BOBBY JONES

GOLF IS MY GAME

WITH A FOREWORD BY Bernard Darwin
There is no name in the world of golf from its very beginning that has the same ring of magic and romance as that of Bobby Jones. He conquered the whole world and after the ‘Grand Slam’ of 1930 he retired at the age of 28 from full competitive play. But he has never retired from the hearts and memories of those who knew him and saw his incomparably graceful swing—as perfect as a Shakespeare sonnet. Nor has he ever been absent from the heart of the capital of golf, St. Andrews, of which city he was made a Freeman in 1958. But Bobby Jones is in truth the Freeman of the whole world of golf.

Some famous sportsmen have to employ ‘ghosts’ to write for them. Bobby Jones writes for himself with the same directness, modesty, grace and authority with which he played golf. This is a book of practical and fascinating instruction and exposition—the essence of a lifetime’s thought on the game. Every expert must read it. But it is a book imbued with understanding for the ‘average golfers’ who keep the game going. It is also a book of the mature philosophy and reminiscence of a great sporting gentleman, the greatest player of his time, perhaps of all time.
The author at St. Andrews in 1930, after winning the British Amateur Golf Championship
GOLF IS MY GAME

Bobby Jones

With a Foreword by
BERNARD DARWIN

Illustrated with
photographs and drawings

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A Push

A Pull
b) A brief instant after the start down. Note that the unwinding of the trunk has produced a tension up the left side which pulls on the grip end of the club through an extended left arm.
My first Open, with Harry Vardon, the English master. This was Vardon’s last appearance in our championship. He would have won except for being caught in a violent windstorm.

Plate 8
CHAPTER 6

Downswing

The swinging of the golf club back from the ball is undertaken for the sole purpose of getting the player to a proper position for striking. So the one influence most likely to assure the satisfactory progression of the swing is the clearly visualized contact between club and ball still at the forefront of the player’s mind. Just as the backswing should not begin until this picture is adequately established, so the movement should continue until there results an awareness that the player has become capable of striking in the intended manner.

I stress this point, and intend to continue to do so, because I know that the unrelenting effort to play golf in this way can do more for a player than anything else he can possibly do. When every move of the swing is dominated by the determination to strike the ball in a definite fashion, the complicated sequence of movements must acquire purpose and unity attainable in no other way.

I have already said that the backswing and downswing as nearly as possible should be blended together so as to comprise one movement. This sounds like a tall order when the two are necessarily in opposite directions. Yet the expert player actually accomplishes just this. In the swing of the expert there is no single stage at which all backward or upward movement comes to a halt and a fixed position is attained from which the downswing begins. This transition from upswing to downswing is a truly crucial point, and it is here that ninety-nine out of a hundred bad golf shots are incubated. Just let the player’s hands move a few inches towards his front, or let him turn his head a few degrees towards the objective, and the shot will be spoiled beyond any recovery. Even in the most competent golfing company this is the real danger point of the swing.
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Photograph 5(a) illustrates the plane of the downswing in a properly executed golf stroke. The series of pictures was begun at about the point where the motion of the club changed direction. The clubheads facing towards the player’s front and with toes pointing upwards are those of the downstroke. Those facing to the rear with toes pointing downwards are positions of the follow-through. It is obvious that the clubhead could not be made to follow this path unless the full cocking of the wrists is preserved during the early stages of the downstroke, the swing having been brought through these early stages entirely by the unwinding of the trunk and the movement of the arms. The all-important feel which I experience as the swing changes direction is one of leaving the clubhead at the top of the swing. To whatever degree this feeling is present, the result is that the cocking of the wrists is completed as the unwinding of the trunk begins.

Consider the club with its head nearest the camera. It is obvious that at this point the angle between the player’s left arm and the shaft of the club is very nearly ninety degrees. It is from this position to the point of contact with the ball that the straightening of the wrists and the final violent completion of the unwinding of the trunk produce the maximum striking effort. The clubhead is shown striking the ball squarely in the back while moving on a line straight to the objective.

