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POINTS OF THE GAME

IN ORDER TO ENJOY THE GAME WITH A RELISH unalloyed by any incidental mishaps or vexation, the Golfer must attend to a number of little points in his Golfing accoutrements besides carefully selecting a set of clubs. For instance the novice will find that he cannot get along very well in ordinary walking shoes or boots, that he is perpetually slipping down the glassy slopes, and has awkward tendencies to somersaulting as a finale to a vigorously played stroke. Then again he will soon find out that his hands, which he has unwittingly bared for action, unaccustomed to the friction of the club-shaft, begin to be troublesome; the skin gets ruffled and teased into little blisters, which provokingly enough compel him to forego the course for some days, and betake himself to the lesser pleasures of short holes.

Moreover it may be, on a sultry day in August, when it is pouring down white heat, our beginner setteth forth with his full complement of apparel, strapped and buckled and collared and cravatted as for a horticultural promenade. Alas! the agonies he must endure before the battle's lost and won! Now all such petty annoyances, which are merely the natural consequences of inexperience, may be easily avoided. Let the novice invest in a pair of stout shoes (boots constrain the ankles too much), roughed with

small nails or sprigs, and he will march comfortably and safely over the most slippery ground that can be turned out by a meridian sun in the dog-days. Then to save his unaccustomed flesh from mortification, let him carefully preserve his white kid gloves, and republish them on the links. We prefer such a glove to any other, because it is exceedingly soft, does not embarrass the hand, and keeps the club excellently well from slipping.

In the matter of dress, we can only give some negative advice. The old Scottish club-dress, specimens of which in various states of preservation, still 'flout the pale blue sky' on medal days, is about the most uncomfortable garment the Golfer could indue, and furnishes an admirable antithesis to a comfortable rig. Not to say anything about the fashion in which these primæval vestments are commonly made, or their ponderous weight, the staring red colour alone is enough to give one a fever on a hot day. The original idea was to make the Golfer as conspicuous as possible, for the preservation of non-players; but it is wholly unnecessary, on the score of danger, to convert a Golfer into a sign post. Let the dress of the player be light and adapted for absorbing perspiration; let him eschew stiff-necked abominations and have his apparel made loose; then only will he be prepared to do justice to himself and to the game.

Having disposed of these preliminary difficulties, let us set forth upon an experimental match. The first point is that placing of the ball, preparatory to striking off, which is technically called *teeing*. This is done by taking a pinch of sand from the adjacent hole, placing it, with a pat to firm it, on the ground (taking care that the Golfer will not have to stand *below* the level of his ball), and finally poising the ball thereupon. We would caution the

beginner against an excess of tee for two reasons; first, because it is apt to cause too great an elevation to the stroke; and, secondly, because the long driving through the rest of the hole must be done *without* a tee, thus making him diffident in his striking. A tee, generally speaking, should be used only when the wind is in the striker's favour; if, on the other hand, he is driving in the wind's eye, not only do we recommend him not to use a tee at all, but even to strike his first ball from off a gentle declivity. This last stroke we have seen performed systematically by only some two or three players; but they were masters of the art, and played those long skimming shots with the wind a-head, as easily as they could have elevated the ball from off a tee were the breeze in their favour.

By all means let the novice accustom himself to playing on a system, adapting his striking to the direction of the wind and the state of the ground. Regarding this latter point, if the ground be marshy or soaked with rain, the swiping should have elevation, as the ball would not run were it played low; again, if the course be hardened by frost, the skimming shots tell better, and make longer running than if propelled high in the air.

To return to our match. We are now fairly started—the tee stroke played, the ball well away, and, what is more important still, safe on the course. Away we go after it; softly and quietly, however, for let not the player excite himself bodily or mentally. Still there is a '*juste milieu*' in golf as in many things else, and we do not counsel tedious delay either in walking or making a stroke. There is a certain coolness and method required to play the game consistently and well.

The beginner will be very much puzzled for the first month or so of his novitiate to tell what particular club

he should use in making a stroke where there seems to be a choice of instrument. On coming up, for instance, to play his second stroke, he sees, on taking an observation a-head, that a hazard looms rather dangerously in front, wherefore, albeit his ball lies well for a swipe, he inclineth to his long spoon; then, suddenly recollecting the existence of a grassed driver, he dismisses the long spoon and weighs the chances of his play-club before adopting the grassed driver aforesaid. Again, for example, his ball tumbles into a grass grown bunker, and the beginner debateth within himself the possible risk attending an experimental use of his short spoon; wavering, he thinks the cleck a good medium between his spoon and an iron; but on feeling the lie of the ball his courage falters and eventually he puts his trust in his bunker iron. The stubborn branch of a whin too, severely tries his philosophy, by breaking the direct line of his advance; and he doubts whether to play back, (which to his inexperience seems as bad as a retreat in actual warfare,) or to drive his ball through fate and whins too.

