MY SWING

In this book I have set out my swing in photographs, taken from all the angles that interest the spectator and the student. I have shown strokes with the various clubs right through the set, putting them in the usual order—driver first and so on down to the putter. I see no point in putting the clubs in any other order, as my experience has taught me that handicap golfers, the backbone of the game, are most interested in this order of play.

My swing, which I established for myself, by myself, as a young aspiring golfer, has not changed basically. Of course, I have studied other players and ‘pinched’ ideas, just as many have done from me, but the grip has not altered, and that has always a major effect on the swing. Without entering into the almost unfathomable depths of golf theory, I can say that I have stuck to my category—a two-knuckle grip; braced left side; hitting past the chin with the wrists working from open to shut—these are the basic principles of my method.

I have tried all the variations in the golf swing, of course, and have known enough to alter my swing, that is my body and arm action, when I have changed the placing of my hands on the shaft—e.g. to show three of my knuckles—as obviously the fact that the level of the shoulders and the action of the wrists are different necessitates another method of play.

I mention this to show that I have stuck to my method for all these years because I have proved to myself that it gave the most consistent results; when I began, there had been a departure from the ideal left-hand positions of Harry Vardon and J. H. Taylor to an extreme three-four knuckle grip, but even as a youth I found that my hands fitted best on the shaft with the backs parallel, with the back of the left-hand facing the hole, and so I built my game round that. I tried various angles of back-swing, some flatter than others; at one period, from 1929 to 1932 I hit everything with perhaps an exaggerated draw, but I always remained faithful to my hand action whereby the ball was whipped, not pushed. I strengthened my left hand later, so that I could hold it firm at impact, if I wanted at any time to push the ball down, and this strengthening has been one of the secrets of any success I may have had. For with a really powerful left arm the whole of the repertoire of golf shots was possible, and I claim that with my swing they were all always ‘in the bag’. As I have grown older, I have been more satisfied than ever that my swing was the one to adopt for all one’s life. History is with me in this, for do not forget that J. H. Taylor made golfing history when he was 53 years of age; he would have won the open championship again in 1924, if the two qualifying rounds were counted in the total.

There has been a return in very recent years from having the left hand well over the shaft, to my left-hand position, and I have heard confessions
from many of the game's leading tournament players that my left-hand position has inspired them to alter their grips.

Using my hands and wrists in the way I do, and have done for a long time, does not put any abnormal strain on the spine, for the body plays a normal role: it does not have to do a kind of corkscrew movement in order to get the club face square to the ball.

Every golfer has to translate any golf action he sees into terms of his own physique. Consequently, when looking at the photographs, please bear in mind that I am 5 feet 10 1/2 inches in height. I weigh around 13 1/2 stone (I have been up to 14 stone, in clothes). I have a very loose neck, and unusually long arms, so that when gripping a club, I can make my elbows touch. Loose shoulders and collar bones enable this to be done.

Also I have very loose ankles; in fact, I can stand up on the outsides of the feet, my ankles almost on the ground. This makes it possible for my left foot to stay firm and not to spin round when I drive; my flexible ankle permits my left side to turn without the foot sliding at all when my left side braces. I have long fingers and my wrists are very supple in a hinging way, but do not cock to the side as much as I would have liked.

This is responsible for my back swing being slightly less than the horizontal. I attach, however, little importance to the length of the back swing. I prefer to see a player hold on to the club and do a three-quarter length swing rather than do a full swing at the expense of opening his left hand.

For the sake of effect, it might have impressed onlookers if my left wrist had had a little more cocking movement; I have worked on this point, but the bone structure prevented an increase in the freedom of this action.

I am round shouldered, which is a 'trade deformation' due to excessive practice when young. Later, no exercises I was willing to do could correct it. I do not think my posture was incorrigible, but when I made an effort, up to a point, to rectify it only my health benefited and not my game, so I stopped.

I strike the ball hard with my right hand, using my right index finger, which is very much bent back at the main knuckle joint, to guide the club face to the ball. I can make a real crook with this index finger.

