

# WOMEN'S GOLF

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Mrs. J. V. Hurd will always be glad to receive items of news, snapshots of current events, notices of forthcoming meetings, etc., from her readers for Women's Golf. All communications to be addressed " Mrs. J. V. Hurd, c/o ' Golf Illustrated & Outdoor America' " 389 Fifth Avenue, New York

ON hearing of anyone who is thinking of taking up golf as a pastime one is almost tempted to repeat Mr. Punch's advice to those about to marry and say: "Don't." Not that it can be denied that golf is a very healthful and interesting pursuit, no one who has played for even the shortest time will question that, but, along with those merits it has the disadvantage of being the most exasperating game that was ever invented to plague the mind of woman or man.

Probably the game never was invented, it is more likely that it evolved by slow degrees. In Sir Walter Simpson's humorous book, not as much read of late years as it deserves to be, he says that many centuries ago when Scotland was still covered with the giant oaks and beeches of the ancient Caledonian Forest, some shepherd lads who tended their flocks on the wind swept shores of St. Andrews Bay helped to pass the long days of this northern land, where night is only a name in the summer months, by hitting with their crooks the golf balls which they found lying among the grass—adding that in proof of this balls are to be found there to this day.

Other writers insist that golf is a Dutch game which was first played on the sand-dunes by the side of the Zuyder Zee and only a few weeks ago an article came out in a daily paper the writer of which offered convincing proof that the country of golf's birth was none other than the land of Omar Khayyam. There is not much likelihood of our ever finding out how and where the first game of golf was played, that will have to remain "wropt in mystery" like the authorship of the plays attributed to Shakespeare, but, that is not a fact that will cause sleepless nights to sensible people. The game has come and very evidently has come to stay whether it evolved in the kingdom of Fife or on the borders of the Persian Gulf. One thing is certain, however, for much the shorter part of its career has golf been the scientific game, surrounded by a hundred rules, regulations and penalties, that it is now. When my English mother went as a bride to her Scottish home on the rocky coast of the Firth of Forth she was eagerly shown figures which were passing not more than a hundred yards from her drawing-room windows intent on a game she was told was called golf. Such very different golf it must have been from the game as we know it now, the balls of course being stuffed with feathers, the clubs heavy and unwieldy, and shaped like a travesty on those of the present day.

Of putting greens or tees there were none, the holes

were put anywhere which seemed convenient and after playing out each couple helped themselves to sand from the hole and drove off again. New holes were only made on Monday mornings and by Saturday night the size of these had increased until they would compare favorably in area with small wash tubs. Skeins of red wool tied to rough sticks were used for flags and those were collected and put away over Sundays in case the Sabbath thoughts of the burghers, who took an after church airing on the links, might be turned godlessly towards secular pursuits. An ancient man watched over the cows which belonged to the people of the town who, from time immemorial, had possessed grazing rights on the links, and if a player's ball found a resting place amongst the herd he would call out encouragingly: "Come awa,' come awa' ma mannie, they're canny beasties and they'll no meddle ye."

What a big jump forward golf has taken since then, but I wonder if it has become any more enjoyable. It was certainly a more picturesque game from my mother's description of it played by the scarlet-coated old gentlemen in tall hats accompanied by equally old caddies in Kilmarnock bonnets with ribbon streamers and scarlet "toories" who carried bundles of hatchet-headed implements over the grass, starred with primroses and cowslips against a background of the shining waters of the Forth.

There were no women golfers in these days, a wild game of croquet with the curate when he came to tea was as far as the sporting proclivities of the fair sex carried them and it was not until the early eighties that a few venturesome spirits made their appearance on the links. This innovation met with a good deal of opposition at first, but after a little while people became accustomed to the idea, and more and more women joined the ranks of devotees to the game. They had found out what we are appreciating now—the fact that it is an ideal game for women, just strenuous enough to thoroughly exercise every part of the body and not needing the tremendous exertion which is required for tennis or hockey. In fact it is recognized as being so healthful that many doctors recommend it and this has added to the widespread interest now taken in the game.

