

The Swing's The Thing!

By MacDONALD SMITH

I AM firm in the belief that the most important element in successfully playing the game of golf—in fact its foundation—is the swing. The chief handicap of a majority of players is that they think too much about the ball. This excessive concentration—the idea of grimly focussing the eye on the ball—is a mistake. Such intenness results in stiffness and, as a consequence, the swing is wholly forgotten.

The best advice I can offer to the average golfer, and those temporarily off their game, is to forget the ball for a time and instead of thinking about keeping their eye on it, to try to groove out a swing. A little practice along this line will soon produce freer movements and awaken a new confidence. My experience in teaching has proved clearly to me that more trouble is caused by looking at the ball too hard than any other one thing. I have also found that the harder the average player looks at the ball the more he or she stiffens up, and then forgets all about the swing.

To perfect the swing and bring it to the point where one can have full confidence in it requires practice. To gain this practice during the winter season I suggest the light cotton ball. There is nothing better that I know of to give the player the sensation of properly hitting the ball and an idea of the direction it is likely to travel when hit. In such practice I again caution the player to consider the swing first and the ball second.

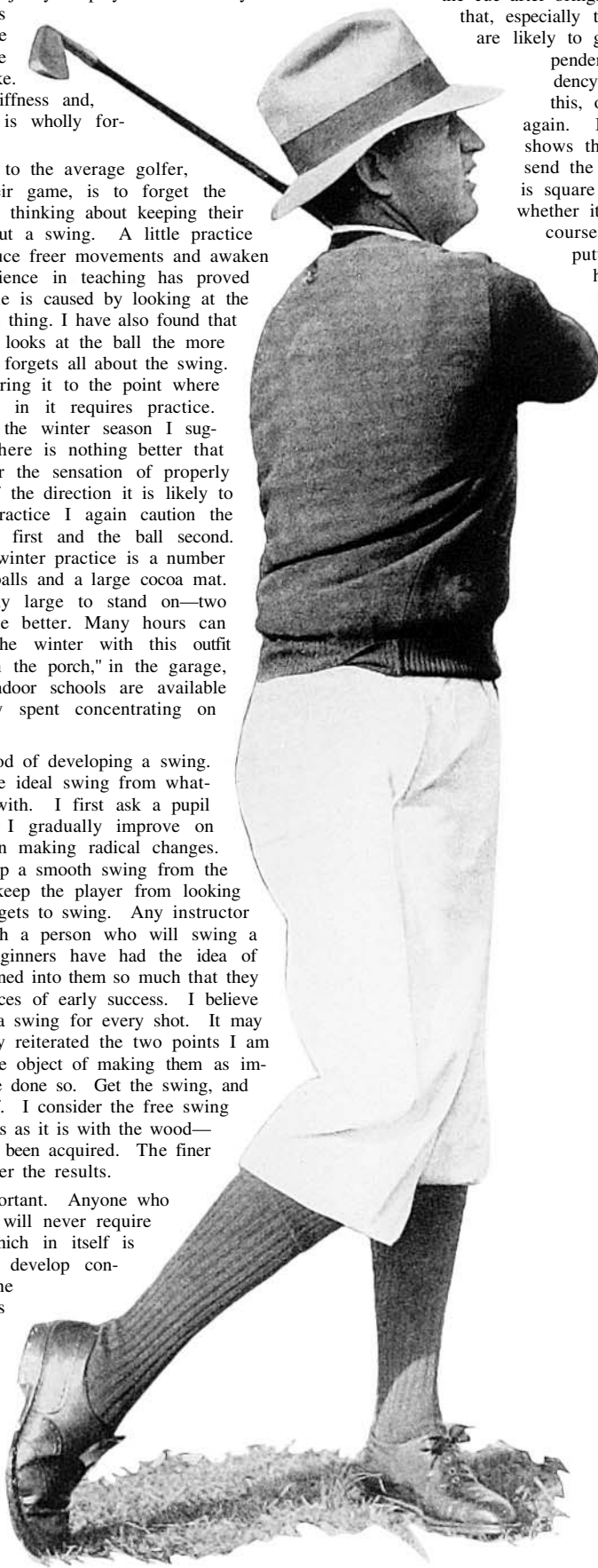
An excellent equipment for winter practice is a number of these light cotton practice balls and a large cocoa mat. The mat should be sufficiently large to stand on—two small ones would possibly be better. Many hours can be pleasantly spent during the winter with this outfit in a large room, the attic, on the porch, in the garage, or even outdoors. Where indoor schools are available much time can be profitably spent concentrating on the swing.

I have been asked my method of developing a swing. It is simple. It is evolving the ideal swing from whatever the player has to start with. I first ask a pupil to swing naturally and then I gradually improve on the style. I do not believe in making radical changes. I do not find it hard to develop a smooth swing from the natural swing, if I can only keep the player from looking so hard at the ball that he forgets to swing. Any instructor can always do something with a person who will swing a club, but 90 per cent. of beginners have had the idea of keeping the eye on the ball dinned into them so much that they stiffen up and spoil their chances of early success. I believe in a pivot for every shot and a swing for every shot. It may seem as though I have unduly reiterated the two points I am making, but it is only with the object of making them as impressive as possible that I have done so. Get the swing, and the ball will take care of itself. I consider the free swing as important with the iron clubs as it is with the wood—when once the free swing has been acquired. The finer the swing is grooved, the better the results.

The short game is very important. Anyone who is playing a good short game will never require three putts on the green, which in itself is quite an assurance that will develop confidence. In connection with the short game, I might say, as a result of observation, that it will greatly improve the game of many players if, instead of trying to make long approach putts, an iron is used for the shot. The No. 3 iron is the safest club to use for an approach putt from ten yards off the green up to the edge, where no obstacles intervene.

So many different versions and reasons have been given for the slight hesita-

tion I make when bringing the putter back before striking the ball. I got the idea from billiards. I noted that most good players stop the cue after bringing it back to control a delicate shot. I find that, especially toward the end of a hard game, the wrists are likely to get tired and sometimes work sort of independently and the face of the putter has a tendency to turn ever so slightly. When I notice this, or note that all is not right, I start all over again. If the face of the putter is not square it shows that the wrist has caused a roll which will send the ball off direction. If the face of the putter is square when it hits the ball it must go straight—whether it goes in, over, or short of the hole is, of course, a matter of control. If the face of the putter is at right angles to the hole, the player has the maximum of advantage to hole out.



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Who considers the swing the foundation of successful golf, and advocates less straining in concentrating on the ball