The classic work on "thinking-through" a golf course—with expert tips on shotmaking, strategy, techniques, and more...
A ROUND of GOLF with TOMMY ARMOUR
This book is dedicated to a million hopefuls like my pal Bill

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being only one stroke behind Dick Mayer and Cary Middlecoff in the National Open that Mayer won in a playoff. Jimmy said that the only deliberate change in his game that he could think of as accounting for his improved performance was gripping the club just a tiny bit more to the right than he previously had held his hands on the grip.

The three amateurs with whom I was playing hardly did the first thing about the grip that a good player does invariably, and that is to get the club cradled snugly on the roots of his fingers. When the club is at that point where the fingers and the palm meet, the fingers can curl around the grip so the sensitive fingertips can communicate the feeling of a good swing to the rest of the player’s nervous system.

Some day, I suppose, some intense student of golf will write a thesis on this subject of fingertip control of the golf swing. Maybe you are old enough to remember the story, play and song of Jimmy Valentine, the safecracker, who found the combination with his fingertips. The successful golfer, like Jimmy Valentine, finds the answer with his fingertips.

There was too much pressure and tension in Bill’s grip when he was addressing his shots. The grip should be light but firm, at address. If the grip is squeezed when you address the ball, by the time you get to the top of the swing your grip will be lifeless and you won’t be able to swing the club with zip coming down into the ball. Another thing: When you are holding the club with practically a rigor mortis grip at the top of the backswing you will loosen at the ball and hit a flabby blow.

You’ve got to learn just how gently you can hold the club without losing control of it at the top of the backswing. When you have an easy but secure hold of the club as you begin your downswing you will spontaneously strengthen the grip as you hit into the ball.

In my book *How to Play Your Best Golf All the Time*, you get all the basic information you need about the Vs of your
thumbs and forefingers pointing to the right shoulder as the
grip for the average-to-fairly-good golfer.

The fellows with whom I was playing might have made good
use of the reminder that turning the hands slightly to the right
on the circumference of the grip tends to produce a hook.
When the hands of the average golfer are a bit to the left on the
shaft so the Vs are vertical or slightly to the left the shot prob-
ably will be a slice. There are other causes of a slice but the
hands being even slightly on the left of the shaft as you look
down at them at address is the slicing grip. I don’t think that
anybody wants to slice except as an emergency measure in
trouble. However, when you know why you may be slicing (or
hooking) you can correct your grip if misplaced grip is the
cause of the curving shot.

You also will get a slice if you hit the ball with your club
coming from outside the line of flight and slicing across the
ball, due to body or arm action, or from an open stance; but in
most cases the average golfer’s slice is caused primarily by his
grip.

The grip is exceedingly important because it is with your
hands that you whip the ball away from you. That’s the only
possible way of getting a shot that amounts to anything.

Bill was inclined to have a grip weakness that is common
among golfers. His right thumb and forefinger didn’t stay as
close together as they should. Hence, at the top of his
backswing his club would slip down in the V of his right hand.

He didn’t realize that the right forefinger and thumb are a
key combination in the grip. They account for giving the
clubhead a great deal of the lash that comes in the critical sec-
tor at the bottom of the swing when the hands are almost up to
the ball and the wrists have just begun to uncock.

The right forefinger curls around the shaft in a sort of trig-
ger grip. The inner part of the ball of the right thumb is se-
curely pressing on the grip material but not pressing so heavily
that the tip of the thumbnail touches. Not one detail of the grip ever should be so tight that you feel tension in your forearms.

Without being aware of it my partner was fighting a tendency that is the curse of the literate golfer. Many of these fellows who have read quite a little about golf become so intent on left hand, left arm and left side functioning that the right-side elements are almost neglected. They go at the job of shotmaking negatively and drag the clubhead into the ball.

In their hurry to get playing about nine out of ten golfers neglect to learn that the left hand guides the club (with the left arm being the radius of the swing) and the right hand does the hitting.

You've got to guide the club into the groove and you can't do a good job of guiding and hitting with the same hand.

You can hold the club a little bit firmer with the fingers of the left hand than with those of the right to get control. The last two fingers of the left hand are especially snug on the club. The right-hand grip will instinctively strengthen as the ball is hit.

Nobody except a southpaw can hit a golf shot very far with just the left hand. I've been in debates on that subject and have seen that shots of 100 yards made with only the left hand holding the driver will usually win all the wagers.

The grip and the stance can be taken care of while you are standing still. When you know what you are doing and are careful you shouldn't have trouble with them.

But the control of the path of the club is a difficult job. To do that you've got to have your hands and feet neatly coordinated and you've got to remember to hit the ball when the time comes.

If your grip of the club is strong but flexible your wrists will be limber. They will be cocked correctly by the centrifugal force of the clubhead and they'll automatically straighten out at the bottom of the swing. When your grip restricts natural wrist action your shot will become only a stiff arm and body push.
The sound of the clubhead meeting the ball usually is an accurate indicator of the character of the grip. If the club hits the ball with a crack that sounds like a rifle shot you may be confident that you have a firm, flexible finger grip. If the sound of the club hitting the ball is a dull and feeble plop then you'd better work on correcting your grip.

I've had interesting experiences with sports headliners who have exhibited the general inclination to clutch the golf club much too tightly. The case of Stan Musial comes to mind.

