BOBBY LOCKE ON GOLF
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**FOREWORD** by Bernard Darwin  
**PREFACE**

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I remember very well how, in the spring of 1935, I had a letter from a friend, then living in South Africa. He was full of a seventeen-year-old boy called Locke—a ‘skinny’ boy he called him, an epithet which would hardly apply now. The boy had won first the Amateur and then the Open Championship of South Africa, straight after one another. Naturally I was much interested when this boy came here in the following year to play in our Championship, and though he vanished in the first round in the Amateur at St Andrews, he was leading amateur in the Open at Hoylake. I met him first in that year; I have met him and watched him many times since and have seen him win his three Open Championships. So I was delighted to be asked to write a foreword to his book which I have read with interest and admiration.

Bobby Locke has won our Open Championship three times in four years. He has been very near the American Open, though he has never quite won it, but he has won a great many other tournaments there and has probably given a ruder shock to American golfing complacency than any other visitor to that country has ever succeeded in doing. He has won Championships in Canada and New Zealand and heaven knows where besides. As to his native South Africa, there he has of course been as near as may be invincible. Throughout his career he has had to encounter all the most formidable adversaries not on his courses but on theirs. The fact that one of them, the illustrious Sam Snead, played sixteen matches against him in South Africa and succeeded in winning just two and halving two, suggests that any of the others who should have bearded Locke in his own den would have had a singularly poor time of it.

I imagine that few people have ever worked harder at golf than has Bobby Locke. He rubs it into his readers over and over again that there is no substitute for unremitting practice and he himself practiced shots out of sand for two hours a day for two weeks with never a break. It may give the lazier of us a pain to think of, but it is the right way and has brought its reward. Moreover, Bobby has worked as hard at schooling his temperament as his clubs. ‘Take a little time,’ said Mr Meagles. ‘Count five and twenty, Tatty-coram,’ when that young lady (in Little Dorrit) was in a tantrum. So when the infant Bobby threw his club away his father told him always to count three if he felt like doing it again, and certainly no golfer alive has more complete control of his emotions as regards any outward signs of them. As he says, ‘One cannot control the human element’; that is, as far as bad strokes are concerned; they will creep in now and then, but no one would ever know it from Bobby’s unchanging
Teaching by example. A photograph taken at Addington Palace Club in 1951 when I was demonstrating my shots for the instructional film, 'Open Champion'.
BOBBY LOCKE ON GOLF

expression. He is very quick to notice the reactions of his opponents, to count, for instance, the extra cigarettes they smoke, and is always on the look-out to see if they are 'wounded'. I have personally found all his remarks on what may be called the psychology of golf of absorbing interest, and there is about him a fine, resolute hostility and a power of being constantly stimulated and never depressed by the enmity of others.

As regards Bobby's teaching, I must not steal his thunder but his doctrine seems to me, if I may respectfully say so, simple, sound and easy to assimilate. I suppose those brought up on American literature might call it 'old fashioned', but for my part I like it all the better for that. I was delighted to read that 'This straight-left-arm business is very much overdone'. How pleased the shade of Harry Vardon would be! Those who read works of instruction generally turn first to the chapter on putting in hopes of finding the eternal secret, and they will do so the more eagerly in this case because the author is generally deemed unsurpassed as a putter and is not afraid of saying that he is a good and consistent one. His method with the right foot back, the club taken inwards and the 'hooded' face, is out of the common, but so most undeniably are the results. Here is a pleasant, interesting and remunerative method for the reader to practise, and I leave him to it with my best wishes.
My golf success has been founded on seeking perfection in what I term the five fundamentals of the game:

**THE GRIP**

**THE STANCE**

**THE BACKSWING**

**THE DOWNSWING TO IMPACT**

**THE FULL FOLLOW-THROUGH**

I state categorically that it is impossible to be a good golfer unless you get it fixed in your mind that these are the essentials and concentrate on getting each one right in that sequence. I feel my method is one of the simplest to follow, though I do not suggest for one moment that golf is an easy game. It is my intention here to explain how I play golf—and once again let me stress those five fundamentals, in the sequence I have given.