My left thumb position varies slightly according to my form, for I have a sort of fine regulating adjustment at my disposal in this key position, inside my hands. I can place the thumb pulled up closely to the hand, extended down the shaft, or favouring the inside or outside of the shaft, all with minor efforts, which have a bearing on direction or trajectory.

My best positions vary from a bit more over to a bit more under; from being bunched up to being extended.

I will deal with these very fine points in the section on Grip.

I have tried 'the club sliding in the hands' technique, but have found
Left: Here is the left hand helping the right to hold the blade down on to the ball. I was intending to ‘drive’ this iron shot to get the maximum distance out of it as the length of the shot was ‘between’ clubs and I fancied a big No. 5 to any sort of No. 4 on this occasion.

The right hand is moving faster than the left which is braking to allow the club head to catch up. This can be seen clearly by the extra blurriness of the right hand.
that this is worth while only to players with less wrist flexibility than mine. It is not a method I like, but I am quite prepared to encourage it in golfers who have very limited wrist movement, and if they have strong hands, they can even play first-class golf. However, I am satisfied that in the long run this method is less consistent than mine.

Many players do not persevere in making a change, I know. This is only natural, for golf is a sport, a pleasure, a pastime, not a drudgery or a sacrifice to make.

I am not setting out to tell you to play my way and to drop all your other methods. This is my swing and all I will say at this stage is that I have taught it to many golfers—champions even. Yes! I have made a few as well! So read my words, follow my swing in pictures. It is sound; it merits the word orthodox, for there are no mannerisms which might complicate it, and I claim that it is simple, for it gives everyone, whatever his age or ability, a chance to build up his golfing muscles. The accent must always be on the fact that golf is 85 per cent. arms and wrists and 15 per cent. body.

My swing can be divided by time into these periods: going up, .90 seconds; from the top to impact, .36 seconds; impact to finish, .54 seconds, which totals 1.80 or just under 2 seconds.

I do at times swing quicker than I should, and at times I do not look at the ball as well as I can, but these failings, common to us all, I have usually been able to discipline myself to overcome by concentration.

You can play all your life if you play golf with your hands.
I hit the ball from inside to out.
I claim that the open-to-closed method (it does not mean full open necessarily, for there are intermediate positions between open and shut) suits golfers of any age as well as our small ball and the general playing conditions at home.

If I use a limited shoulder pivot then, unless I hold the face of the club more closed throughout my swing, I need to turn my wrists over faster to prevent the blade arriving too much open at impact. I believe that for my method it is essential to be able to lever against the left wrist at will—to hit past the left hand. That is why I have trained my left hand independently all along, so that I could call on it to restore any needed balance of power to command the desired results. The point at which this levering may appear can never be fixed; it must depend on the type of shot required and the flexibility and power available. With me this varies greatly with the temperature.

I show in the following chapter photographs of myself playing in various weather conditions, from almost tropical heat to winter cold, but it can be noticed that I bring my club face up to the ball from ‘open’—strike through with the right past the left (I do not push the ball stiff-wristedly with both hands moving at the same speed) allowing my club face, once impact is made, to continue through low and square, and afterwards to continue to turn over.

At impact the back of my left hand is facing the hole. It remains so for varying periods according to what I am needing to do. I can hold my left hand back, flick it upwards, as it were, to throw the ball up or hold it down to flight the ball low. This is possible only with a trained arm, and is one of the finer points of this method. The accent in my swing is ever on the wrists, which provide 85 per cent. of the speed, the body only 15 per cent. I estimate this, but I have seen another keen student of golf, Seymour Dunn, quote similar figures. To whip successfully and to the maximum of my ability I know that my elbows must never spread, and if my elbows are kept together I am in a position to give the best I have. The right hand at impact is moving faster than the left; all my photographs show this clearly. In the series of photographs where I have blacked in the right side of my trunk and right arm, the left arm and wrist action can be seen very clearly. There is a moment when the left hand itself throws the club head at the ball like a left-handed, back-handed, wristy tennis stroke. This ability of the left hand to play such a role, gives me that choice of flying the ball and controls early and late hitting. It is always possible to hit too early or too late, as I have learned, but this is my control. This levering of the club head is one of the secrets of my timing, as then my right hand can come into play at the point I choose.
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To emphasise the left-wrist action, right arm and side have been blacked out. Note in No. 3 the cocking of the head, with the focus just back of the ball. The left wrist throws the club at the ball, beginning in No. 6 and continuing in Nos. 7, 8 and 9.
THE DRIVER

As the Drive is an all-out blow, no judgment of distance creeps in to add tension to the swing, so the action should be as free as possible.

