

# GOLF SWINGS DISSECTED

*A Happy Medium for the Average Player*

By GEORGE DUNCAN

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SO far as the vast majority of players is concerned, I suppose that the chief value of the professional golfer is his capacity for imparting knowledge of the game. It is to his interests to practice diligently the principles that suit him best and to win as many tournaments as possible in that way, precisely as it is to the interests of anybody to make a name for himself in the particular sphere which affords him a livelihood, but, the golf professional has to preserve all the while an open mind on the subject of the way in which he should guide the strides of the enthusiasts who visit him for lessons. It would not always be to the advantage of his pupils if he were to preach exactly what he practiced. In many cases it would be to their utter discomfort and despair. He has to possess sufficient fellow-feeling and power of observation to know which methods are likely to achieve the best results in given circumstances of adaptability and physical constitution. The importance of that doctrine is appreciated by every experienced teacher of the pastime, and to the present writer it has appealed as strongly as to anybody because, he has given lengthy trials to just about all the manners of swinging a club which have ever been introduced and satisfied himself as to their relative difficulties and merits.

For the purpose of proving the case, let me make liberal use of the first personal pronoun and declare that until I was nineteen years of age I was absolutely faithful to the flat swing; that during the next few years I tried nearly everything under the sun, and that for a long while now I have been convinced of the superiority of the upright swing over any other for the person who hopes to end in first-class company. The individual who takes up the game early in life, and who thus attunes his whole system to the task of wielding a club, effects these changes with some impunity until at length he lights on the method that gives the best reward. For the enthusiast who



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Illustrating his stance for the upright swing. Note how far the left hand is over the shaft. It is the typical grip for the upright swing.

starts to play when he is a good deal nearer thirty than three and whose body and muscles are set, there is restriction. If he begins in a way that is not suited to his build, the chances are that he will never make much progress. At such a time in life, it is very hard to alter a style which has been practiced assiduously for (say) twelve months; it means going back to the beginning again and worst of all, unlearning all that has been learnt. It is very desirable to be on a safe track from the outset, and, in the course of this article I hope to show that between the flat swing and the upright swing there is a happy medium which is earnestly to be recommended to all save such golfers as possess special attributes that enable them to adopt one or other of the principles aforementioned.

I have already said that, for the man who wants to be and who thinks that he can be a real top sawyer, the upright swing is unquestionably without a rival. It is so because, in taking the club back and again in bringing it down, the club-head is in the line of play for a greater distance than is possible under any other system. That circumstance must inevitably make for straightness of flight. Experiments have shown me that, when this method is accurately employed, the middle of the club-face is dead in the line of flight five inches before the club-head reaches the ball in the down swing. It continues in that line for the same distance after the impact, and off flies the ball as straight as an arrow. Harry Vardon has the upright swing to perfection and personally I have played all my best golf when adopting it, but here let the warning be advanced that the accomplishment of it is, in a large measure, a knack. Very few people do it naturally (probably not one in fifty) and to master it a player needs specially adaptable wrists, which are usually the fruit of having been a golfer since childhood. It is a matter of letting the hands take the lead at the beginning of the back swing so that when the club has receded about six

## GOLF ILLUSTRATED



These three photographs of George Duncan at the top and finish of the drive show very clearly the characteristic of the upright swing. Note the raised right elbow in the first picture and the restrained pivoting of the hips in comparison with the flat swing as illustrated by the photos of McDermott on opposite page

inches, its head is level with the hands and the middle of the face is still looking down the line of play, just as it was at the start, instead of being turned away. This may sound simple, but what the average golfer does when he attempts it is usually to lose his balance. The circumstance of his hands leading and the club-head catching them up, so to speak, in the first six inches causes him to sway to the right, and that is certain to be fatal. The only way to secure the proper effect is to hold the club loosely, and start the hands with the club-head following. Until the club-head has traveled straight back for six inches, the distribution of weight must remain the same as during the address.

From that point, it is merely a matter of continuing the swing as nature ordains. If it is correctly inaugurated, it is found to be an upright swing and a safe one. For this method, the open stance is desirable since it facilitates the taking back of the club-head in a straight line and makes the follow-through easy. The right foot should be slightly in front of the left, with the ball about four inches inside the left heel.