I am not a theorist. I have never filled my head with a string of confusing injunctions: head down, left arm straight, left heel off the ground, and all that sort of thing. Too many people approach a golf shot with their heads buzzing with a variety of tips and hints—'Do this', 'Don't forget that', 'Remember not to do the other'.

Wrong, absolutely wrong! Make sure that you have those five fundamentals correct, that at all times you are relaxed, and from then on it is a matter of practice, practice and more practice. And remember you must avoid tension, which is the ruin of good, consistent golf.

How to make sure that you are doing the right things? Well, if you read on, study carefully the illustrations I have given, and faithfully copy my methods, you will be right.

I have always aimed at achieving a perfect swing. In the course of this book I shall include some 'don'ts', but I want the reader always to remember that it is the perfect swing we are seeking and that the perfect swing depends on those five fundamentals.
Bomber pilot. The photograph was taken in the Middle East while I was learning how to handle heavy four-engined bombers.
The Goodall Round Robin is one of the toughest golf tests in the world. In 1947 I won this invitation tournament by three points over Vic Ghezzi with a total of 37 points.
17. PUTTING

Among golfers the putter is usually known as the pay-off club, and how right that is! Putting, in fact, is a game by itself. I am recognized as a good, consistent putter. From early in my career I realized that there was far more in putting than actually striking the ball, and I do not think any prominent golfer has devoted more time and thought and practice to this side of the game than I have.

Illustration 1 Here you can see immediately how I change my grip for putting (see illustrations on pages 76 and 77). First of all I grip the club in the left hand, and the grip is normal except that I position my thumb down the centre of the shaft. The art of putting lies in the tips of the fingers. If you have a delicate touch, you are lucky. It helps a great deal. But remember you must not grip tightly. You must grip loosely and do everything possible to acquire a delicate touch. The shaft of my putter is much longer than the standard men's length. I find that this gives me what I call 'better head feel'. By that I mean I can feel more clearly the weight of the club-head as I swing. I grip my putter at the very end of the shaft and I use the same grip for all putts. Never change the position of the hands up or down the shaft whether it is a long putt or a short putt, as that will cause inconsistency.

Illustration 2 I have now placed the right hand to the club. I am using the overlapping grip as for all other clubs, but again the thumb is placed down the centre of the shaft. Having the two thumbs in this position enables me to follow the club-head through dead in line to the hole, and also helps to put topspin on the ball. It is so necessary to put topspin on the ball when putting, as it makes the ball run through on the line to the hole.

At one time as an experiment I tried the reverse overlapping grip with the index finger of the left hand lying on top of the little finger of the right hand. I found it did not help my putting and it had a very bad effect on the rest of my game, making my grip for other shots feel most uncomfortable.
Illustration 3 Having explained the grip, I will now describe my method of putting. First of all, I sum up the putt, and this is vital. Most putts are missed not because they are mishit but because they have been started on the wrong line and at the wrong speed. I examine the line of the putt, concentrating particularly on a radius of about three feet around the hole. This is where the ball completes its run, and what happens here is going to make or mar the putt. During this quick inspection I remove any obstacles which might deflect the run of the ball, but, more important, I check the pace of the green, determine how closely the grass has been cut and whether the green is fast, slow or medium-paced. Also I check the lie of the turf around the hole to see whether the ball will be going slightly uphill or downhill or dead level as it approaches the hole. It is at this stage that I determine how hard I am going to hit the ball, always, of course, taking into consideration the length of the putt.

I work to the rule that if the green appears to be fast, I will aim my putt at an imaginary hole six to twelve inches short of the hole. If the green appears to be slow, and particularly if during the last two or three feet to the hole the ground is uphill, I hit it firmly for the back of the hole.

Illustration 4 Having made up my mind how hard I am going to hit the putt, I now get behind the ball to examine the contour of the part of the green my ball will have to cross. Chiefly I am concerned with slopes and any hills or hollows. According to the slope, I make up my mind on the direction of the putt, whether it shall be dead straight or whether I should aim for the right or left side of the hole. Once I have made up my mind as to the line of the putt and how hard I am going to hit it, I never change my mind. It is fatal to let second or third thoughts intrude as you are putting. You must make up your mind before you begin to address the ball, and never alter it.

