How to Win at Golf

(WITHOUT ACTUALLY CHEATING)

By STEPHEN POTTER

Many books have been written on correct form in sports, but "The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship or The Art of Winning Games Without Actually Cheating" by Stephen Potter is the first devoted to the subject of how to win games without being able to play them. Thanks to Henry Holt & Co., Inc., and "Pageant" magazine, the USGA JOURNAL is enabled to present here, in digest form, a few of Mr. Potter's golf "secrets".

Since the first muscle stiffened is the first hole won, the object is to build up an atmosphere of muddled fluster.

When, for instance, your opponent kindly comes to pick you up in his car, your procedure should be: (1) Be late in answering the bell; (2) Don't have your things ready: (3) Walk down path and realize you have forgotten shoes; (4) Return with shoes, then, just before getting into car, pause and wonder whether clubs are at the pro shop or in the den upstairs.

The First Hint

Like the first hint of paralysis, a scarcely observable fixing of your opponent's expression should be visible. Now is the time to redouble the attack with map play (a new and better way to the club, ending, of course, in a blind alley).

An experienced gamesman will keep two changes, one correct and one incorrect; also, two golf bags—one covered in zippers with five woods, twelve irons and a left-handed cleek; a second containing only three irons and one wood, each with the appearance of string ends around its neck. If he finds his opponent is humbly dressed, he will wear the smart outfit. If the conditions are reversed, out will come the frayed trousers and the stringy clubs. "And I don't want a caddie," he says.

Play against your opponent's tempo. Against a player who makes a great deal of wanting to get on with the game, the technique is to: (1) agree, "as long as we don't hurry on the shot"; (2) hold things up by 15 to 20 disguised pauses. Peg-top tees were introduced for this purpose. Tee the ball, frame up for the shot and at the last moment stop, pretend to push the peg a little farther and start all over again. Early gamesmen used such naive devices as leaving the driver on the tee and going back for it. The essence of the modern approach is making the pause as if for the sake of your opponent's game: removing an imaginary twig from the line of *his* putt, asking him to wait until "those kids" (imaginary) stop walking across his line of sight, etc.

For the slow-playing opponent, of course, the flurry works best. Invent some train you would "rather like to catch if the game is over by then."

To counter the old-aunty type of game, I invent an imaginary character called Jack Rivers. Early in the game I praise his charm, good looks, fine war record and talent for games. Then I say, "I like Jack Rivers' game. He doesn't care whether he wins or loses so long as he has a good match." If the method is given time to soak in, chances are your opponent will begin to think, "Well, perhaps I *am* being a bit of a stick-in-the-mud." Soon he is adopting a hit-or-miss method which doesn't suit his game.

My counter to, "I'm afraid I don't play golf. Do you know, I've never been able to see the point of it," is, "No—it is, of course, a game of *pure skill*."