It is my feeling that it is a wholly natural performance which will be accomplished in this way, provided only that the player have in his mind striking the ball in this direction and with this sort of timing.

In photograph 5(b) we may examine the hitting stroke and follow-through where the interval between exposures is considerably longer. The important point to observe here is that the face of the club is brought up squarely against the ball not by rolling the right hand over the left, but rather by the completion of the unwinding of the trunk, which in turn pulls the hands in and causes the entire left arm to roll over.

Far better, I think, than could be done by separate pictures of the successive positions, these photographs 4 and 5(b) depict
a) The downswing

b) Striking the ball
the movement of the head, or the lack of it, in a very impressive fashion.

In photograph 4 the stark whiteness of the head was brought about by being held substantially immovable throughout the sequence of eight exposures. The outline of the face and the part of the hair are almost as they were in the beginning, a very striking illustration of Abe Mitchell's conception of the player moving freely beneath himself.

In photograph 5(b) five outlines of the head may be distinguished. Obviously, then, there was no perceptible movement of the head between the topmost position and the next in order. For hand positions three and four from the top, the head moved slightly backwards and then definitely down as the ball was struck. When the hands had reached a position ninety degrees past the ball, the head was still farther down, but being pulled up and rotated forward by the turn of the trunk and the momentum of the swing.

It is often very helpful for the player to determine that he will never see less of the back of the ball during the swing than he sees at address. I have many times been able to help my playing companions by asking them to try to peer up underneath the back of the ball as they hit it.

There is nothing more important in this whole procedure than holding the head back, or even moving it backwards, in the act of striking. The golfer speaks of "head-lifting" and "looking up". Actually, he does not lift his head because of any over-eagerness to observe the result of the stroke. When trying to strike the ball, the most natural thing in the world is to look at it. In almost every case the head comes up because the wrists have been uncocked too soon, and with the angle between the left arm and the shaft of the club being less acute, the head and shoulders simply must come up in order to afford room for the completion of the swing.

If ever anyone should hold the notion that a golf ball may be propelled great distances by some magic of form without the need for physical exertion by the player, I ask him to observe the facial contortions in the photographs facing page 80. In answer to this proposition, and to the claim that golf is a
The backswing
left-handed game, let it be said that the only way to make a
 golf ball travel is to strike it mightily and with both hands.
 The expert hits long drives with such apparent ease and
effortless grace because he makes efficient use of all sources
of power, and mainly because he builds up a considerable
rate of speed in the clubhead by the unwinding of his trunk
before the hands unleash their explosive force at impact.

The golfer must strike strongly with his right hand, but he
must first put his hands, both of them, in position to strike in
the desired direction. This is done as the swing changes
direction at the top. Initiating the downswing with the un-
winding of the trunk provides space and time for the hands
to drop down along the proper plane whence they may strike
towards the objective. Once this move is made, there is no
need to hold anything back.

The point at which the swing changes direction from up to
down is one of those spots where the motion slows down
enough so that a bit of conscious control may be applied.
A very useful trick at this point is to make certain of returning
the elbow of the right arm directly to the ribs as the down-
swing commences, at the same time relaxing the right wrist
and thereby increasing its inward set. This has the effect of
dropping the club a bit towards the player’s rear and thus
enhancing the opportunity of hitting straight through the
ball on the line of play.

I have nearly always written of the golf swing as subjected
to left-hand and left-side control. I have done so because it is
obvious that the width and arc of the swing are limited by the
extension of the left arm. Since the left hand is above the
right on the club, the left arm may be extended throughout
all the movement taking place on the back swing, or be-
fore impact. So in order to get the club away from the player
to the greatest possible extent, this left arm must be straight,
or nearly so. It is, therefore, helpful to think of pushing the
club back with the left side and arm.