So many putts are missed because at the last second the player thinks
With Jimmy Thomson, Gene Sarazen and Bobby Jones at Augusta, U.S.A., 1947. The Augusta National is Bobby Jones’s club, and is recognized by most players as among America’s finest.
to himself, 'Perhaps I had better hit it straight', or 'I think it would pay to aim a little further left'. Hitting a putt in doubt is fatal in most cases. Make up your mind what you are going to do, then go ahead and do it.

Illustration 5 Now for the actual putt. In the first place, the weight is evenly distributed on both feet. I place the feet about four inches apart, with the right foot three inches behind the left in relation to a straight line from the hole to the left toe. This is known as a closed stance, and I adopt this to prevent myself from cutting across the ball and imparting any sidespin. I position the ball directly opposite the left toe. This enables me to hit the ball slightly on the upswing, whereas if the ball were farther back towards the right foot, there might be a tendency to chop or jab it. The actual putt I am making in this illustration is a twenty-footer. I begin the address with the ball opposite the toe of the putter but actually strike the ball with the centre of the blade. I do this to avoid cutting the putt. If one addresses the ball with the centre of the putter blade, there is a tendency to swing outside the line on the backswing resulting in a cut and the ball not running true. By addressing the ball near the toe of the putter blade it is easier to take the putter back 'inside' the line of the putt, and in this way one is able to impart topspin at impact. Never hit a putt with the heel of the club. That puts check on the ball and it will not run as far as you expect.

Illustration 6 I have now started the backswing, keeping the putter very low to the ground, almost brushing the turf. I am careful to take the putter back on the 'inside', and notice there is no wrist-work at all. Throughout the swing, the putter blade stays square to the hole. I want to emphasize that the blade does stay square to the hole. There are people who say it is impossible to take a club back 'inside' without opening the face. With a putter it is not impossible, and this is how I putt. I learned the method largely from Walter Hagen in 1937. The term he used for taking the club back and still
keeping it square was that you 'hooded' the face. He proved to me that this backswing applies true topspin to the ball and is in fact the only type of backswing with the putter that will apply true topspin. Hagen in his heyday was probably the world's greatest putter and I was happy to learn from him. It is essential in the method I am showing here that there should be no wrist-work. Wrist-work results in inconsistency—and missed putts. A point I stress in the backswing is that you must keep the putter low. Watch these points, and with practice you will find that you can take the club back 'inside' and still keep the blade square to the hole.

**Illustration 7** This is the completion of the backswing. The putter, left hand and left arm to the elbow, are in one piece. To make sure that the club-face does not open, the back of my left hand keeps pointing to the grass. I have now reached the 'hooding' position. By 'hooding' I mean keeping the putter face dead square, or if anything slightly closed, in the backswing. This will make sure of getting true topspin on the ball, provided the putter returns to the ball on the same line.

**Illustration 8** Here I am at impact. Notice that I keep the left wrist firm in relation to the forearm; the position of the left hand in relation to my putter is exactly the same. This means that the putter blade is kept square to the hole. My head is being kept well down until the ball has been struck.

**Illustration 9** Still no wrist-work in the accepted sense. I am concentrating all the time on keeping that club-head square to the hole and on keeping my head well down. It is only necessary to follow through as far as the club went back in the backswing.

**Illustration 10** The putt is now completed and you see the complete follow-through. My method of swinging the putter is the same as the swing of a clock pendulum. The club goes as far through in the follow-through as it goes back in the backswing. Notice that though the head is turned to watch what
is happening to the ball, it is still in the same position in relation to the body. It cannot be too much emphasized that the putting action must be slow and smooth, and above all the grip must be loose to maintain the most sensitive touch.