We shall suppose that the two first thoughts which arise in a woman's mind on starting her career as a golfer are the questions of clubs and a suitable costume. As our sex is supposed to be pre-eminently interested in matters sartorial we shall deal with the

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second matter first. Some years ago women evidently thought it necessary to adopt a very masculine style of dress for golf and to ape many other attributes of the opposite sex. Luckily there are only a few of this kind of creature left, but it is unfortunate that of late the majority have gone to the other extreme and now rival the peacock in the brilliancy of the colors they wear, without, it must be said, any of the peacock's good taste in the blending of shades. A suit of a quiet neutral color is in much the best style on the links and ought to have a skirt short enough to clear the ground by several inches and a coat or Jersey allowing sufficient freedom for the swing. Skirts that are so tight that they have to be unbuttoned around the hem or so wide that they have to be held in with an elastic strap are a distinct proof of the wearer's lack of sense as well as of taste. White looks very cool and pleasing on a hot day but has to be very immaculately fresh, a matter of difficulty after a few traps have been visited and is really dreadful if there is any wind. Of shoes there is a wide range to choose from, rubber soles are the most comfortable to play in, but those made of thick leather studded with hob nails are the most dependable as a sudden shower will render rubber soles but a broken reed to lean on. It is a good plan for a player to accustom herself to wearing gloves. They are really necessary in cold weather and at all times are a protection against the unlovely blisters and callous places which will otherwise appear on the hands. On wet days a spare pair can always be carried as damp leather gloves are a poor medium for a grip. Probably some prospective golfers will think that this costume must of necessity be very uninteresting and unbecoming, but it is not so at all. Many women look at their very best in simple clothes and their individual fancy can have plenty of scope in choosing harmonizing ties, stockings and hats.

The next thing for the embryo golfer to do is to get a suitable set of clubs, which is not as easy as it seems at first. All professionals and shops which stock sporting goods sell golf clubs, but only a small proportion of these can be termed first class. There are so many people who seem to be perfectly satisfied with an inferior article that to secure a really good set of clubs is a matter which requires some judgment and a great deal of patience. How often one sees an eager novice emerge from a club-maker's bearing under her arm an assortment of eccentric looking tools, the accumulation of several seasons' unsellable stock. The vogue of a freak club as a rule barely lasts for one season and afterwards the professionals find themselves with dozens on their hands. Being only human they then feel justified in palming those off on the innocent beginner. How many of these extraordinary clubs, the rage of a few months, have been relegated to the dust heap, bulger drivers, clubs with immensely long shafts called fishing rods, which

were supposed to give a very long ball, mallet headed putters, irons with springs concealed in them, etc. The list is endless but the short career of favor which those inventions enjoyed showed very plainly that there is no royal road to success in golf and that it is the player and not the club which makes the successful shot.

For a beginner a set of seven or even six clubs of the ordinary pattern will be found an ample supply. Seven would include a driver and a brassie, but a great many people seem to find it easier if a driver is dispensed with at first. Vardon says that a ball driven from the tee with a brassie is the easiest shot of all in golf, as, the slight loft on the face engenders a feeling of confidence. This being the case it would probably be foolish for the novice to make her initial attempt with anything else. That these six clubs should not be too heavy cannot be sufficiently insisted on. The golf faults of most women arise from two primary causes—overswinging and the use of clubs that are too heavy for them. It may be that the first error is really the logical outcome of the second one. When a club is too heavy, in racing parlance it "takes charge" and the player's swing is at least two-thirds too long to be properly under control. For wooden clubs a good weight is around thirteen ounces and the irons ought to be only slightly heavier. The brassie ought to be of a comfortable length when the player takes up her stance and rests the sole on the ground. A shaft that is too short will incline the player's position to be more or less of a crouch over the ball while one that is too long will make her stand too upright which will result in a series of fozzled shots.

Nearly every wooden club has either a slight slice or pull on the face and it is better to choose the latter kind. The natural tendency of the novice is to pull back nervously from the ball at the moment of impact. This causes a slice to the right which will be greatly exaggerated if there should be even a slight slope in that direction on the face of the club. There should always be a good deal of spring in the shaft of wooden clubs, a lifeless shaft never seems to yield such satisfactory results and gives only a minimum of pleasure when the ball is well hit. Grips of fairly rough leather will be found the most dependable of the many kinds offered for sale, rubber is impossible when it is wet, and kid, which becomes highly glazed after a little use, is so slippery that it makes the club difficult to control for anyone who has not got a vise-like grip.

