The Game of Golf

By

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THE GAME OF GOLF

BY

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CHAMPION GOLFER, 1887-89

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

FOURTH IMPRESSION

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1899

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Although golf has become a universal pastime only within the last few years, it is a game of considerable antiquity, and has been played in Scotland from time out of mind. Who invented golf, if indeed it was invented, is not known, and it seems probable that it has been evolved from a game similarly played, but in a crude form, rather than invented. At one time it would appear to have been the prevailing form of sport in Scotland, and so far back as the year 1457 there is an Act of the Scottish Parliament prohibiting it as interfering with the practice of archery, then all important as a martial exercise and a means of national defence. A few of the older golf clubs have records dating back more than a century, some of which seem to point to the fact that the clubs had been in existence at prior dates, although the records are now lost. The Honourable The Edinburgh Company of Golfers have minutes dated in 1744; the Royal and Ancient
Golf Club of St. Andrews dates back to 1754; the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club was instituted in 1774; the first minute-book of the Bruntsfield Links Golf Club dates from 1787; and the Edinburgh Burgess Golfing Society claims to have been instituted in 1735. There is, however, a golf club in England—the Royal Blackheath Golf Club—instituted in 1608, which has, it is believed, more ancient records than any of the Scottish clubs; but it is doubted whether some of the clubs first mentioned are not older in point of fact, although actual proof of this cannot be produced. Whether the Scottish clubs are more ancient or not, the Blackheath Club has the honour not only of possessing the oldest records, but also of being one of the very few golf clubs in England until within a comparatively recent period.

To describe shortly the game of golf, one may say that it consists in playing a ball, with the smallest number of strokes, from certain places called teeing-grounds into holes made for the purpose at considerable distances away. This is but a rough and ready description of the game, but it may serve as a general introduction, and tend to a better understanding of the more particular explanations contained in the succeeding pages.

The ground upon which the play takes place is called a 'links' or 'golf-course' or 'golf-green.' When the latter terms are employed, the adjective is commonly omitted, and 'the course' or 'the green' alone used,
The word ‘green’ is apt to be somewhat puzzling to novices, because it is frequently applied indiscriminately not only to the whole links, but also to that particular part called ‘the putting-green.’

Along the sea-coast there lie large tracts of undulating sandy ground, quite unsuited for agricultural purposes, and covered with short, velvety turf, interspersed with sand-holes, whins, rushes, and benty grass, and it is on these that golf has in the generality of cases been played. Such stretches of ground are in Scotland called links, but that word has now come to be almost exclusively used to signify any ground upon which golf is played. These seaside links are the best adapted for golf, but there are many excellent inland courses laid out upon any land covered with turf which happened to be available.

The extent and form of a golf-course are quite arbitrary, depending in a great measure upon the nature of the ground, which makes it impossible to find two golf-courses exactly alike. This dissimilarity, it may be remarked, is one of the chief pleasures of the game, because a visit to a strange links lends variety, and helps to bring out the judgment and skill of the golfer. Eighteen holes are recognised to be the full number a links should contain, but fifteen, twelve, nine, and even six hole courses are by no means uncommon. The lengths of some of the best-known courses of eighteen holes—adding together the measure-
ments from hole to hole—vary from about two and three-quarter miles to three and three-quarter miles. With regard to the plan on which the holes are laid down, there is no fixed system; on some links the first nine holes follow each other consecutively in an approximately straight line in one direction, and the remaining nine holes return in much the same line in the opposite direction, while on others they are placed irregularly as the ground permits. For instance, at St. Andrews, which is considered to be one of the best eighteen-hole greens in the Kingdom, the course has the shape of a shepherd's crook, the players going out to the end of the crook and returning the opposite way; at Musselburgh, which is possibly the best nine-hole links in existence, the shape is something like an irregular oblong, three holes out, one across, four holes back, and one home to the starting-place; at North Berwick and Leven, both eighteen-hole courses, the players go straight out and come back in lines parallel to one another; while at Sandwich, a splendid links, the holes are placed irregularly, something in the form of a capital T. The examples given will convey some idea of the form of a golf-links; but so long as the green is laid out to test good play, the shape is quite immaterial.

