



8

MATCH PLAYING

WHEN THE BEGINNER HAS PLAYED SOME LITTLE time, and has acquired a slight acquaintance with the various clubs, along with some facility in handling them, he turns his thoughts to conquest, and burns to match his powers with an antagonist. We propose to give such readers a few hints on the subject of match-playing, as we think a young golfer's play is very much influenced by the style of those he plays with. There are various kinds of matches in the game of golf besides the usual single contest between two players. Sometimes four engage—two against two—and this combination is called a foursome. Again, three parties play together, each for himself, and each having a separate ball.

In playing a single, the novice should neither select for his antagonist one very much worse or very much better than himself. If his opponent play very badly, the novice learns nothing from example, and may be *infected*, so to speak, with the malady of indifferent hitting; and if he play exceedingly well, our beginner is either discouraged, or, what is quite as bad, is smitten with a desire to emulate the brilliant strokes of his adversary, attempts which are almost certain to make shipwreck of his style. If, however, it happens that an opponent such as we would recommend, that is to say, one of his own calibre, does not turn up,

MATCH PLAYING

our beginner must go forth armed with a great deal of resolution. Should his antagonist be a feeble hand, the novice must not play carelessly; let him gain by his own strength and not by his adversary's weakness. Should the opposition carry too many guns, on the other hand, the young player must not be discouraged; let him summon up his resolution, watch the manner in which his adversary's strokes are made, and, if he *do* get beat, why it is a good lesson to him after all.

The great stumbling-block in the way of all players, veterans and recruits, is excitement. This proceeds from various causes. Sometimes it is generated by heavy stakes being bet on the result. The only remedy we can suggest for this malady is, not to bet at all; or at least to stake such an amount as will not influence the player's nerves by its prospective loss. Sometimes again, a golfer finds himself playing very badly, and losing every hole. Knowing he can do better, and much irritated at his ill-success, he generally takes the very plan to make it worse, if possible, by causing strength to take the place of science, or in some other equally objectionable mode. Sometimes, a player driving beautifully, more so, it may be, than is his wont, is inoculated with an intense purpose of accomplishing still greater shots; and, as in the last instance, breaks the charm and his play at the same time. Lastly, excitement is occasionally superinduced upon golfers of nervous temperament, by the exceeding closeness of a match. This often causes mistakes to be made even by the finest players, and admits we are afraid, of no cure saving the cultivation of coolness and method.

When a player, in his excitement, seeks to retrieve the fortunes of a match, or to outdo a brilliant stroke, by forcing additional strength into his swing, he is said technically

to 'press'. Nothing is more fatal to steady play than this pressing; it throws the golfer, during the sweep of his club, for the moment off his equilibrium, and thus renders the hitting very uncertain. Besides, it is a curious fact that, even when a ball chances to be correctly struck with this additional impetus, the distance is but little increased; bearing out an assertion made in another part of this work, that an excess of lead (which is equivalent to an increased rapidity of swing) does not tend to give much greater momentum to a ball when hit with a correctly executed sweep. Pressing one's play to recover a lost stroke is also radically wrong in principle; for it is very evident that the stroke must be made up if at all by some mistake committed by the opposite party, rather than by an extraordinary achievement which shall cover two good shots of the adversary.

Excitement is liable likewise to influence the short game; we can only advise in such case coolness and deliberate play. But of all other things let not the young player get irritated, by the luck of the green being apparently against him. Perhaps he finds his ball after a well calculated stroke, lying in a narrow rut; at another time when he chances to draw his ball amongst some whins, he discovers he has the additional misfortune to be down a rabbit hole; then, a beautiful long put promising to be dead by the lip of the hole, is midway thrown at right angles off its course by an unremarked stone; let him bravely defy his luck, and if he be a philosopher, even thank the fate that has given him some useful experience. The golfer should never give up a hole. This is a capital maxim, and has done wonders on a links where hazards abound.

Indecision should be overcome boldly and promptly by the player. He must have confidence in himself. If he

is conscious of having a tolerably correct theory of the game in his head, backed by some experience, he should never seek advice from his caddie. Should he play correctly, his merit is greater, and the success encourages him; should he fail, then he has himself to blame, and his idea he finds erroneous on his own showing,—a very conclusive and convincing argument.

A single is perhaps the best match for a novice to make his *début* in. He has the play all to himself, and therefore gets a more rapid knowledge of the various predicaments of the game; and besides, if fortune declare against him, there is no partner to hint wrathfully that if he had done so and so the result would have been widely different.

When two players of unequal game engage, the match is usually equalised by the giving of what is termed 'odds' by the stronger to the weaker party. This consists in allowing a certain number of extra shots to be deducted from the number played by the golfer receiving them. Suppose, for instance, he receives 'one more', that is to say an odd stroke every hole, then if his opponent does a hole in five strokes while he accomplishes it in six, it is halved, the odd shot making the number even. The exact proportion of odds may, in many cases, be considerably less than one more; accordingly, a stroke may be given each alternate hole, which is termed 'half one'; or, on every third hole, when it is called 'a third'; and so on. There is another way of giving odds in a match, by allowing the party receiving the difference so many holes ahead to start with. Now this kind of odds, although very tempting, is very insidious, and does not by any means equalise the chances of a match, especially if the party giving the odds is a much superior player to his adversary. In this latter case, for example, suppose a novice is offered ten holes to start with

on a match of twelve holes, he is dazzled with the tempting offer, and eagerly accepts, never doubting that such a large proportion of holes must ensure him the victory. But on reflection he must see that unless he wins a hole and halves another, he has no chance of the match—contingencies which, supposing his adversary to be a very superior performer, are not likely to occur. By all means, therefore, let the novice who requires odds in a match, take strokes instead of holes.