So much, then, for the ideal system of managing a club. But, as already mentioned, I do not recommend it to the comparatively late convert to the game, nor, indeed, to anybody except the player who has some sort of instinct for it. Even less do I advise the flat swing. The studious golfer will hardly need to be told that, under this title, I place the method by which the club-head is started before the hands and, as a consequence, the face of the club is turned away from the ball the instant the swing begins. A genius here and there makes it safe (J. H. Taylor is a shining example) but for the average individual, it is fraught with peril for the very good reason that the club-face only becomes square with the intended line of flight an inch and a half short of the ball in the down swing, so that the very slightest deviation from the correct action is calculated to ruin the shot.

Thus it is that the flat swing, while it may secure a small gain in distance, often results in uncertainty of direction save where, as in the case of Taylor—the player has an inborn faculty for performing it accurately. It is an easy operation in the sense that it demands no turning of the wrists save that which arises involuntarily, but it has the disadvantage for the person who is not young, or who is a little more bulky about the waist than a youth of twenty, that it demands greater pivoting at the hips than any other system. The club is taken back in one sweep, its face turning away from the ball at once; and the only way to preserve a perfect balance is to screw the body right round from the hips. Unless a man has been in the habit of doing this all his life, it is a strain that he cannot stand; instead of screwing his body in the desired degree he loses his balance, and there is the first stage of disaster.

Undoubtedly the easiest and most natural method of beginning the swing is to turn the face of the club away from the ball (that is to say, to start the club-head first), and I am convinced that for nine people out of ten, especially those who do not expect to become champions though they may reasonably hope to get down to scratch or better, the safest principle is a combination of both swings, taken in the right order. It is not hard to learn; it requires only a little thought and practice; it is possible to a person of almost any build or age; and the results, as a rule, are exceedingly good. It is the happy medium between two extremes which obtain brilliant effects in the hands of masters but, which are perilous to less fortunately inspired persons.

For this swing, I recommend the square stance because, the first thing to do is to turn the face of the club away from the ball "to let it lead and go round the corner," as we say, just as it does at the start of the all-flat swing. If, for such a purpose, we choose the open stance, there is a greater tendency to push