At suitable places on the course teeing-grounds are marked off from which the play to each hole begins—the first teeing-ground being the starting-point from
which the game commences—and at distances varying from 100 to 500 yards or thereby from these teeing-grounds putting-greens are formed, in which the holes are made into which the ball is to be played. The size of the holes, as fixed by the laws of the game, is four and a quarter inches in diameter, and at least four inches deep, and flags mounted on tall pins are placed in the holes to indicate their positions; such flags must be capable of being lifted out when the players are on the putting-greens. Between the teeing-grounds and the various putting-greens there are, invariably, either natural or artificially formed 'hazards,' in the shape of sand-holes (or 'bunkers'), clumps of whins, and rushes or similar obstructions placed for the purpose of entrapping, and so punishing, badly played balls. The hazards sometimes extend right across the line of play, and at other times are to be found on either side thereof, the object being in the first case to catch topped balls (i.e. balls struck on the top, causing them to run along the ground instead of rising in the air), and in the second case to trap balls played too much to one side or the other. As the play from hole to hole is continuous, the teeing-ground for the second hole is generally near the first hole, the tee for the third near the second, and so on. The chapter on laying out and keeping golf-links contains fuller information on this subject.

It is a curious fact that there are no written laws of
golf regarding the implements—either clubs or balls—to be used in playing the game; but it is safe to assume that only golf-clubs and golf-balls can be used.

The mode of play has already been briefly explained. But there are two methods, viz. 'match play,' in which individuals contend against each other for holes, and 'medal play,' in which any number compete among themselves for scores.

**Match Play**—the most genuine form of golf—admits of several variations. The most usual match is a single—that is, two individuals play against each other. They start at the first teeing-ground, and each tees his own ball on a small pinch of sand called a 'tee'—sand for the purpose being provided at each teeing-ground. If they cannot agree which is to strike off first, it is usually decided by tossing up a coin. This privilege of playing first from the tee is called 'the honour.' Each player endeavours to drive his ball from the tee on to the putting-green, and to put it into the hole with the smallest number of strokes. The player holing his ball in the fewest strokes wins the hole; if both take the same number, the hole is said to be 'halved'—neither wins it. The game proceeds from teeing-ground to hole until the full eighteen holes, of which it generally consists, have been successively played, or until the match is finished. The player who wins the greater number of holes wins the match; but if both win an equal number the match is said to be halved, or, in other
words, is drawn. Except in the case of the tee-shots, the person whose ball is farther from the hole plays before the other. Thus it may happen that one of the couple, on reaching the putting-green, has played two strokes while his opponent may have played three or four, or even more; and it is also possible that one of them may have to take two or three consecutive strokes before his opponent again plays, until he puts his ball nearer the hole than his opponent’s is at the time. After the balls have been struck off from the tee, they cannot be touched or moved with anything except the golf-clubs, save in the exceptional cases provided for in the rules, or subject to the penalties therein mentioned.

A good golfer can drive a ball any distance up to, roughly speaking, a couple of hundred yards, and when he gets to the putting-green he should be able to put his ball into the hole in two strokes. On reading this, many persons will no doubt think that golf is quite a simple game—and simple it is, in theory; moreover, to see golf played by a ‘crack’ makes it look not only simple but also comparatively easy. But let it be tried, and it will then be found that it is not quite so easy as it looks. A golf-ball is not a large object, being only about an inch and three-quarters in diameter, and to hit it accurately when it lies clear on the green—and accurately hit it must be to make it travel—requires both skill and practice. I have said when it lies clear;
but the ball may not lie clear: it may be imbedded in grass, or it may have lodged in a ‘cup’ or small hollow in the ground, which considerably increases the difficulty of hitting it properly. Apart from mere hitting, the distance and the direction in which the ball is to be driven must be attended to; because, as already pointed out, the hazards are intended and are always so placed as to catch badly played strokes; and if care and skill be not exercised, one is likely to find his ball in a difficult position out of which there may be some trouble in extricating it. In addition to all this, when getting near to the putting-green, or ‘approaching,’ the amount of force requisite to play the ball on to the green and yet not beyond it requires to be judged; and in putting—as playing strokes on the putting-green is called—the requisite strength and the proper line of play to send the ball into the hole have to be nicely calculated. But the player who has obtained even a small degree of mastery over the game feels a keen delight in endeavouring to overcome such difficulties; and the same amount of satisfaction as is derived by golfers from well-played strokes is probably not to be found in playing any other game.