In the same way, since the downstroke is led by the un-
winding of the trunk, the left side again becomes a convenient
focal point. If complete use is to be made of the power latent
in the player's legs and back muscles, there must be a sense of pulling or stretching up the left side and arm to the grip end of the club. If ever the hands and arms get ahead of the unwinding of the hips so that this feeling of tension becomes lost, the power in these big muscles must likewise be lost. Such a thing would result in the interruption of an important line of communication, so that the effect would be like pushing on the end of a string.

As nearly as I can describe the sensation of striking a golf ball, it is a combination of a pull through with the left side, combined with a slapping action of the right hand and forearm, the left being responsible for keeping the swing on track, or in a groove, and the right being the agent responsible for bringing the movement to a well-timed climax as the ball is struck.

An ample cocking of the wrists and the retention of the greater part of the angle for use in the hitting area are not only important for good timing and increasing the speed of the clubhead, they are absolutely necessary in order to enable the player to strike downwards and so produce backspin. When the angle between the left arm and the shaft of the club becomes straight too early in the downstroke, the clubhead at that point will be too low, and the subsequent arc will be too flat. I found a very valuable application of this principle in the spring of 1930 when I played several rounds of golf with Horton Smith.

For many years I had been a very poor mashie-niblick player simply because I was inclined to be a bit wooden in my wrists when playing the shorter strokes. The backswing ample for the lesser distances was still not long enough to free me of this restraint.

Watching Smith's play, I took note that at the top of his swing for a short or medium pitch the angle between his left arm and the club was quite open. He was gripping the club quite firmly and allowing very little cocking at this point. But in making his first move downwards, his wrists relaxed, so that while his arms moved perceptibly, the angle of his club to the ground or a vertical plane changed scarcely at all.
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In other words, the wrist cock, which is usually completed at the top of the swing, was being completed by him at the beginning of the downstroke.

For me, this proved a most valuable lesson. It gave me something to think about when the pitches were not behaving, and I think it can very well be passed on to any others who may have trouble getting their hands and wrists working. It will not matter so much where the cocking takes place, so long as it is there when the time comes to hit.
Plate 18

a) Driving from the 10th tee of the final round of the U.S. Open, 1930. No worries about a lost ball here.

b) Playing a short iron at Interlachen in the Open of 1930. For better control, these shots are always played at less than full strength. That’s my playing companion, Jock Hutchinson, in background.

c) The final stroke of the U.S. Open, 1930. The ball topped the slope, took a small break to the right a few feet short of the hole, and went into the centre of the cup. My, what a relief that was!
O. B. Keeler mans a typewriter as I work out script and action for a shot for a Warner Brothers series
CHAPTER 21

Playing the Masters

Drawings by George W. Cobb, Golf Course Architect
Hole No. 1, 400 yards, par 4. This hole can be played straight away from tee to green, although the fairway does expand on the right as it approaches the green. Ordinarily, the fairway bunker on the right presents no problem for the tournament player. With a heavy wind against, however, as often happens, a half-hit tee shot may catch this bunker.

At the same time, a drive down the right side of the fairway is only important when the wind is behind and the hole is cut immediately behind the bunker at the left front of the green. In these circumstances, the drive down the right side makes it possible for the player to play more nearly for the pin with his second shot.

The player who drives down the left side must play his second either over the bunker or into slopes which tend to direct his ball off the right side of the green.

A sort of shelf across the back of the green offers several interesting pin locations, especially when the wind is against. With the flag far back, the player thinks twice before he goes boldly for the pin and often leaves himself a very difficult approach putt from the lower level.
Fig. 9 Wrong Way: improper upward stroke, improper spin
Fig. 10 Right Way: proper club loft, proper spin
After the great finish of the 1954 Masters, in which Snead and Hogan tied for first place, with Billy Joe Patton, the amateur, only one stroke behind. Left to right: Patton, Hogan, myself, Snead
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One time a little later, when I was in high school, I became a bit excited over an article I read in the *American Golfer*, purported to have been written by Harry Vardon, describing the "push shot" and how to play it. I read the article several times, tore the page out of the magazine, and tucked it into my pocket. I could scarcely wait next day to get out to East Lake to try it. On the trolley returning from school I pored over the article until I thought I had it firmly in my mind.