Musial holds a baseball bat loosely, waggling it so freely you'd almost think he had rubber fingers and wrists. As the pitch is delivered Musial never tightly clutches the bat but swings it smoothly until the precisely timed instant when his grip subconsciously adjusts to required firmness and his hands lash the bat against the ball.

At golf "The Man" is prone to go at the small, still ball with a notion to overpower it. He will grip the club so hard at the top of the backswing he almost presses the shaft flat. He gets so tight he sticks at the top of the swing.

All I have to say to him to get him to lighten his grip and allow his hands to work and put life into his swing is, "How much do you think you'd hit if you held a bat as tightly as you're holding that golf club?"

While playing golf with Otto Graham I've asked him if he gripped a football tightly when he swung his arm back to pass. He answered that he was barely holding onto the ball.

In golf, as in most other games I can think of — baseball, football, tennis, bowling, billiards, croquet and horseshoe pitching — tightness of grip often ruins the chance of first-class performance. When the actual moment of hitting or throwing comes, the light grip will firm up automatically, and you'll get your power.

I couldn't make any major alterations in Bill's grip or swing with the third hole facing us. His errors and those of our opponents did suggest that I discuss the grip at this point in
Right thumb and forefinger close
- grip without tension

Club laid along root of fingers -
dots show pressure points
when right hand is closed
The feel is all in the fingers

Firmer grip with left hand —
last two fingers especially snug
The left hand is the strong guide;
the right hand firms up just
before contact and hits!
my book, so you might be moved to examine how you connect yourself with your club. You may find that your grip is the cause of about half your golfing trouble.
Before I tell you about playing the sixth hole I want to attend to a matter that I'd noticed while watching my amateur pals exhibit the range of their merits and deficiencies.

None of the three had a really first-grade stance as uniform procedure. Mainly by accident they were able to start swinging correctly.

As I looked at them I recalled another one of the sessions at which Ty Cobb and I had compared baseball and golf.

We had talked about developing a uniform swing and had agreed that wonders can be worked in improving hitting of the baseball and of the golf ball by making slight alterations in the stance.

Bill needed to think about his stance. He wasn't aware of it but he was making the game very difficult by changing his stance in some little (or big) way almost every shot.

On some shots he would be bent over so much and holding his head so low that he'd have to look up shortly after he'd started swinging.

On other shots he'd be stiff-kneed and as upright as a guardsman at review. My other two companions were inclined to be a bit more at ease but at times crouched too much.

In talking with Cobb (and Stan Musial, too) about batting I'd been told by both of them that the first thing a batter does after the pitcher delivers the ball is to spring up out of the crouch. In baseball the crouch is a decoy. It may help to deceive the pitcher.

In baseball you get three swings at the ball. In golf you get only one and that is at a ball that doesn't move, so it gives you time to straighten up out of your crouch.
The fellows against whom Bill and I were playing suggested in their stances the crouch of a football player who is making ready to throw a block. That doesn't fit golf at all. In golf the body must stay in the same place and act as the fulcrum of all the leverage in the swing.

Golf is played standing up, not lying down or leaning.

Clubs are designed so if they are correctly fitted to you they will measure the distance you should stand from the ball when you're addressing it. Your arms should hang down with your hands close enough to your body so you feel that you are in easy, steady balance, and when you sole the club so it is flat on the ground behind the ball there isn't the slightest sensation of reaching out for the ball.

Your knees must be unlocked so they can turn easily. They will be bent and loose enough when you push your hind end back a little bit and have the center of balance running up about in line with the arches of your feet to just below your shoulders.

Your right shoulder is quite a little lower than your left shoulder at address because of your right hand being lower on the grip of the club and because the right elbow is loose and bent a bit so it is fairly close to your right hip.

Your left arm should feel a trifle stretched at address, but it must not be rigid. It shouldn't be measuring the radius of the swing.

Whether you stand at address with your head cocked a little bit to the right or with your chin straight down is pretty much up to you. Some believe that having the head turned to the right slightly makes it easier for the left shoulder to slide under the chin in the backswing. If thoughtful experimentation and practice show that this turn of the chin helps you to make a body turn instead of swaying, then cock your head as standard procedure. What you are seeking is free shoulder action and a steady head.

In the final analysis, if your head doesn't move your body
keep his head pretty well fixed as the center of his swing on most shots, I wouldn't have been able to do much for him as we played.

A great deal of the explanation of head steadiness — or lack of it — is as far away from the head as you can get. The answers are in your feet.

If your footwork is good your head will stay steady and you'll be able to turn around a stable axis.
This book defines the difference between playing golf, and playing intelligent golf.

Tommy Armour—winner of the US Open, the British Open, and many other professional tournaments—here plays an imaginary round of golf with an average player and analyzes the mental, strategic, and technical errors almost every player makes. He explains how to plan a series of golf shots to take advantage of a player's natural abilities. And he shows how a golfer's mind is his greatest asset, the surest contributor to a lower score.

Second to actually playing with a professional, A ROUND OF GOLF WITH TOMMY ARMOUR is perhaps the best golf lesson any golfer can take.

TOMMY ARMOUR, a native Scot, was one of the world's great golf professionals and was renowned as an exceptionally gifted teacher. His book How to Play Your Best Golf All the Time remains a best-selling golf classic. He died in 1968.

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