblick. Note how far the hands are ahead of the club

tion. Under average conditions this type of stroke would produce a slice. But as I swing into the ball I turn my right hip into the stroke and this, to a certain extent, makes up for the lack of wrist turning.

It is a hard shot to explain and not one that I would advocate for general use.

There is no lift to the wrists to get the ball up, as I play to keep the approach fairly low. Naturally I hit the ball first, the back side of it, on the downward swing, taking turf just on beyond. If I take turf first the shot is spoiled.

Especial attention must be made to turning in the face of the club head, not laying it

back. In addressing my ball my mashie niblick, held as it is, is almost as straight as the blade of a midiron. It is by bringing the hands through just a trifle in front of the club head that the club face is turned back, giving me the cut that I want.

When I am playing this shot well, even upon keen greens, I can pitch right at the pin without any fear of running over. For example, when Wethered and I came to the last green at St. Andrews after fine drives, he had a 4 to win and I had a 4 to tie him. His approach stopped over forty feet from the cup and he failed to get down in two more. My approach was pitched right at the pin on a very keen green and I had a ten-foot putt for a 3.

Great Relief

IT is a great relief when you come to a fast, well-guarded green to know you can pitch boldly over a trap right up to the cup without fear of running over into another trap. On an average green I don't figure the ball will run over two feet after it lands. If it does, I haven't played the stroke correctly.

It is quite different from the standard method of hitting a pitch. For example, Jim Barnes and Chick Evans and Bobby Jones use their wrists much more than I do, by which I mean to say that their wrists seem more flexible and are not as unbending as mine are.

The shot must be exactly timed. If the hands get in too much ahead of the stroke, not even turning in the club face will be sufficient to save the shot. It is neither a right-handed nor a left-handed blow. I feel that both my wrists and forearms are working together. I don't guide with the left and hit through with the right as so many do. It is a double-handed, double-armed blow with me.

The chief value of this shot is that I can keep the pitch fairly low on a windy day and still put as much cut to the ball as if I thumped it high in the air. As I said before, the ribbed club helps, but it does not make the stroke. I can take a plain-faced club and get almost the same results.

The ball will not stop as quickly, but it will run very little even on a keen green.

The golfer who can't put a cut on his approach shot knows that he has to barely clear a trap to keep on the green. He has much less space to shoot at. If he plays well over a trap he runs into another trap beyond.

At St. Andrews the greater part of the way this stroke left me six, eight and ten feet from the cup where I had my chance for a birdie and where there was small chance to get over par by wasting an extra putt. It is easily, for me, the best stroke in my bag. But it isn't going to be learned in a day or in a week.