My putting is based on the fact that if a ball has true topspin, there are three entrances into the hole, three chances, providing the speed is right. There is the front door and there are two side doors. Obviously it is safest to use the front door, but with my method, if the ball catches the left side of the hole it will fall, and if it catches the right side it will also fall. By thinking of these three entrances, I always feel that I have three chances of sinking every putt.
20. ADVICE TO YOUNG GOLFERS

Parents often ask me how best they can help their children to become proficient at the game, how to encourage them, how to guide them. I was given my love for the game and my first lessons—very good lessons too—by my parents, particularly my father. What I am most grateful for, though I was not at the time—I thought he was being hard—was that as soon as I began to play my father insisted that I should be conversant with the etiquette of the game. He drilled it into me that when you are playing golf a constant thought in your mind must be consideration for other people on the course. He drilled it into me to watch how others played, to keep my eyes open. At the same time I had a stern directive to keep my mouth shut when I was in the company of grown-ups. I suppose that even though I am no more than in the middle thirties it will date me if I admit to being old-fashioned enough to wish sometimes that children these days were seen more and heard less. I think my father was right.

I started very young and I started with two cut-down clubs. For youngsters who show a real interest in the game and want to start on right lines I suggest four clubs as a beginning—a number three wood, a number four iron, a number seven and a putter. Great care should be taken to see that the clubs are really suitable, not too long or too heavy. The youngster should be able to swing them easily enough to show that with practice he or she will be able to control them.

The first essential is that the young player should be shown the correct grip and shown, and this is important, that it soon becomes a comfortable grip. From then on one goes on to show the stance and the swing. As far as possible encourage any youngster to swing freely and not to get tied up.

As to positioning, well, I cannot do better than to recommend any parent to follow closely the methods I have described here. I am writing this as I convalesce after an operation which is keeping me completely away from golf for two months, and when I get back I shall rehabilitate my game in the way I have described in this book. In a sense I shall have to relearn my game. I shall start with the grip, taking hold of clubs again and again and
examining my hands to make sure that they fall naturally into the correct position. When I have done that I shall go on to the tee and put down the ball. Then, at a comfortable distance from the ball, I shall lay one club on the ground pointing in the direction of the flag and another club at right angles to it pointing to my ball, the two clubs forming a T on the ground. Then I shall practise taking up my stance, toes touching the club pointing to the flag. This so that I get back into the habit of standing in the correct position with a line across my toes pointing in the direction I want the ball to go. I use the second club on the ground to make sure I get my position correct with the ball in line with my left heel for the tee shot and further back for the other shots as I have described earlier in this section.

I shall practise with these two clubs on the ground until I am satisfied that I have got my positioning correct. In the next stage I shall practise the backswing, and for an hour a day during the first week I shall practise the movement back to right-hip-high and no more, concentrating on seeing that club, hand, arm and shoulder all move back in one piece. Then on to cocking the wrists and making certain as I go further back that my left shoulder is fully turned and pointing towards the ball at the top of the backswing.

You see that what I have to do is to get acquainted again with the essential fact that there is only one correct hitting position, at the same time making sure that there is no backward sway of the body at all and that my chin remains opposite the ball throughout the entire backswing.

When I am happy that this has once more become automatic I shall go on to the downswing making sure that the first movement is a slight drag with the left hand. I shall then unwind my wrists to the hitting position at right-knee-high, doing this time and time again because the natural tendency for me—as it is for anyone who does not play the game regularly—will be to want to hit from the top of the backswing. In sequence I shall practise taking the club-head from right-knee-high to impact and then the follow-through.

I have gone into this in detail because I want to emphasize how much care I shall have to take getting back to my game. It will not be until I am satisfied that I am back 'in the groove' that I shall go on to ‘re-learning’ my short game, low shots, and the rest of putting.

I believe any parent who wants a youngster to become proficient at the game should follow this drill; in fact, it is only the way. It entails hours of practice, but if a youngster is keen and is given a reasonable amount of encouragement he or she will enjoy it.

Teaching a youngster to develop an ‘eye’ for the game is another matter. I am quite certain that when I get back to golf my ‘eye’ will not be in and I shall have to spend a lot of time practising to restore it. I shall have the urge to get my ‘eye’ in again because golf is my living. How quickly a youngster develops this facility depends on the degree of keenness. Linked up with the eyes is co-ordination. This again is a matter of practice. I am sure my co-ordination will be lacking when I resume play and I shall have to work hard to get it back. The younger and the more supple you are the easier it is to
achieve perfect co-ordination. The secret when teaching the young people is to explain to them the need for perfect co-ordination. Once they appreciate that need they can achieve it more easily than any adult, and as they achieve it they develop concentration. I have always found that if I could get across to a youngster the need for co-ordination, concentration followed as a natural sequence.