In match play it is not usual to count the actual number of strokes taken. Golf has a language of its own. When a golfer plays the same number of strokes as his opponent, he is said to play ‘the like.’ When both have played the same number they are said to be
like as they lie.' When the one has played a stroke more than his opponent, he is said to have 'played the odds.' When he plays two or any greater number of strokes more than his opponent, he is said to play 'two more' or 'three more,' as the case may be. Now, suppose one of the couple has played three strokes and the other five strokes—that is, 'two more'—and it is the turn of the former to play, he does not say, 'This is my fourth stroke against your fifth,' but he says, 'I am playing one off two.' Similarly, he may be playing 'one off three,' and so on; of course, when he plays one off two, if he has again to play before his opponent, he then plays the like. In a 'hole game' it is not of the slightest consequence what actual number of strokes is taken; the only object each golfer need have in view is to get his ball into the hole in one stroke less than his opponent. Having played the first hole, if it is won, the person winning it is said to be 'one up,' and his opponent 'one down.' If it be halved, the match is 'all even.' If halved, the player who originally had the honour again drives off first for the second hole. If either party wins the hole the party winning it obtains the honour; and so the game proceeds from hole to hole until the match is finished.

It is not always necessary that the agreed on number of holes should actually be played out to finish the match. Suppose, for example, that one of the players
gets to be 'four up,' and there remain but three holes to play, he has won the match, because it must be obvious that even if his opponent were to win all the three remaining holes, the first supposed player would at the end of the round be still one up. In such a case the successful player is said to win his match by four up and three to play. Similarly, he may be two up and one to play, or seven up and six to play, or seven up and five to play, or any such combination. The match originally made (called the long match) being finished a few holes from home, the remaining holes are generally played as a 'bye.' When a player is, say, three holes up on his opponent, and there are only three to be played, that player is said to be 'dormy three,' 'dormy four,' 'dormy five,' etc., applying similarly to the number of holes he is up with the like number remaining to be played. When a player is 'dormy' he cannot lose the game; it may result in a halved match, however, if the opponent succeeds in taking all the remaining holes.

A golf-match is sometimes played by a 'foursome,' and, as the term implies, four persons engage in it, two playing against the other two. The play is in no particular different from that in a single above described, except that, after the tee-shot, each of the two players who are partners take alternate strokes at the ball, and they drive off from the tees alternately.

A three-ball match is another variation in which three
persons play each his own ball, and the game may be arranged in two ways. First, each person may play against each of the other two, counting in the usual manner. Such an arrangement does not, however, make a very good match—not so good as a single—and it is somewhat troublesome to keep a note of the state of the game, as, of three players (who may be called A, B, and C, for the purpose of illustrating what I mean), A may be two up with B and three down with C, while B is one up with C; and besides all this, it is a three-sided match, and the adage about three being no company applies in golf as in other things. The second mode of arranging a three-ball match is for one person to play against the 'best ball' of the other two; that is to say:—Suppose A, B, and C play a three-ball match, in which A plays against the best ball of B and C: if A takes five strokes to a hole, while B and C each take six, A would win that hole; but if A takes five strokes, while either B or C also takes five and the other takes six or seven or any greater number, the hole would be halved: and again, if A as before takes five strokes, and either B or C takes only four, while the other takes more, then A would lose the hole. It will thus be seen that A plays against whichever of B and C takes the fewest strokes at any hole. This makes a capital match, if, in the case supposed, A is a considerably better player than both B and C. In a three-ball match of this description there are only two sides, and it is a hard match.
for the single ball to win, because the other side has two chances against his one.

*Four-ball matches* are sometimes, but not very frequently, played; and in them sides are chosen, two balls playing against the other two, and the best ball on each side counting.

It is not always the case that a golfer can find an opponent of his own calibre, and when a good and an inferior player make a match, it is usual for the good player to give to the other 'odds,' depending upon their respective merits. This may be done in two ways,—first, by allowing him a certain number of holes of start, which they arrange between themselves. For example, A, a good player, makes a match with B, an inferior player, and allows him say five holes of a start; unless A beats B (counting *actual* play) by more than five holes he loses the match; if he beats him by five holes (counting *actual* play) the match is halved, B having that allowance; if A beats B by four holes (counting *actual* play), B wins the match by one hole, in virtue of his allowance; but, on the other hand, if A finishes six up (counting *actual* play), then he (A) wins the match by one hole. The second method of giving odds is by giving strokes at certain holes to the inferior player. Thus A may allow B 'a stroke a hole,' that is to say, B's second at each hole will count as his first, and his third as his second, and so on; or the allowance may be a stroke at every alternate hole, which is called
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giving ‘half one’; or it may be a stroke at every third hole, giving a ‘third’—or any variation of this nature. Handicapping is more fully dealt with in the chapter devoted to that subject.

