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THE REFINEMENTS OF PUTTING

By WALTER J. TRAVIS.

Putting versus Driving—

I AM NOT a believer in long driving, which is not at the same time good driving, and I think that even yet, after the lesson has been many times taught to them, many players hopelessly underestimate the value of reliable putting. Putting was one of the last matters I made a close study of when I took up the game of golf. The first thing that strikes you when you come to analyze the game is that of the total number of strokes played in a perfect round of golf nearly half the number are absorbed in these little putts on the green. As I have already said, it took me some time to make this discovery. But when I did I gave my whole mind to a solution of the problem. Suppose a hole is a par 5, it is meant that the player shall be on the green in three strokes and shall have two left for the putts. If the hole is a par 4, he has to be on the green in two, and has two left for putting. If it is a par 3, he must be on the green with his tee-shot and has two left for putts.

This is the simple mathematical reckoning of the business; and very few golfers seem to put it to themselves that putting is really half the game; that they have twice as many putts—and, alas! sometimes more—

as drives in the course of a round, and that, therefore, bad putting at a hole is twice as costly as bad driving, and excellent putting infinitely more remunerative than the finest play from the tee. On the green at least, you may, indeed, very often gain a whole stroke; and it is the stroke that tells.

Now watch the man who drives the longest balls throughout the round, and count the number of times when, in his desperate efforts to drive farther and farther, he goes clean off the line and into rough grass or other entanglements; then count the number of times that he loses the hole as a consequence of getting into these difficulties, and reckon for yourself how much his long driving has benefited him.

Unless a man can absolutely depend upon himself surely it is better to practice a little self-denial in driving and keep straight. Let your opponent go into the rough if he likes. Apart from this view of the matter, consider how very seldom does the long driver, even when his stroke is well played, gain anything substantial over the average driver. Take a hole of average length—say 350 yards. The latter drives his tee-shot 200 yards, and, being left with a comfortable iron shot to the

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green, is perfectly satisfied that he has done everything that is humanly possible in the circumstances. He is nicely in the middle of the course, clear of all hazards, and his second shot will be as easy of accomplishment as it was ever meant to be. He has insured himself against all accidents; that is to say, he has taken twenty or thirty yards off his drive and been guaranteed for safety. Now what does the long driver do? He smites the ball to the utmost extent of his power with object of out-driving his opponent. Why he does so he himself does not know. He cannot possibly reach the green, 350 yards away, in a single stroke. Therefore, he will have to play another shot to reach it, as his opponent has to do, and the only difference will be that, if his drive has come off as

he intended, he may have his to play from a range of 120 yards instead of 150 yards, as in his opponent's case. That is not a very tangible advantage after all. And he has run all the extra risk of trouble.

If a player stands a chance of gaining a whole stroke by tremendous driving, as distinguished from average driving, at a hole, let him by all means run the sporting risk if so disposed, which he must undoubtedly run when he makes the

attempt; but before he makes up his mind to do so let him mentally map out the play at any given hole and see whether, in the absence of fozzles, there is really any good prospect of his gaining that stroke. If he does this fairly and logically he will see that very seldom does he gain it.

Direction and Strength—

WHEN I came to study putting at the beginning I realized that there were two chief essentials in it, which, once mastered, made it comparatively easy. The first of these essentials is that the ball shall be made to travel in the proper line for the hole; and the second, that just sufficient strength shall be put into the stroke as to ensure the ball reaching the hole with so very little to spare that there shall be no risk of

its running far past. Anybody can be taught with practice how to putt straight, but nobody can give him a hint of value as to how to putt with the proper strength. This is more an instinct than anything else. Mr. Arnold Haultain, in "The Mystery of Golf," says: "Putting is a fine art. It requires the most delicate and educated touch. To measure the precise amount of force necessary to propel your ball (with a certain spin) 5 feet—50 feet . . .



MR. WALTER J. TRAVIS—Stance and address for putting.

This is not learned in a fortnight. One putter I remember whose putting was a delight to the eye. He seemed positively to infuse sight and intelligence into his ball. The way that small sphere would start from his club, mount an incline, negotiate a curve, look for the hole, and, endowed with some curious spin, drop unhesitatingly in, without dreaming for a moment of rimming it, or running over it or stopping short of it, was a sight to make one wise. It taught one that even on the green—perhaps especially on the green, there was scope, and abundance of scope, for the play of the subtlest and most intelligent skill.”

NEARLY everybody has his own style of putting, and it is only with hesitation that I advise particular methods; for if a man is a good putter, as putters go, it is probably best for him to keep to the style which he has very likely dropped upon by accident. You cannot be dogmatic about putting, as you can about the methods of driving, for there is far more liberty in method. However, there seems to me to be some chief principles, adherence to which I regard as very helpful.

Stance—

THE QUESTION of stance is a very important one, although in the same day you rarely see two players adopt exactly the same stance in putting. Some of them putt off the right leg and some off the left. In my opinion, the right leg is the better. Now, in putting, everything depends upon the proper action of the wrists, and the arms, *from the elbows only*, more especially the right. In a longish putt the upper part of the left arm is brought into play, up to the shoulder, but in a restrained way.

This in the back stroke. The body does not enter into the question at all, for whilst a putt is being accomplished it should be absolutely motionless, and when it is not so there is a much greater likelihood than usual of the putt being missed.

The Hands—

I BELIEVE that putting should be done always with one hand—with one hand actively at work, that is. The left one should be used only for the purpose of swinging the club-head backwards preparatory to making the stroke. When it has done that its work is over, and the right hand should then be sole master of the situation, the left being merely kept in attachment to it for steadying purposes. When only one hand is thus employed, the gain in accuracy is very great. Two hands at work on a short putt or a long one tend to distraction. When the stroke is being made the grip of the right hand should be firm, but not tight, and after the impact the club-head should be allowed to pass clean through with an easy following stroke. The follow-through should, indeed, be as long as it is possible to make it comfortably, and with this object in view, at the moment of touching the ball the grip of the fingers of the left hand should be considerably relaxed, so that the right hand may go on doing its work without interruption. Never hit or jerk the ball, as so many players do. There is nothing that pays so well as the easy follow-through stroke.

The Grip—

IT WILL be observed from the accompanying illustration that my grip is different from what may be termed the orthodox, the first finger of the left hand overlapping the

