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## Sir Walter Simpson to Beginners

THE FAMOUS CLASSICAL AUTHORITY IMPARTS SOME  
SOUND ADVICE

I PROPOSE TO WRITE a little sermon for the young player. Let the beginner shake himself down naturally before the ball, and hit. Till he has done this for a good many days, no advice has either use or meaning. During this first stage it is probable that he will be quite delighted with his driving, and with good reason. His attention being entirely directed to hitting—his curiosity about how to hit not being so far aroused—he makes good shots. In many respects a man naturally attacks the ball in the proper way. He stands up, stands firm, does not force; and although his swing is of course stiff, it is not artificial.

From the very first some players, however, make the mistake of treating the ball as a heavy object, whilst in reality it has, for practical purposes, no weight, and ought to be swept away, not jerked. In a bunker or a hard hole it becomes heavy, and nothing will do but a jerk; but from the

turf the problem is to shave it cleanly off. Again, early cricket, and many other games with balls, start most beginners on their golfing career with a wrong grip. The handle of the club is opposite the third waistcoat button instead of being as low as the length of the arms naturally let it go. They wish to drive as much in cricket form as the shape of the club will allow. Not that anyone thinks of literally golfing with a straight bat. They are freed from that restraint, and enjoy sweeping across the wicket. But this cannot be allowed. A bad cricketing style is not a good golfing one. The beginner must learn that golf is the very opposite of cricket, that he must get his hands as much down at it as up at the other. He must use his club like a scythe; must sweep, not strike the ball. In my opinion the extent to which the player gets his hands over the club cannot be exaggerated. To have them well over is a *sine qua non*

of an easy style. Beginners and others do not like the position until they have proved it, until patience and experience convince them that the grip which is most convenient for catching the ball a hammer-like thud is not the best either for far or sure.

I say, "until they have proved it." Lucky for them, if they ever do. A very large percentage of players live and play and die with their knuckles pointing too much towards the ground, with their club at too obtuse an angle with their arms, and consequently without the possibility of ever having a perfect swing. Why getting the knuckles too far around is so common, so almost universal, is (besides that it gives the hammering power already referred to) that it prevents the wrists being used, and leads quickly to fairly steady driving, whilst the true position enables them to be employed, with consequent feeble and uncertain hitting. I would therefore strongly impress upon beginners the advisability of having their hands well over the club—of becoming steady by keeping their wrists taut, rather than by so gripping the club that their joints cannot bend. I say "hands." It should rather be "hand"—the left hand. The right will look after itself. If the tyro acquires a grip which prevents him seeing his left knuckles, and which shows him instead more than the first joints of his fingers, if his club handle point to his waistcoat instead of well below that garment, there is no reason why he should not become an effective, but he will never be a pretty, driver—a true, full style of the orthodox sort is impossible. The fault must be compensated by either a short, a broken, an overhead swing, or by some other modification, pronounced or slight in

proportion to the cause. Let any one grip in this way, swing a club back to his shoulder, examine the constrained position of his right wrist, and he will see that one of these things is inevitable.

It is not generally till after the first week that the golfer begins to think about his game—to wish to know how it is done, in order that he may improve. With these inquiries his troubles begin, and let us hope that, with patience and common sense, he will get through them without crippling his style. He will soon hear on all sides, "Keep your eye on the ball." Of course one must see the thing which is to be struck; but it is a mistake to insist upon it as if it were very difficult. If the beginner glares at the ball too determinedly it will mesmerise him, so that the hammering will be a distraction, and cuts from former tops appear to be fatuous mouths smiling derisively. Then it comes to be a question with the beginner whether he ought to go in for a full or for a half swing. If he must have an answer—if he must have a name for, and an ideal on which to mould, his blow, let it be a half swing. It will be some time before his unpretending thump can be classed at all; but no matter. It ought to be more like a half swing than anything else; it will grow into that, and from that into a full one, unconsciously, as the fetters of awkwardness fall from the limbs; but if he try for a full swing at once, he will not get it,—he will merely acquire the habit (difficult to correct later on) of allowing his club to wander aimlessly about his back and shoulders.

