



STEWART MAIDEN SWINGING DOWN TO THE BALL



SWEEPING THROUGH TO THE FINISH OF THE SWING

MY SYSTEM OF TEACHING GOLF

A Famous Instructor's Conceptions of The Importance of Correct Body Action

By STEWART MAIDEN

I AM not at all sure that I have any system of teaching golf. I do have certain views about the golf stroke, and how it should be made.

However, I have been asked to say something about my system, and the editor has suggested that I explain something about how I go about handling a pupil who has never played the game at all, also what I do when I set out to correct errors in the swings of pupils who come to me for help in straightening out their play.

Let me say, in the first place, so far as the pupil who has never played the game at all is concerned, if he happens to be a grown man, possibly around middle age, he is usually a tough proposition to make any progress with, unless he happens to have a world of patience and persistence. I would much rather work with a player who has tried the game, for a time at least, and has developed some sort of way of hitting the ball. This fellow has at least made a start, and you have something to work with.

But to start with the man just taking up the game, I consider it essential to get him started with a correct grip, that is, correct for him. I don't know that I have ever seen a man take up a golf club for the first time, and in his own way place his hands on the club in a suitable grip. Mind you, I am not talking about the overlapping grip, or any other particular kind. I use the overlapping grip, but I've known lots of great golfers, who use the so-called natural grip, and still other fine ones, who interlock instead of overlapping. But the important thing is to have the player place his hands on the club in a way that will let him swing it in the way that will get the best results for him.

Then we can say that the right grip is mightily important. The newcomer has taken a grip that will pass at least, and he is now asked to swing the club, remembering that he is trying to hit the ball with the clubhead. In all probability his effort won't look much like a golf swing. If he is a right-handed person, the chances are he will lift the club too much with his right hand, and that he won't get his body into the swing to speak of. I find that common experience with most beginners.

The next thing I go to work on is showing him what to do with his feet and legs, because he's got to get them to working right to get his body into it, and he can't make a golf swing, if he doesn't get his body into it. I'm speaking of a full swing, of course.

And, right here, I would like to get away from the idea that I am supposed to be writing about a system of teaching, to say something about foot and leg action and body action, because I think they are a lot more important than any system of teaching. I have heard a good *(Continued on page 42)*

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deal about swinging the clubhead and what it will do. Well, you do have to swing the clubhead, because you hit the ball with the clubhead, but I can't go along with the fellows who say that this explains everything. I've seen too many golfers get back to the top of the swing in such a position that it was utterly impossible for them to swing at all.

To make a golf swing, you've got to get the club back with the body, hands and arms in a position to swing the club down to the ball with power. To do this the body must turn well around toward the right, and the only way I know that can be done is to brace the right leg, relax the left, and turn. And the reason I spoke above of watching the foot and leg action of the beginner is that this body turning must start with the start of the backswing. If the player begins by lifting the club up with the right hand, he will never make a correct body turn, and, if the body doesn't turn properly on the backswing, there is not a chance that the body and arms will work together as they ought to coming down.

And this reminds me that I want to say something about the straight left arm at the top of the backswing. I don't say that the arm has to be absolutely straight, but I don't know any reason why it should not. Anyway, I want that arm fully extended and firm at the elbow, because that means that the muscles of that arm and of the left shoulder are contracted, and if they are not, then those of the right shoulder will be, and it's the contracted muscles that go to work when action is started. If the right shoulder and arm muscles start the downswing, the right side will swing the club. And if this happens, the right side will swing about toward the left too fast. The club will be swung around too much, causing what you hear spoken of as hitting from the outside in, instead of having the body turn back easily toward the left, with the arms swinging the clubhead down to the ball from the inside of the line of play. I notice that where the right

shoulder swings around, the player usually has a tough time keeping his head in position until after he has hit the ball. So keeping that left arm firm and as straight as you can at the top of the backswing can prevent a lot of trouble.

To go back to our beginner, after he has learned to hold the club right, the main thing then is to get him into the right way of turning his body to get the club back. He's going to have a lot of trouble in doing it unless he is one of the lucky few who happen to fall into it in a natural kind of way, and they are very few indeed. He just has to keep on trying until he finally gets a feeling that he has finally reached a position from which he can swing comfortably down to the ball, keeping his head in position as he does so until after the ball has been hit.

As to correcting faults in players who have been playing the game for varying periods, I think that is entirely too much of a case of individual treatment for each player to try to set down any general rule. What will fit one case won't fit another. I try to make the whole thing as simple as I can. It is usually easy enough to see where the trouble is, but it is not so simple to correct it. My plan is to ask the player to execute a certain movement that I think will automatically correct his fault, without trying to go into any detailed analysis to him. Trying to think about half a dozen things at one time will ruin anybody's golf swing. One at a time is about all anybody can stand.

The golf swing isn't a very complicated thing, but it is easy enough to make it complicated all right. Any ten-year-old boy can learn to swing a club in a very short time. Yet I've seen a lot of intelligent grown men who couldn't learn in ten years. Out of a hundred men, some will learn the swing much quicker than others; some will get to play much better than others. I suppose that same thing would apply to learning to play the piano, or to dancing, or most anything else.

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