I was lucky as a youngster in that I was taken to see the greatest golfers of the day—or at least those of the great ones who visited South Africa. I have told how I was taken to watch Cyril Tolley. Though I did not realize it at the time, I know now that I learned a great deal that day and it was, in fact, a landmark in my progress to world championship class.

I say then to parents that, whenever possible, any youngsters should be given an opportunity to watch leading players.

If the money can be afforded it is wise to arrange for lessons. My experience, however, is that lessons must be complementary to parental interest. What no doubt helped me more than all other things was that my parents were so keenly interested in my progress at the game. They made my golf something personal in their lives. That gave me tremendous encouragement and it is something I commend to any parents who are really keen to see their children become proficient golfers.
PART THREE

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GOLF
9. THE FUTURE

My long-term future as I see it? I have another three or four years big-time golf ahead of me. Certainly I hope to compete every year in the British Open at least through the 1950s, and in as many other tournaments as I can manage. For me the British Open has something unequalled by any other championship.

I have always kept it in mind that a world champion golfer has a limited number of years at the top. When my turn comes to step down I shall not have any regrets. I shall not try to hang on too long.

Moreover, I do not intend as so many others have done to let high-pressure golf ruin my constitution. As soon as I find tournament pressure affecting my appetite, my sleep, and, more than anything, my general outlook on life, I shall know it is time for my swan song. I enjoy life and I want to go on enjoying it. As I have said before, I have never aspired to being the richest man in the cemetery, nor, as I grow older, do I want to spend my life as even a semi-invalid, plagued by any of the infirmities which so often overtake sporting celebrities.

Already I have business interests and when the time comes I plan to develop these. But so long as I can swing a club I shall go on playing golf.
MAJOR TOURNAMENT VICTORIES

1935  South African Amateur Championship
      South African Open Championship
      Natal Amateur Championship
      Natal Open Championship
      Transvaal Amateur Championship

1936  Natal Amateur Championship
      Natal Open Championship

1937  Transvaal Open Championship
      South African Amateur Championship
      South African Open Championship
      Transvaal Amateur Championship

1938  Transvaal Open Championship
      South African Open Championship
      Irish Open Championship
      New Zealand Open Championship

1939  Transvaal Open Championship
      South African Open Championship
      Dutch Open Championship

1940  Transvaal Open Championship
      South African Open Championship

1946  Transvaal Open Championship
      South African Open Championship
      Yorkshire Evening News Professional Tournament
      Brand Lochrym Professional Tournament
      Dunlop Masters Tournament

1947  Transvaal Open Championship
      Carolina’s Open Tournament, U.S.A.
      Houston Open Tournament, U.S.A.
      Philadelphia Inquirer Open Tournament, U.S.A.
      Goodall Round Robin Tournament, U.S.A.
      Canadian Open Championship, Canada
      Tam O’Shanter All-American Tournament, U.S.A.
      Columbus Open Tournament
      Dunlop Tournament, South Africa
1948 Phoenix Open Tournament, U.S.A.
Chicago Victory Open Tournament, U.S.A.
Carolina’s Open Tournament, U.S.A.

1949 Transvaal Open Championship
Cavalier Specialist’s Tournament, U.S.A.
Goodall Round Robin, U.S.A.
British Open Championship

1950 Transvaal Open Championship
South African Open Championship
Western Transvaal Open Championship
Dunlop £2,000 Tournament, England
Spalding £1,500 Tournament, England
British Open Championship
North British Tournament
Tam O’Shanter All-American Tournament, U.S.A.

1951 Transvaal Open Championship
South African Open Championship
Western Transvaal Open Championship

1952 Mexican Open Championship, Mexico City
Carolina’s Open Tournament, U.S.A.
British Open Championship
French Open Championship
Lotus Professional Tournament, England
Knee-deep in the bracken at the sixth hole at Walton Heath in 1938 during the challenge match against Cotton and Whitcombe.