I have been a good driver. My supporters would go even further and claim that I have driven straighter than possibly anyone in my generation. As far... No! but as straight maybe as most.

It does make the game easier if the tee shot is in play every time, for then the hole begins some 250 odd yards from the tee down the fairway.

I walk a bit pigeon-toed, so I have stood this way at address; it is the stance for balance.

I have my knees relaxed, but I do not crouch down. My arms are relaxed at the address; in fact, my left arm is notoriously relaxed as I do my preliminary waggles, which curiously enough go to the ball and back. I rarely waggle past or over the ball. I swing my club back after a slight forward press to get the action started smoothly, from a static point, and the final address is made when I place the centre of the club face right behind the centre of the ball. I mention this because many good players address the ball off different points on the club face and even do not put the club face right up to the ball as I do. This is done by them for adjustment purposes only, slight corrections in advance for tendencies their swings have. I take the club back on the inside, not round the right leg but definitely on the inside, allowing the wrists to turn open slowly but not to break until the swing has got to waist height.

There is no need to encourage the left heel to lift—I find it suits me to hold my left heel down as much as possible, rolling the foot inwards to begin.

My arms pull my body into position as the club swings back and my wrists cock naturally, but the only point I watch is that the club head does not trail behind at the top of the up swing. I keep it forward to point towards the direction I am going. In recent times some of the shut-face players have advised allowing the club head to stay back. My shoulders turn fully so that my back is facing the hole, but I think that I play best when my right leg is not too straight at the top of the back swing. This gives more life to my action and prevents me getting my body locked on my right heel.

The beginning of the downswing, which begins in the body (before the club reaches the furthest point back), takes place with a shifting of more of the weight to the left. This sort of unwind is necessary to narrow down the arc, so that there is room for the hit to take place. This means that the unleashing of the power (that is, the centrifugal pull of the club and the extending of the muscles) which might take the club head on a much wider arc than it occupied on the back swing, and so catch the ground
behind the ball, is compensated for by the moving over of the centre of the swing. This pull-down with the left arm, transferring the weight, hitting late, waiting for the hit, or whatever expression you prefer, is in effect only just what I have explained. It is done (this narrowing of the arc) in my swing because of my hand and wrist action, in a parallel to the line ball-hole-lateral-sway, my hip thrusting to the left under my head.

With the strong left arm I have, I am able to hit past my left wrist and can actually control the flight of my ball by regulating the point at which I brake (not break, note) my left arm and allow my wrists to throw. This is one of the features of playing with the method I use, and why I am able to play half shots effectively. I keep my elbows together at impact, which I consider is important for consistent accurate golf.

I tee my ball at all sorts of heights, depending on the way I am driving and the type of the shot I require, because of the surface of the teeing ground itself. I vary my action from an upward sweep, ball on left foot, hitting the ball on the upswing slightly, to a drive down on the back of the ball, ball near the centre, depending on just how loose I feel in my muscles that day and what type of drives suit playing conditions best. I use various grip thicknesses and various materials, leather and a new cork rubber composition being my favourites. The all-weather type I have not found of any advantage to my game. I think that the continual experiments I make with my clubs is only following what other keen golfers before me have done, for the effort to keep one's clubs right in line with one's muscular condition makes a fascinating game.

My own driver is about 15 ounces in weight, is 43½ inches long and has a strong to medium shaft. I find that the stiffest shafts are easier to time the ball with, even if they do not send it quite so far, especially when one plays infrequently.

My hands are free from callouses because at no point does the club move in the grip during the stroke.

My best drives are straight, with a slight bend to the left at the end, and are of medium height. I like to drive against the wind. I am not unduly bothered with a wind on my back as my movement is without frills and controlled. The photographs which follow of me driving, I have put in pairs, showing the various movements in my swing taken from the two most interesting angles.