As Vardon described the shot, it was to be played with a minimum of hand action, striking the ball a sharply descending blow and sending it on a low trajectory towards the green. It was described as the ideal manner of playing an iron shot into the wind, so that it would be little affected by the wind and would stop quickly at the end of its flight.

I had no notion whatever of discussing this experiment with Stewart. I knew that whatever discussion might take place would be all on my side. I even almost gave up the idea when I found Stewart giving a lesson on the same practice tee I had to use. I knew he would give me a good razzing, no matter what the result of my effort might be. But I was just stubborn enough to go through with it anyway. Maybe I could show Stewart something.

I know I hit over a hundred shots from the tee, following as closely as I could the procedure described in the article. I know I hit not one effective shot. When I finally decided to give it up, I turned to find Stewart had finished his lesson and was sitting on a bench watching me. He was shaking with silent laughter, as nearly hysterical as a Scot can ever get.

Never again did I try to learn a shot or stroke from a written description, and ever after, I have been careful in writing or talking about the golf swing. Certainly, there are ways of translating from one person to another ideas which can be helpful in playing golf, but it is not feasible for the learner to follow a prescription for the entire performance. No matter how clear the complete picture may be, the mind cannot possibly think through the process from beginning to end within the time required for the accomplishment.
think that a great measure of his discomfort is derived from his conscious efforts to follow prescribed routine, to look and move like someone else, or as he has been told. I think he would present a more natural appearance if he should put his mind upon striking the ball, rather than upon swinging the club.

This will be the most important chapter of this book. It will describe the most useful learning you will ever acquire as a golfer. You may gain knowledge from the mere reading of this chapter that will help you in the playing of every golf shot you make for the rest of your life. This knowledge can make you a better golfer overnight.

If you are a beginner, this chapter will start you off on the road to a correct understanding of the nature of golf. If you are an average golfer, it will give you the means of deciding upon the club to use and the shot to play on the basis of reasoned judgment, rather than guesswork. If you are a better than average golfer, it will broaden your perception of the possibilities in the game so that you may become a player of imagination and resourcefulness. If you are weary of being told to concentrate without having knowledge of what you should concentrate on, this is it.

Golf is played by striking the ball with the head of the club. The objective of the player is not to swing the club in a specified manner, nor to execute a series of complicated movements in a prescribed sequence, nor to look pretty while he is doing it, but primarily and essentially to strike the ball with the head of the club so that the ball will perform according to his wishes.

No one can play golf until he knows the many ways in which a golf ball can be expected to respond when it is struck in different ways. If you think that all this should be obvious, please believe me when I assure you that I have seen many really good players attempt shots they should have known were impossible.

The first diagram (figure 1) is intended to represent a ball being struck by a clubhead moving precisely along the intended line of flight with its face square to the objective. In
CHAPTER 1

Learn by Playing

I BEGAN playing golf a few months after I became six years old. I began life as a sickly child, and at the age of forty-six was stricken by a crippling ailment. Even so, to this day, golf has been the major interest of my life.

No one could possibly owe a greater debt to the game than I do. With all the odds on the health side against me from the beginning, I know that I can thank golf for having given me forty years of active life filled with exciting experiences and warm human contacts. I know that my physical affliction was not derived in any sense from playing the game, and I doubt that without this playing I should ever have lived to see a full maturity. I am convinced, too, that golf has taught me much about life and provided for me a philosophy, a treasure of memories, and an appreciation of human attachments which have immeasurably enhanced both the reality of the past and the prospect of the future. The game for me will always be, as it has been in the past, a consuming interest.