Now all this hesitation is natural enough, and can only be overcome by a habit of cool calculation and reflection, backed by some theoretical knowledge, such as in this treatise we have attempted to give. Let it be the standing maxim of the novice, however, never to sacrifice the chance of making a brilliant stroke when a fair probability offers; such caution is not prudence but undue timidity, and will greatly retard his progress as one of the 'fliers of his year.'

In the course of his experience, again, he will see old hands putting up to the edge of a formidable hazard, rather than risk playing across it; spooning a stroke gently on to a table of smooth turf, when a longer shot would probably

land them in grief; and playing backwards and sideways out of a hazard in preference to a 'turn-a-head.' This is the finesse of the game; and a consideration of these recurrences will temper any rashness our novice may be prone to; but will not, we trust, incline his play into the opposite extreme.

Respecting open swiping through the long green we have few remarks to offer, other than those already made in former pages. It may be, however, that the golfer finds some difficulty in keeping his ball on the course; that, stand as he will, play ever so coolly, one stroke shoots to the left, another to the right, in the most unaccountable fashion. He may safely conclude there is something rotten in the state of his play. Nothing happens more frequently, even to an experienced hand, than this wild driving, technically called, according to the direction of the stroke, 'drawing', and 'hitting off the heel.' The first is the more serious evil, and consists in sending the ball in a curving orbit away to the left of the striker. A ball may be drawn by one or more of three causes; first, by not standing squarely to the ball; secondly, by twisting the head of the club inwards in making the stroke; or, thirdly, by drawing the arms in towards the body in making the downward sweep, instead of allowing them to swing outwards in a natural manner after the club. The novice will easily discover to which of these three causes he is to attribute the tendency to draw his ball.

Hitting off the very heel of the club, which is the opposite fault, results generally from the player standing too far from his ball, thus causing him to indulge in a far wider swing than is actually needed, and is therefore easily amended. *Hanging* balls are very common through the long course, especially where the soil is earthy. These are

caused by a little rise of the ground close behind the ball, from whatever cause,—a mole-heap, tuft of fog, or inequality of surface. As a rule, hanging balls should be jerked; since it is nearly impossible, even with spoons, to hit cleanly, and at the same time ensure elevation.

The other points of the long game are sufficiently obvious, excepting perhaps a choice of tools when the ball is in trying ground, and even then, the various names of the clubs are guide enough to show when they should be used. When he nears the putting green, however, the real difficulties of the golfer commence, and the game gets complicated in its details. The chief terror of the young player is the quarter stroke,—most difficult but most beautiful of all others. The baffing-spoon is, as our reader will remember, the club specially fitted for this stroke; another, however, is used, and defended in the use, by many players in effecting this stroke. This club is the light iron; and it has certainly many points to recommend it. The baffing-spoon, from its make, and the manner in which it is wielded, is an excessively puzzling club to use properly; and for some time, it is impossible to calculate with anything like certainty, where and how far the ball is going. The iron, on the other hand, not striking the earth at all, and swung short off the wrist without stooping, may be depended on as affording great accuracy in the calculation of distance, if the striker does happen to hit the ball cleanly. Here is the trouble; should the iron catch ever so slightly in the turf—a contingency very likely to happen when a quick wrist-turn is required—the ball is sent hopping into the very hazard intended to be cleared.

Nevertheless this light iron, although dangerous at the distance of a quarter stroke, is most useful for negotiating

a bunker or other hazard, when the ball is in close proximity to the putting ground. This stroke is done by taking a short grasp of the iron, laying the head well back, and hitting the ball clean with an upward turn of the wrist. Some players do not lay the iron head back, but allow it to do its own work; this is a pretty mode of handling it, but not so easy, we think, as that above recommended. Little hillocks and other impediments in putting may be overcome in the same manner with very little practice. But the most delicate use of the same iron is in playing a *stimy*. This particular stroke occurs on the putting green, when a player finds his antagonist's ball is so exactly in the line of his put, whether that line, from inequalities of the ground, be curving or straight, as to preclude possibility of playing at the hole in an ordinary manner. As will be seen from the golfing law in that behalf,* the ball *stimying* may be lifted if within six inches of that of the player, until the stroke is done; the idea being, reasonably enough, that when the balls lie so close it would necessitate sleight of hand and not legitimate golfing skill to avoid collision.

There are two ways of playing this stroke; with an iron and with an ordinary wooden putter. The light iron or cleek is used when the balls lie so close together that to play by the side of the ball *stimying*, however closely, would throw the put wide of the hole. These clubs are handled for *stimy*-playing on the same principle we have already noted for playing very short strokes over a hazard on to the putting green, the *stimy*, of course, being still more delicately executed. The thinner the face and the greater the slope of the iron, the more easily will the stroke

* Rule No. VIII. of the St Andrew's Code.

be lofted over the intercepting ball. Should the distance to be traversed after the stimy is surmounted be very short, for instance, some eight or ten inches, the player should practise lofting his ball directly into the hole without causing it to roll at all after alighting.

