The author at St. Andrews in 1930, after winning the British Amateur Golf Championship
GOLF
IS MY GAME

Bobby Jones

With a Foreword by
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Illustrated with
photographs and drawings

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CHAPTER 3

Gripping the Club

Even if a person may not have begun to play golf at an early age, I believe that he may gain much by emphasizing naturalness in his learning processes. I think he has the right to convince himself that an effective golf swing can be made without rigid adherence to a prescribed routine and that there is room for differences in physical structure and capabilities. No matter how nearly equal in performance the top-rank players may be, yet they are as recognizable by their swings as by their faces.

What the average golfer needs more than finespun theories is something that will give him a clearer conception of what he should try to do with the clubhead. The golf swing is a set or series of movements which must be correlated. The minutest change in any makes a difference in one or more of the others; and while for consistent first-class performance there can be only a very small deviation in any particular, it is still a fact, and always will be so, that there are more ways than one to swing a golf club correctly.

When we speak of a sound method or good form, we mean nothing more than that the possessor of either has simplified his swing to the point where errors are less likely to creep in and he is able consistently to bring his club against the ball in the correct hitting position. We think, talk, and write so much about the details of the stroke that we sometimes lose sight of the thing which is all-important—hitting the ball. It is conceivable that a person could perform all sorts of contortions and yet bring the club into correct relation to the ball at impact, in which case a good shot must result. The only purpose of discussing style and form at all is to make it easier for the player to maintain this correct relation. In a crude way, he may do it only occasionally. In a finished, sound, stylish way, he will be able to do it consistently and with assurance.
GOLF IS MY GAME

Let's say that what we know now is merely what a golf club looks like and what effect it will have on a ball when the two come together in certain ways. Since the head of the club is mounted at one end of a shaft, and it must be actuated by a human being operating at the other end, the connection between that human being and the grip end of the club must be important.

Many things, of course, can be said about the placing of the hands upon the club. But just now I am thinking only about the over-all conception of swinging, and to that end I am only concerned that the club be held so that the action of the hands and wrists may be free, so that the club may be retained in the hands against the centrifugal force generated by the swinging of it, and so that the head of the club may be placed in comfort behind the ball.

Since a golfer must play the ball from the ground while he himself is more or less erect, a couple of angles are introduced into the mechanism. One of course is the angle between the shaft of the club and the face, or striking, surface. The manufacturer or club-maker takes care of this one.

The other angle or angles between the shaft and the arms of the player are to be accommodated by the grip. These angles vary as the player is tall or short and as his hands are large or small, lean or fat. The precise placement of the club in the hands cannot be prescribed. The obvious requirement that the two hands work together should be a sufficient guide on this point. The grip end of the club should lie to some extent diagonally across the palms, but it must be controlled and felt mainly in the fingers.

I like to think of a golf club as a mass attached to my hands by a weightless but rigid connector, and I like to feel that I am throwing the clubhead at the ball with much the same motion I should use in cracking a whip. By this simile I mean to convey the idea of a supple, lightning-quick action of the hands.

Stiff or wooden wrists shorten the backswing and otherwise destroy the feel of the clubhead. Without the supple connection of relaxed and active wrist joints and a delicate, sensi-
tive grip, the golf club, which has been so carefully weighted and balanced, might just as well be a broom-handle with nothing on the end. The clubhead cannot be swung unless it can be felt on the end of the shaft.

I have seen numbers of players who take hold of the club as though it were a venomous snake and they were in imminent peril of being bitten. A tight grip necessarily tenses all the muscles and tendons of the wrists and forearm so that any degree of flexibility is impossible.

The only way I know of achieving a relaxed grip which will at the same time retain adequate control of the club is to actuate the club and hold it mainly by the three smaller fingers of the left hand. If the control is at this point, the club can be restrained against considerable force, and yet the wrist joints may retain complete flexibility.

The great fault in the average golfer’s conception of his stroke is that he considers the shaft of the club a means of transmitting actual physical force to the ball, whereas it is in reality merely the means of imparting velocity to the clubhead. We would all do better if we could only realize that the length of a drive depends not upon the brute force applied, but upon the speed of the clubhead. It is a matter of well-timed acceleration rather than of physical effort of the kind that bends crow-bars and lifts heavy weights.

My prescription is, therefore, only that the club should be held mainly by the three smaller fingers of the left hand, and that the shaft should be laid across the middle joint of the index finger of this hand. The remainder of the gripping should be done as lightly as possible, exerting pressure upon the shaft only as this becomes necessary in order to move or restrain the club.

Let it be known right here that many acceptable golf shots and drives of good length can be produced by players who have nothing more than active hands and a good sense of timing. These players will never achieve the consistency nor the extremes in length attainable by the expert with good form, but they will, nevertheless, be able to get a lot of fun out of playing golf.
With Stewart Maiden at the 1923 Open. Stewart’s method of instructing was entirely simple and direct—and successful.
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.
CHAPTER 21

Playing the Masters

Drawings by George W. Cobb, Golf Course Architect
THE FOUR FINISHING HOLES

Hole No. 15, 520 yards, par 5. The fairway of this hole is quite wide. The short rough on the left is far removed from the line of play and there is no demarcation on the right between the fairway of the fifteenth and that of the seventeenth. The tee shot may be hit almost anywhere without encountering trouble.

It is nevertheless of considerable importance that the line of play be along the crest of the hill, a little to the right of the centre of the fairway. This fairway, being on high ground, usually provides more run to the ball than most other holes of the course. It is also more exposed to the effect of any wind which may be present. Two tees, front and back, are provided so that the length may be adjusted within wide limits according to playing conditions.

The design of the green causes it to be most receptive to a second shot played from the right-centre of the fairway. The greater depth of the putting surface is on the right side. The left side is quite shallow, considering the length of the second shot, and the most severe hazards lie on this side. A ball played over the green on this side may very well run down into the pond at the sixteenth hole. More often than not, it is the better part of wisdom to play the second for the main body of the green, even though the hole may be cut on the left side.

When Gene Sarazen holed his second shot with a three wood for his famous double eagle, the hole was cut near the back of the green. Gene’s ball landed on the tongue of the green in front and rolled directly into the cup.

Under almost any conceivable conditions the second shot to this hole suggests precarious possibilities. With the wind against, the player must decide whether his power and the state of the game warrant an effort to reach the green. With a following wind he may have to consider whether he will be able to hold the green, even though it be well within reach.

Billy Joe Patton’s magnificent bid to be the first amateur to win the Masters ended when he tried to reach this green from the rough on the left. The ball finished in the pond. The resulting six was one too many. Had he played safely for a five, he would have tied with Snead and Hogan.

The only bunker on the hole was placed there just a few years ago, not so much as a feature of play, but to protect spectators occupying the mound on this side provided as one of our special vantage points. Without the bunker, players uncertain of their ability to reach the green were using this area as a sort of haven for the second shot. Now they either play directly for the green or, quite frankly and safely, short of the pond.
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.