It will readily be understood that if club competitions were conducted on the lines of match play it would not be possible, when a large number of competitors enter, to finish the competition in less than three or four days. The competitors would require to be drawn against each other, and to play successive rounds of the links until, by a process of survival of the fittest, the ultimate winner vanquished all his opponents. To obviate this, club competitions, with the exception of club tournaments, are usually played under MEDAL RULES. In medal play it matters not how many or how few competitors there are, as each individual player counts the number of strokes he takes to each hole, and the total for the eighteen holes forms his score. The player having the lowest score, either actual or after deduction of a handicap, is the winner of the competition.

‘Bogey’ Competitions.—An innovation in competitions has recently been made by each competitor playing against what is termed a ‘Bogey’ score. The method of play is as follows:—The committee in charge of the competition fix a fictitious score for each hole, say four strokes for the first hole, six for the second, five for the third, and so on. This ‘Bogey’ score usually represents par play over the green, and
it is made known before the competition begins, so that each competitor knows what he has to do at every hole. Each player counts his score at every hole, and if he holes out at that particular hole in fewer strokes, or in the same number, or in more than the appointed number, he wins, halves, or loses the hole to 'Bogey,' as the case may be. At the end of the game the number of holes won from 'Bogey' are placed against those lost to 'Bogey,' and the player who is the greatest number of holes up or the fewest down wins the competition.

In competitions for prizes ties are invariably played off by the parties who have tied. In ties under 'Bogey' play the cards of the competitors who tie may, however, be compared against each other, and the one who is up on the others declared the winner. But this can only be done with fairness when these competitors have actually played out every hole.

The rule before stated in regard to the ball farther from the hole being played first, and as to the honour, ought to be strictly observed both in match and medal play, subject, as regards the latter, to the special rule for medal play § (9). Although in medal competitions holes are not won or lost as in match play, the honour is invariably accorded to him who takes the fewest actual strokes to the previous hole.

MATCHES BETWEEN GOLF CLUBS or Golf Societies are frequently played. In these each club selects from its
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MATCHES BETWEEN GOLF CLUBS or Golf Societies are frequently played. In these each club selects from its
best players a team of a certain number agreed on beforehand, and arranges the players of the team in their order of merit, the best players being placed at the top of the list. The player first on the list of the one team is matched against the player first on the list of the other team, and so on. Each couple plays the full number of holes, and at the end of the play each team counts up the number of holes by which its individual members have beat their opponents, and the club whose team has the largest number of holes to its credit is the winner.

It may be noticed that the Open Golf Championship is played under Medal Rules. At present the play extends over two days, thirty-six holes being played each day, and the player with the lowest aggregate score is the winner. On the other hand, the Amateur Golf Championship is played by matches. If the number of entrants be not such as will result in their being ultimately reduced to one, without byes at the later stages of the game, a sufficient number of byes is drawn at first to attain this object. The competitors are in the first stage drawn in couples, the defeated player of each couple being forced to retire at the finish of each stage, and the successful player of couple number one engaging the successful player of couple number two, and so on in successive stages until only one player remains, who is the amateur champion for the year.
Club Tournaments by matches are played on lines similar to the Amateur Championship, the only difference being that between each stage a week or more is usually allowed to elapse, so as to give the competitors ample time to play off their matches without inconvenience.
CHAPTER II

GOLF CLUBS AND BALLS

Golf Clubs

The first difficulty that presents itself to any one who desires to learn to play the game of golf is the choice of clubs and balls. In the older days this was a much simpler matter than it is now: the number of clubs was then limited; there was a plentiful supply of good material for their manufacture, and there were only a few makers, all of whom had a thorough knowledge of their business. It was therefore unlikely that a purchaser, however little knowledge he had of the subject, would be put in possession of worthless clubs. He had only to go to any clubmaker, state what he desired—the extent of his purchase being regulated by the length of his purse,—and he was tolerably certain of getting good value for his money. Nowadays all this is entirely changed. Clubs are placed on the market by numberless makers, many of whom have but a limited knowledge of the game or of what is required to play it properly; good, well-seasoned wood is diffi-
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