Throughout the period when my physical faculties were unimpaired I was always an ardent player of the game. I was somewhat of a student of analyst, I suppose, but mainly I liked to play. And whatever thoughts I had about the game were directed towards enjoyment of competition. This did not have to be formal competition, because I could throw myself as enthusiastically into a four-ball match for a dollar Nassau as into a tournament for a national championship. I admit the strain was not so great, nor the prize of such importance, as to inspire the intense concentration of tournament play. Nevertheless, the zest was still there. The proposition is thus very clear to me that golf is a game meant to be played, and played as a contest worthy of the best effort of any man alive.
keeping with the notion that the ball had bounded from a lily-pad on to the bank. Actually, no lily-pad was involved, and the action of the ball was precisely that of a flat stone being skipped across the water.

As I was playing the shot, the gallery was lined up behind the ropes along the right and behind me. I was playing as though down a human fence. Just as I reached the top of my swing and started down, my eye caught a sudden movement in the gallery several yards in front of my position. It turned out that two little girls had made a break as though to run across the fairway. My involuntary flinch caused the half-top.

There is no question but that it was a considerable stroke of luck that my ball should have escaped the water and found such a good lie on the bank. Had it remained in the water, a six would have been the best score that could be expected. That the stroke of luck actually decided the championship, I very much doubt. Everyone who has played in a competition of this kind knows that no one stroke can be removed with the assurance that everything else would have remained the same. The problem of constructing a seventy-two-hole total is itself altered by everything contributing to that total.

Nevertheless, I was grateful for the saving, and so ended the round in seventy-three, one over par, which gave me a total of exact par for two rounds.

Of course, I don’t intend to pretend that I now remember all such things. The following scores of the leaders after the first two rounds of this championship have been taken from O. B. Keeler’s Boy’s Life of Bobby Jones published in 1931 by Harper & Brothers. According to Keeler’s figures—and I am sure they are accurate—the standing of the ten leaders starting the third round on Saturday morning was as follows:

Horton Smith  72–70 = 142
Harry Cooper  72–72 = 144
Charlie Lacey 74–70 = 144
Jones         71–73 = 144
MacDonald Smith 70–75 = 145

THE UNITED STATES OPEN

Tommy Armour  70–76 = 146
Wiffy Cox     71–75 = 146
Johnny Farrell 74–72 = 146
Walter Hagen  74–73 = 147
Johnny Golden 74–73 = 147

The scoring, perhaps excusable because of the heat, was not very good, but I had no doubt that I was surrounded by a group of contenders which was pretty formidable. Yet my position was not too bad, because I was never too keen about being in the lead at the start of the final day. I had found that I always felt more comfortable when I lay in good position to move to the front, instead of being oppressed by that feeling of having something to protect. From a spot a couple of strokes back, a really good third round could be counted on to pick up a lot of strokes.

Precisely this happened at Interlachen. Although my second-round seventy-three had been two strokes off my first-round seventy-one, I was beginning to hit the ball more nearly in the Augusta fashion. I felt that my game was coming at just the right time, and I did not have much doubt that I could give the boys a real run for it on that last day.

I began that morning swinging smoothly and comfortably in the way I liked to start a championship round—not pressing for anything at first, but taking things quietly and easily until I could play myself into a good feel of the swing, then gradually increasing the tempo until by the middle of the round I was hitting at full power.

The first break came at the long fourth, where I came out of a bunker short of the green and holed a putt for a birdie four. Two more birdies at six and seven, and I was out in thirty-three.

Two more birdies, both fours, at the long holes eleven and twelve, and another one, a three at sixteen, and I was set for the best round I had ever played in a championship, and I believe what would have been the lowest score ever turned in at the United States Open up to that time.

This was the one time that I played at my very best in a
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of warmth and heightened regard for my opponent or playing companion.

The championships have been very much worth the effort they cost, but more important by far have been the expanding interests they brought and the avenues to friendships with individuals and groups of people they opened for me.

That these rewards should endure so long makes it easy to see why for me golf will always be the greatest game.
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