## GOLF ILLUSTRATED

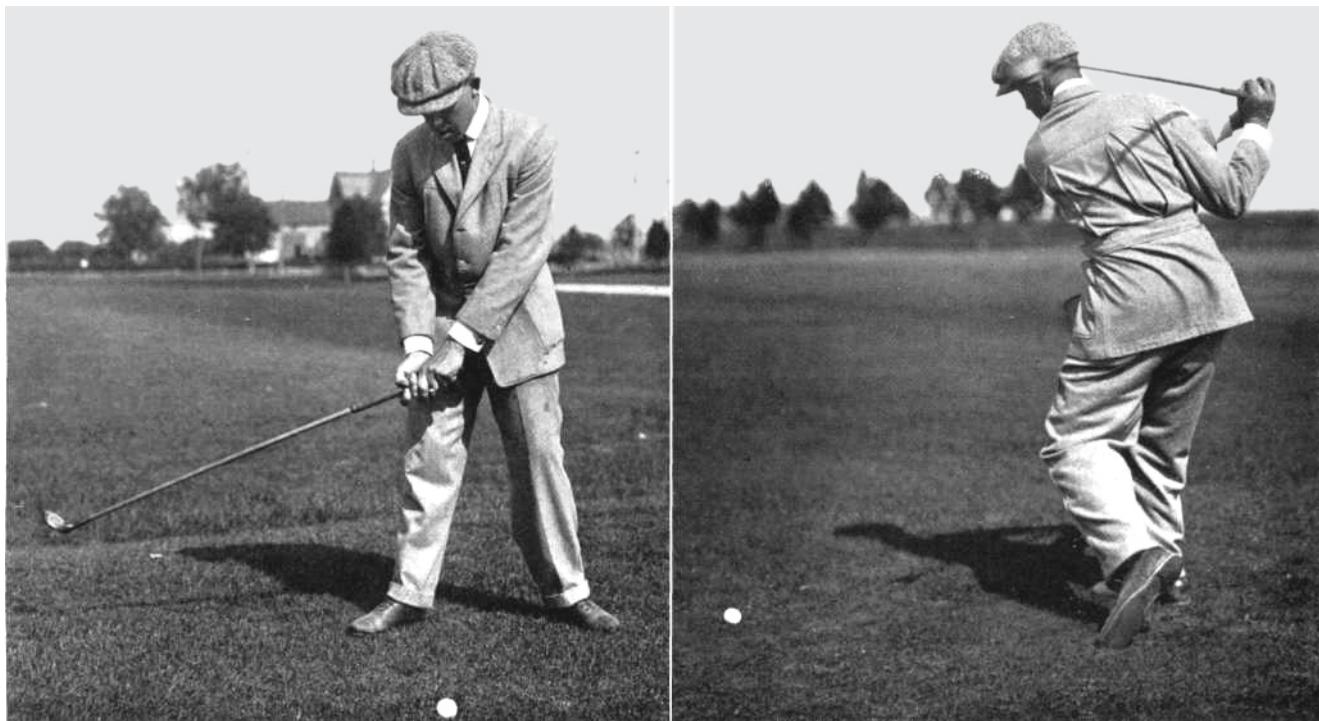
the club-head out or let it move straight back behind the ball instead of leading the way "round the corner." For the rest, as regards the stance, all that we need remember is that the ball should be in such a position that a line drawn from it at right angles to the direction of play would be four inches inside the left heel and that it should be addressed with the toe of the club and not the middle of the face. These conditions apply to all stances. The reason that the ball should be addressed with the toe of the club—a desirability that tens of thousands of golfers overlook—is that the arms are bound to stretch to greater length coming down than they assume during the up swing.

Adopting this position with the greater part of the weight on the right leg, let the club-head lead at the beginning of the swing so that its face starts immediately to turn away from the ball. Then, when it is about half way up, give the right wrist a half-turn in the direction of your own head. The effect will be to bring the shaft in towards the back of your head. The action is, of course, an incident in the swing (you do not stop to perform it with ceremony) but, once it is done, you will arrive at the top of the swing with the club in almost the same position as it would have occupied if you had accomplished the much more intricate upright swing. You will have abandoned the flatness directly the need for waist-pivoting becomes acute; and, by that half turn of the right wrist, you will have converted the swing into nearly an upright one. The club will be close behind your head. With an altogether flat swing it would

be farther away. The toe of the club should be pointing to the ground (it is never wise to allow the shaft to proceed beyond the horizontal), or, if you do not feel comfortable with anything more than a three-quarter swing, which is enough for most purposes, the toe of the club will be in such a position that, if continued, it would point to the ground.

It is possible to play sufficiently well for almost any occasion by practicing this most facile of all swings; it is, to all intents and purposes, the method of Mr. Charles Evans, Jr., and Mr. Francis Ouimet, and of several golfers of repute in Britain. So far as concerns the down swing, I would say simply: sling the club-head at the ball. Sling it with as much vim as you possess, and there will be no need to bother about that snap of the wrists (a truly mysterious quantity) about which a good deal is said from time to time.

The club will naturally come down in a different track from that which it occupied when ascending, and the center of the face will enter the straight line of flight about three inches before reaching the ball. It will continue in that line for the same distance after the impact. This, also, I have proved by experiments. The whole secret lies in that half turn of the right wrist toward one's own head when the club is about midway on its upward journey. Nobody ought to experience much difficulty in mastering it—it is little more perplexing than the process of turning a tap in a gas stove. Such is the efficacious happy medium in golf swings.



McDermott is the flattest of flat swingers. The characteristic initial movement of the flat swing is the turning over of the left wrist. The first illustration shows to what an extent McDermott does this. The face of the club has already come to face a bit upward. In the upright swing the face of the club never assumes such a position unless at the very top of the swing. The second illustration shows the enormous pivoting of the hips which the flat swing compels. Also note how closely the right elbow hugs the body and the peculiar position of club head