In a match with odds, both parties should play with extreme coolness, avoiding pressing and hazardous strokes; for he who gives the odds cannot afford to run dangerous risks, and he who receives them, is only benefited by their use when he keeps his ball safely on the course. The fact of an extra shot occurring in a hole should be, as much as possible, totally ignored on both sides; it should occupy no place in the calculations of their play; the only time, indeed, that it should be remembered is, when the balls lie dead, or nearly so, at the hole.

In a three-handed match, the Golfer still plays his own ball, and thus so far as the mere system of play is concerned, this triple contest differs in nothing materially from a single. Since, however, each performer is opposed to two adversaries, the *policy* of the game gets a little complicated, and is productive of a good deal of finesse. We cannot recommend young players to deal much in this kind of match, for a very obvious reason, viz., that they are, as a rule, quite incapable of following the good practical advice contained in the old saying—

'in medio tutissimus ibis';

and three balls continually off the course is no joking matter.

The usual way of reckoning the strokes played in a

single match is by the terms 'odd', 'two more', 'three more', and so on, according to the number of strokes played by a Golfer in advance of his opponent; the relative expressions being 'the like,' 'one off two,' 'one off three,' &c. This nomenclature becomes insufferably tedious and confusing when three balls are played; and we therefore suggest to the beginner, who may chance to be engaged in such a match, that a much clearer way is for each party to count his strokes.

A foursome, or match of two against two, is a favourite, and very interesting kind of game. One ball is played on each side; thus a certain harmony of purpose and play should subsist between the two partners in such a match. The best foursome alliance is, when between the two Golfers on a side, all the points of the game will be played well. Thus a long driver and a steady short game player make an excellent couple for a foursome. Each knows exactly what the other can do and so arrange their play that the particular strokes which one is good for shall fall to be executed by him. This circumstance is a great help to the novice after he has overcome the difficulties of putting, or some other part of the game. He then may engage in a foursome, having for his partner one who will supply his deficiencies in driving, or as it is phrased on the Links—'keep him up in the swiping'; this combination will at once encourage him and give him good example in those points where he fails, while, in the meantime, he takes more pleasure in the game.

In foursomes, coolness and command of temper cannot be too much enjoined on the unsteady player, for in addition to the reasons we have already urged against the indulgence of excitement, he has a partner whose interests and enjoyment he is bound to consult as much as his own,

and it is doubtful whether this can be accomplished by wild driving or haphazard play. This species of match is a favourite one amongst oldsters, as the subdivision of labour enables them to enjoy all the excitement of a contest with one-half of the usual fatigue.

The great match, however, on the golfing course is the periodical contest for a club-medal. Then the golfer has arrayed against his single arm, not his every day antagonist, whose play he knows, point by point, but the first performers of the day; the mirrors of golfing chivalry collected from all quarters to uphold their well-earned fame. We must avouch nevertheless, our solemn disbelief that the score on a medal-day is a true criterion of what a golfer can do. Just let the reader picture the awe inspiring preparations; the deserted green, waving with flags, tabooed from pressure of competitors' foot, till the word be given; the whispering circles of stalwart golfers, all soon to be engaged in friendly combat; and, most dread sight of all, —alas! that it should be so,—the waving silks of beauty and fashion, flitting round the starting point, like the fair dames of the ancient tournament. What can an unfortunate fellow, with nervous tendencies, do, but miss his ball, and start away with a tingling sensation of shame! Many a medal has been lost by a very champion of golf in consequence of this fatal miss at the start.

Whilst repeating our somewhat monotonous advice of playing coolly and deliberately, we would caution good golfers against a fault they glide into unwittingly; that is, extreme caution in putting. We have repeatedly seen old hands, who were first-rate performers, lose their chance of coming in at the top of the list by this seeming prudence, after making their long game in the most masterly style. They forget how often the medal is taken by an 'outsider,'

or, at all events, they overlook the reason why. The cause is simply this: an indifferent player, knowing that his chances are feeble against the array of golfing talent assembled on the course, unless he is very lucky, rushes his ball at the hole when he gets on the putting green, seeking by a steal or gobble to gain a stroke or more on the hole. This chance play is more often successful than it ought to be. The more evenly couples are matched on medal-days the better will the play be; nothing distracts a good performer more than seeing continual missing and wild play; in the latter case, indeed, he has to wait with what patience he may till his unlucky opponent tracks his wandering stroke amongst the whins.

In playing for club honours, we only need say in conclusion, avoid pressing, and by all means try and give your irons a holiday.