

# GOLF IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

by  
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**T**HAT *which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been . . . there is no new thing under the sun;*" saith Solomon.

And so it would seem of golf.

Ever since the venerated days of Vardon, and long before, golf has proceeded through an inevitable evolutionary phase. The ball—from leather stuffed with feathers to the revolutionary gutta percha to the modern electronically rubber-wound missile—has become progressively "rounder" and more volatile; the transition from comparatively clumsy hickory shafts to those composed of rapier-like steel knows no end.

## *Courses Improved*

Fairways now are meticulously cultivated and even the rough or tiger country, as it once was called, is periodically mowed and no longer conceals anything bigger than a baby rabbit. Where once bad lies predominated, the fairway farer now loudly proclaims his discontent if by some extraordinary mischance his ball occupies a cuppy depression. Cuppy lie! Hasn't that plaintive phrase become obsolete? Greens that once were hard and skid-dish now are soft. They are extravagantly barbered under scientific supervision provided by the United States Golf Association's Green Section.

We present this preamble as an introduction to excerpts from a book written sixty years ago which seems to substantiate suspicions of long standing that fundamentally the technique of golf ball propulsion has undergone very little change and that the breaches of rules and etiquette then prevalent were peculiarly similar to those in unhappy practice today.

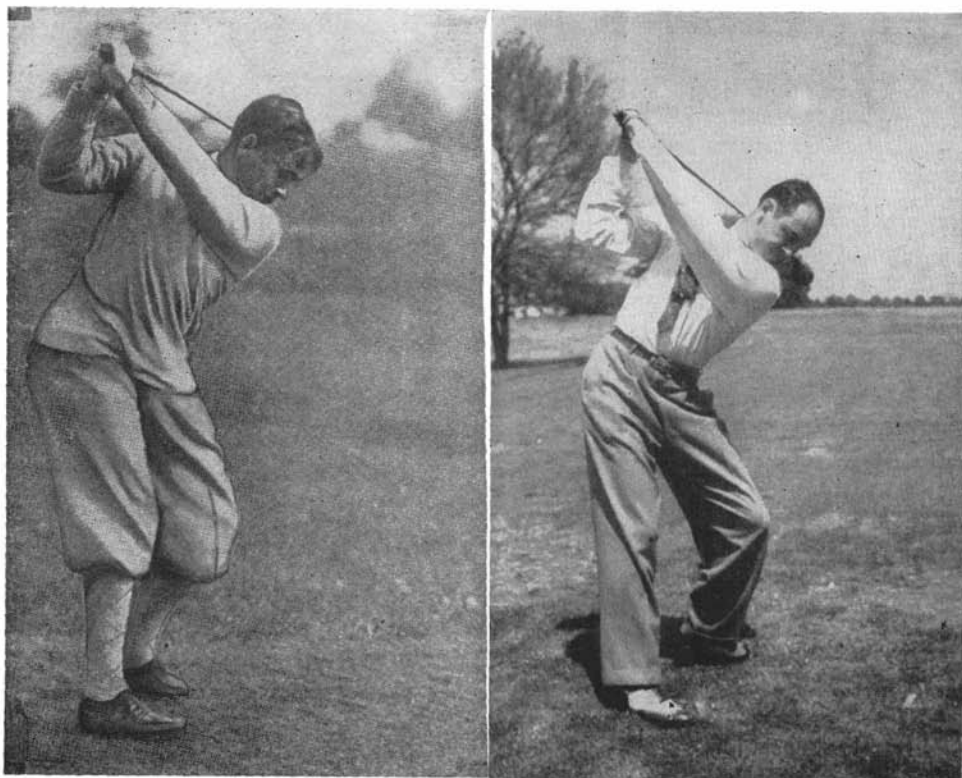
The book, entitled *Golf in Theory and Practice*, was written in 1897 by H.S.C. Everard and published in London. A copy was presented to the USGA's Golf Museum and Library in 1956 by the late Willie Klein, Long Island professional. Even in the matter of the written word pertaining to golf there has been no change. In prefacing his tome Everard apologetically said, "The writer feels serious misgivings as to the propriety of inflicting another book on golfers already satiated with the literature of the subject."

Then, in extenuation, he said, "Golfers are now a power in the land and more are learning every day. Learn golf during boyhood is the best advice of all; but they also have to be considered who are no longer at that merry time of youth. With the adult, things are different. First principles may be explained to him and he will reason upon them and, to some extent, a book may actually convey some useful hints—though it remains and ever will remain true, most especially at golf, that an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory."

## *Be Yourself!*

To do what comes naturally has always been sound advice, and to those who through the years have got very little comfort from striving to imitate Bob Jones, Walter Hagen, Ben Hogan, Sam Snead and other stalwarts, it is interesting to note that Everard said when the game was in its cradle days in this country that, "to strive after effect is a delusion and a snare. To stand up and hit the ball most easy and natural to him must be the object of the learner." Driving well "is not to be done by any fancied imitation of other players. Be yourself!"