In the laudable endeavor to drive far (and no man should ever accept the position of a weak player), the be-

ginner has to stumble through many errors before mastering the secret of where and how to apply his force. There is one the beginner is certain to fall into. In order to get a good sweep at the ball, instead of causing his trunk to revolve on its own axis, he sways it back over his right leg. One feels as if tremendous force were acquired in this way. So there is, but of the wrong sort—slow, ponderous, clumsy. Even a ball clean hit, and getting the full result of this swaying motion, does not go far. But it seldom is hit, and no more wonder than that it should be missed if struck at whilst the player is walking. Swaying thus is a standing walk, a term which may be objected to, although it ought to be as intelligible as the accepted phrase, a "standing jump." It is perhaps as well to advise young golfers to have both hands close together; at all events, it is but fair to warn them that every inch which separates them takes ten yards off the length of their shot.

These few hints are ample theoretical equipment for many months. But the beginner will get many more, to which I advise him to turn a deaf ear. Every old hand will be anxious to persuade him that his own last crochet is the one thing needful. He will be told that the great point is to keep his hands tight, or not to keep them tight, or one slack, his elbow in, or his elbow out, to let the club follow the ball, or his arms follow the ball, etc. etc. Naturally he thinks these people know. He tries one and all, getting as confused as if he were selecting a new religion. The fact is, there are more bad teachers than good, and if the beginner must have advice, let him consult a really first-class player, who will probably tell him he

knows nothing about grips, or elbows, or following, and that all he has to do is to stand firm and smite hard. If the beginner is liable to be confused by his friends, his danger is much greater from his caddy. The former only give advice when it is asked, the latter volunteers it, and insists. There are such things as good professional coaches. On the whole, it is better not to allow your caddy to interfere. Most of them advise a thousand and one things within the hour. They feed babes with strong meat, and expect to, or at least try to, make them full-grown golfers within an hour. Besides things good enough in themselves if they could be digested, two pieces of advice which they mostly insist upon are positive poison. One is that the player should rise upon his left toe. The swing not yet being so full and free as to tear the heel from the ground, by acting on this advice the beginner is simply left with a few spare inches of leg which he does not know what to do with. He may double them under him out of the road, but most likely he will use them to sway his body away back over the right leg, his caddy thus actually encouraging him to commit this common and fatal mistake of beginners.

The other is, insisting on the right thumb being over, not on, the club. If (which is likely enough, as we have seen) the beginner is holding his club as uprightly as possible, both hands too much under the club, it is absolutely impossible for him to strike at all if he obeys. His grip well over, he may do it; but ought not to unless it is natural—perhaps not even then, as at this early stage it foreshadows an intention of driving with the wrists, and opens the way to these wanderings

of the club around the back—these so-called long swings of which I have already said a good deal. Leave the thumb where it is. By degrees, if the player allows himself to acquire his art without prejudice, it will slip into its proper place, getting out of the way to allow a fuller swing. But at first it is needed to guide the stroke, and if not allowed to be used, the beginner will effect his purpose by some other means, perhaps burying his club in his palm so as to work with the end of the second joint instead of with the point of the thumb. This inevitably "turns in the nose" of the club, and it breaks. His faith in his caddy costs many a beginner much money and many sad rounds, in which his set gets reduced to some irons and some headless shafts. It is lucky for his golf if in the end he rebels against the oracle. If he does not, his grip with the right hand is a difficulty ever after. It remains twisted, and to do any work at all, the body and legs have to twist too.

For some time the beginner (I am speaking of men, not boys) makes marked and regular progress, until suddenly one day there is a breakdown, which crushes his sanguine hope that his march towards perfection was to be smooth and rapid. It is the first of many which will follow from time to time as long as he is able to hold a club. To avoid them altogether is impossible, but their number may be lessened, their severity checked, by wisdom and care. When the beginner is getting on swimmingly, let him not be carelessly confident, for pride goes before a fall. Nor when his driving is very satisfactory ought he to attempt to note what he is doing, so as to be able to return to it

if a relapse occurs. This in itself is the beginning of backsliding. Golf refuses to be preserved like dead meat in tins. It is living, human, and free, ready to fly away at the least sign of an attempt to catch and cage it. It will confuse your logic if you, as it were, stand aside and try to produce it by causes. With patient attention to hitting, not relaxed even when we are in the full pride of good play, our relapses will be fewer and less severe; but there is no means by which we can secure uniform progress. In proportion as the wave of advance is great, so will be the back draught. Let not the learner be discouraged by it, and begin to doubt lest the tide has turned. Golfers often speak of their game. The best the learner has ever played is his game, even supposing it is a third better than what he has relapsed to. It will come again soon, unless, indeed, he begin to ask, "What am I doing?" "How did I stand?" "How did I swing then?"