The next club to secure is a cleek or driving mashie, each of which sends a ball of about equal length. A cleek is a splendid club to play when a golfer has complete mastery over it. It may be called the most temperamental of all clubs and in moments of strong tension will make a full shot finish a foot from the hole and do other things not within its real province. On the other hand it has the reputation of being hard

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to learn, and a beginner will probably on that account prefer to try a driving mashie which is supposed to be easier to wield successfully. An alternation to these clubs is a spoon which is a brassie with a very much lofted face, a club whose kindly expression is calculated to give confidence to the most timid. Of course it is not such a pretty club to play as the cleek or driving mashie and does not cover so wide a range of shots but is certainly reliable and is especially useful on inland courses where its broad sole prevents it from cutting too deeply into the ground. The shaft ought to be at least an inch shorter than that of the brassie and have considerably less spring.

A well balanced mid-iron should now be added to the list and this ought to have its chief weight in the head. It will be expected to play several kinds of strokes and, for the longer ones, needs to have a feeling of power. Besides full iron and half iron shots it is extremely useful for what might be termed quarter iron shots, little pitch and run approaches from the fairway about twenty yards or less from the green. As these strokes require great nicety of judgment and, if played consistently well are a most important factor in lowering a score, it will be readily seen that a good mid-iron is a very useful thing to possess.

Now we come to that very important member of the golfer's bag—the mashie. Bernard Shaw's axiom that we should exercise great care in the selection of our parents can be applied with equal force to the choosing of mashies. The rule that most women's clubs are too heavy for them does not, for some mysterious reason, include mashies which are generally much too light. Besides playing pitch shots a mashie will often serve its owner better in a bunker than a niblick and is useful for forcing the ball out of heavy grass. In none of these places is a light club of practical value and perhaps if fewer of these unsuitable mashies were made we should see less of that over-swinging which makes the iron play of two-thirds of women golfers so ineffectual. In spite of the fact that there is a greater variety of mashies on the market than of any other club, with the exception perhaps of putters, it seems to be a matter of difficulty to get a really good one. I speak feelingly as it took me several years to find a mashie with a really satisfactory "feel" to it but the moment I took my present treasure, who rejoices by the way in the name of Thomas, in my hand I knew that I had found a friend. It is of paramount importance to have a mashie which gives us confidence as it often plays the shot which casts the die whether the hole shall be won or lost. Al-

though the socketless mashie is far from being a beautiful club it is really the most reliable and is especially so for beginners. These socketless clubs were invented some years ago by a man who was suffering from a maddening and apparently incurable fit of sending his ball to what cricketers call "cover point"—that is at right angles from the spot aimed at. This is caused by hitting the ball on the socket of the club where the shaft joins the head and is one of the hardest of all golf faults to cure. As the socketless mashie has a twist in the neck, which renders this fault an impossibility, it is obvious that by getting one in the beginning a golfer is saved a great deal of trouble. Some people call them "duffers clubs" and perhaps they are, but it is certainly a relief to know that with them a shot can only be topped or duffed and never sent off at an acute angle to the direction intended.

Although a niblick has less honor with a golfer than any other club it ought to be quite as carefully chosen. A poor niblick will cost a player almost as many strokes as a badly balanced driver or mid-iron. One with a medium sized face is the best as those which have very large heads do not penetrate their way into a heel mark if the ball should happen to lie in one. The shaft must be absolutely without spring. I was once given a whippy niblick which at the end of its first season resembled a sickle and testified eloquently to the number of traps it had visited.

Of putters we can surely say that their name is legion. As nine-tenths of success in putting lies with the player and only one-tenth with the club one putter is really as good as another. Only one golden rule ought to be observed: that the putter should possess an absolutely *flat* lie. There are many players who appear to take correct aim and swing evenly and yet always finish a couple of inches off the line. These people will often be found to have putters which meet the ball slightly off the horizontal at the moment of impact with the result that it is deflected a little every time without apparent cause. Quite a number of players carry two putters, a wooden one for approach putts and a putting cleek for holing out, but it is not necessary for the beginner to do so. An ordinary putting cleek will play any length of shot quite well and is especially good on fast greens.

The above set of clubs ought to be quite sufficient for a golfer's first season and if, in addition, she will buy a strong, but not too heavy caddy bag, a large umbrella, and a small sponge in a rubber case, she will find herself equipped for any emergency

*These hints for beginners will be continued in future numbers*