## SIMILARITY IN SWING



Doin' what comes naturally is still the best advice a golfer may receive. In the case of Bob Jones, left, and Sam Snead, the similarity in swing is so close as to be almost identical. However, fancied imitation is not the way to master the game.

Later the author said, "It is not advisable for a beginner to cumber himself with many clubs; rather let him copy the average schoolboy, or caddie, whose stock-in-trade often consists of nothing but a driver and a cleek; it is surprising what can be done by one who is thoroughly master of even these two alone."

A sore subject pondered by the USGA today concerns the flight of the ball and the steady improvement of steel shafts and the resultant recession of scores. The words that follow are not those of Richard S. Tufts, current USGA President, but were written half a century ago by Everard:

"It is universally admitted that the present standard of play is very much higher

than that of say thirty or forty years ago, but how much of this advance is due to the greater skill of the modern player and how much to improvements in balls and clubs, is a question not easy to decide."

Most popular of the various methods of gripping a club is the overlap or more widely known as the Vardon grip because it was Vardon who set the fashion for it. Though he several times makes mention of Vardon who had won the first of six British Opens in 1896, Everard does not connect him in any way with the overlapping grip but does make remarkable mention of two players who did overlap, not just one but two fingers!

"J. H. Taylor and Mr. J. E. Laidlay,"

wrote Everard, "so grasp the club that the third and fourth fingers of the right hand overlap the first and second fingers of the left, thus bringing the wrists into still closer juxtaposition."

How hard should the club be gripped in the address was a moot question then as it is today. "As many authorities could be quoted on the one side as the other," said Everard. Some then gripped tightly and some loosely and you will find advocates of both ways among both amateurs and professionals presently parading the fairways.

#### *Hogan Comments*

When he addressed his fellow professionals at a clinic in Chicago, Ben Hogan said of the stance, "I play the ball approximately an inch or two back of the left heel and it remains constant. I never alter the alignment regardless of what shot I want to play. You may move the right foot in or out a little but the relationship between the ball and the left foot never changes."

Now let us read what Everard said three score and ten years ago: "The matter of the stance is important but it is a favorite theory of Mr. Cunningham's and other eminent players that it is so only in respect to the *left* foot; arrange *that* in proper position and it matters little, within reasonable limits, what happens to the right."

There has been much controversy anent the left arm and what, if any, stiffness is to be employed in the backswing. There are many advocates of the stiff left, although Bob Jones once said, "Sometimes I wonder if our concern over the 'straight left arm' is not a useless bother. Many players, I am sure, interpret straight to mean rigid, the result being a stiff-armed poke at the ball which has none of the elements of timing or power."

There was controversy too in Everard's day. He, manifestly, was committed to the stiff left. He wrote, "The left arm plays a very important part in driving, contributing, as it does, much of the hitting power; therefore its muscles should be braced up and the whole kept taut as the shaft of the club, of which practically it forms a part, with one hinge, viz, the wrist."

In the chapter, "Playing the Game," Everard wrote, "As a first step towards taking our place on the links, apart from the merely mechanical aspects of the game, it is our bounden duty thoroughly to acquaint ourselves with the laws and etiquette of golf. Now it is a singular fact that there is no game known into which a tyro will more confidently plunge without the most elementary acquaintance with either the one or the other than this game of golf. Having bought a few clubs and a ball or two, gaily he rushes into the middle of things, outrages law and order in nearly everything he does, but says of himself and his friends say it of him that, save the mark, he is a golfer."

How true! He could have written that yesterday or tomorrow.

#### *Etiquette Important*

On the subject of etiquette our author deplored "a disregard of the most ordinary courtesies, which can only be described as scandalous . . . Consideration for others, courtesy, gentlemanly feeling; this is the basis of all golf etiquette. For those not thus happily endowed there is the letter of the law to be studied, and one hopes, observed."

On the thesis of gambling Everard said, "The virtues of the 'statutory half-crown' must in no wise be overlooked, at least, in our everyday matches amongst friends—for just as sixpenny, nay, even penny points make all the difference at whist, where few would think it worth while to sit down and play for nothing, so does the consciousness of this silver medal, depending upon the result, act as a sort of fillip, when attention perchance, begins to flag . . . So the half-crown may be just the spice of condiment, perfectly harmless, necessary to season the game—it is a fine for bad play and at the year's end nobody will be a penny the worse. Needless to say, no form of gambling should be associated with golf; the word, of course, is purely relative; but any sum, the loss of which would be of the least importance, is best left unplayed for: there should be the most perfect indifference to wins or losses from the financial point of view."