It is impossible to say how good a player a man may become but every beginner ought, as much as possible, to play with better golfers than himself. He will unconsciously by that means aim higher. It should be his ambition to beat somebody, and, having done so, to attack a still stronger adversary. Many half-crowns will be lost in the process, but what of that? It is cheaper and pleasanter than to employ a professional coach. In the early manhood of his golfing-life, the earnest and promising player's mind is apt to be much exercised as to the weight, length, lie, and spring of his club. He will feel sure that a best club for his style is to be found, and to find it will for some time appear a matter of the last importance. After

many experiments he will be in possession of a mass of conflicting evidence, and a box full of clubs more remarkable than useful. From extreme hope and faith he will fall back into a condition of dogmatic unbelief. He will try to use any club—even the rubbish accumulated in his days of faith. Truth lies between these two extremes. In the matter, of lie, a tall player's club ought to be upright, a short man's flat. The reason is that for all sorts and sizes of men about 3 feet 6 inches is the proper length. That a longer club will not drive farther, that a shorter one drives as far, is proved to be true. Theoretically, the long club reaches the ball with greater velocity, but as each inch adds to the difficulty of being accurate, it has to be taken easier. It is not your strong man who can wield a long club; on the contrary it is your pocket Apollo, whose long driving is due to precision and neatness. An exceptionally short club, on the other hand, can be, and instinctively is, swung with much more force. The objection to their general use is that they break a man down, not so much from the fatigue of over-exertion as from the loss of self-control which results from it. As for weight, so long as the specific gravity and the absolute weight of the head are both greater than these qualities in the ball, the carry will not be affected. Within these limits the lightest club will drive the longest ball, because it can be swung more swiftly than a heavy one (with what lightning accuracy one sweeps off daisy heads with a walking-stick!) The danger with a very light club is that muscles having so little strain are apt to grow frisky and wanton.

Theoretically, therefore, a heavy club ought to steady a wild, pressing player. It does not do so. It ought to act as a bit in his mouth. He takes it in his teeth. Practically, the golfer with an ambition for lead handicaps himself terribly. He cannot play easily in proportion to the weight of his weapon, for part of his ambition is sure to be to drive a long ball. This he will do occasionally; but he must hit perfectly clean, or else make an egregious fizzle. There is no reserve force in him if he scuffs. His club sticks in the mud, or is twisted out of his hand. To avoid the ground he is apt to top. Sometimes, when he does hit clean, the club runs away with him to the right or left. And all this on account of a crude, erroneous idea that the heavier the club the farther it will drive. It is a mistaken idea, otherwise the man who could swing a 16-lb. hammer would beat the record. It is evident that even Goliath would have made a very feeble shot with such a club or with his own; but with a Philp he might have outdriven the champion.

The spring of a club has more to do with comfort than with carry. Nobody likes stiff shafts. Many charges are laid at their door; the only just one is that they jar the hands. Each man will drive, not further, but better, with the club he likes best. A "fozy" handle will do very well if you have a sweeping, scythe-like swing. If your style is jerky, such a shaft, or one with the spring under the rind, will prove itself useless to you at once; the club or the jerking must be abandoned. For all kinds of forcing players (those who let in when they get to the ball), the spring must be confined to the neighborhood of the skeer. If you wish to compel

yourself to drive easily, buy a "wabby" club; it will either teach you or top your ball. It is pleasanter, however, to play with a master. In short, my advice is—use a stiff club, whatever your style, with just enough elasticity to make the ball go off

sweetly, and give up all idea that spring here or there will make you drive further. If you don't want to abandon this notion, no matter. Your club with an ideal spring may drive further on account of your confidence in it.