There is a curious way of playing stimies with an iron club, which is generally considered illegitimate, although it is a moot point whether or not it is against any golfing law.* The player stoops rather further than the length of the iron to be used, in *front* of his ball and facing it. He then extends his club, grasped by the right hand only, horizontally on the ground in the lie of his put, fitting the slope of the head behind his ball. Thus, upon his jerking the iron towards him, the ball is made to hop with the utmost certainty over the stimy. Extra elevation is easily given by raising the hand whilst the head remains on the ground. This is a stroke, at all events, worth trying for experiment's sake.

Wooden putters are used to play stimies when the intercepting ball is at some distance from that of the player. A curving-in motion is imparted to the ball, causing it to pass the stimy and work in to the straight course again. This twist is acquired in making the stroke by drawing the putter from heel to point in towards the body with a quick motion, never allowing it, during this operation, to quit the ball. As will be seen, this stroke is only available when the lie of the ground allows of the stimy being played on the right hand side. A twisting motion imparted to a ball on a rugged green has a tendency to keep it straight,

* (The only law that can be brought to bear against this use of the iron, is that innocent injunction contained in Rule No. XIII, to play the ball 'fairly and honestly;' and this is susceptible of pretty loose interpretation.)—*Auth.*

effectually preventing its being thrown off by a ridge or hollow. However, we cannot assert that it is very efficacious in the case of stimies, being only possible on the smoothest putting greens, or where the inclination of the ground assists the curving course of the ball. We therefore recommend the iron in almost every position of the stimy.

In long putting, the player should make it a point always to be up; even should he overshoot the mark, his ball has a chance of holing, which it could not have were it played short. Some few golfers put almost exclusively with a metal club, an iron or cleek, to wit; and on a Links where the short game is over very rough greens, a knowledge of this use of the iron or cleek is very desirable. As a rule, nevertheless, let not the player forsake the honest wooden tool; its heavy head and stiff shaft forbid the fear of a miss, and yet do not preclude the delicate touch, which is the chief feature in the handling of an iron. In short putting the player must consult principally the policy of the match on hand: if he have the advantage of a stroke or two over his opponent, it were madness to rush his ball at the hole, as a miss would at once destroy the hard-earned superiority of the long game; rather, on the contrary, let him put softly and cautiously, that his ball may lie *dead* for the next stroke. On the other hand, when the golfer is a couple of strokes or more behind, his only chance lies in a bold put—a rapid gobble over level ground—or a scientific curve through a cup or rut when such occasion offers. Should his antagonist's ball lie a little to one side of the line of his put, it becomes what is technically called a 'guide', and the golfer should take advantage of it by playing his own ball close past it. This ensures a straight run to the hole, and should he touch the guide, there is

no harm done, as the *kiss* will set his ball on the right course again.

On some links there is a portion of ground of unequal surface, but smoothly turfed, devoted to short holes. These are designed exclusively for the practice of putting, and are situate from each other at limited distances, varying from ten to twenty feet; hence their name. The novice will find them useful in acquiring a knowledge of his putter, but on no other account. They are wholly unlike the putting-greens on the regular course, and are generally held by some trick of the ground—some run or particular inclination—which, once ascertained, precludes the possibility of any merit in the play. We would therefore advise the young golfer to be cautious in playing too much at the short holes, as it might render his putting on the the course timid and erring.

Some golfers are over-solicitous about the state of their clubs. An unfortunate miss, an erratic draw, a skimming shot or too lofty swipe, or an indifferent put, are solemnly traced to some failing in the tool employed, and the delinquent club is forthwith filed and refiled, made heavier or lighter, shorter or longer, thicker or thinner in the grasp, as the case may be, to suit the passing fancy of the owner. Let not our novice lay *his* shortcomings to the charge of his club, and let him be chary of alterations. When his putter-face becomes too smooth or too rough for playing delicate strokes, filing is an allowable remedy, aided, if necessary, by a little judicious chalking; or if his driving clubs begin to crack or get very soft in the face, or otherwise inefficient, a leather face is a good substitute when filing would be unavailing. These, however, should be necessary cures of really existing evils, and not the result of caprice. Some few golfers, we may notice, prefer a leather face for

driving; it certainly is a capital elastic substance, so long as the weather is dry, but when the grass is damp, or when it rains, the virtue of a leather face is for the time gone.

The proper weight of balls is the subject of a good deal of difference of opinion amongst players. We would recommend the Golfer, however, to be provided with both light and heavy balls, to play with, or against the wind. It is a curious fact that if a light ball be struck particularly fairly, it will scarcely be touched or affected by an adverse wind; it is, however, safest to be provided as we have counselled. A medium sized ball is, according to the ball-maker's scale, No. 28; above this number, balls are considered heavy; below, light. The larger a ball is, the more easily will it be putted with; for this reason, heavy balls are preferred by those players whose chief excellence lies in the short game. In the winter season, if the player be enthusiast enough to brave the slippery ice and wreaths of snow, he will find red paint a very desirable coating for his balls. In particularly inclement winters, when the snow is too deep on the course, golfing is sometimes indulged in over a level sandy shore. Playing on such a course requires no comment.