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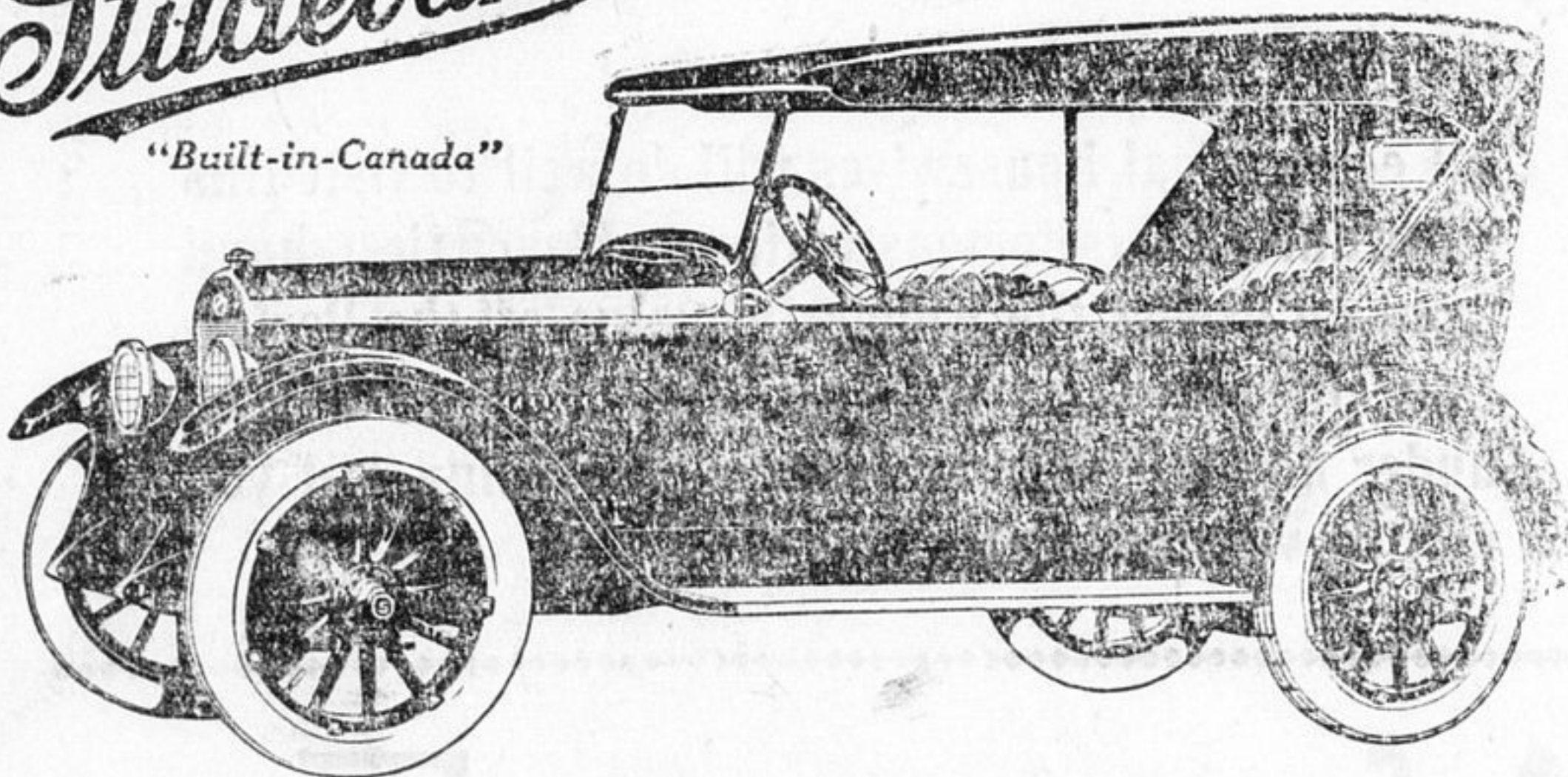
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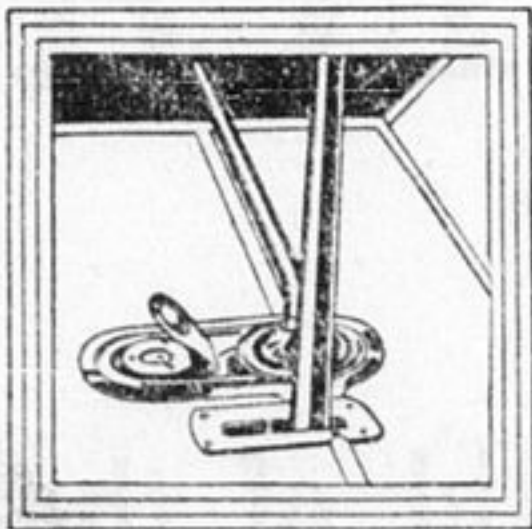
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GOLF

And It's Minimum Essentials
by FRANK THOMPSON, AMATEUR CHAMPION OF CANADA.

NO. 7—PUTTING

"The man who can putt is a match for anybody," is as true today as when Park coined the phrase. Park, White, Travers and Travis have all attained success more by their putters than by other clubs. Indeed the latter won the British championship solely by his phenomenal putting. Travis is a striking example of what may be accomplished by accurate short work. Never long from the tee (in fact there is one course on which he would rarely play because of the long carries), he more than recouped himself by accurate work on the green.

When one considers that par golf allows two putts to a green, and assuming par 72, which is a high average, putting accounts for just half the game—a proportionate value which many think too high. Other things being equal (which they never are) good or bad putting will affect the game because of its proportionate value, more than any other shot. So it behooves the ambitious golfer to study this department of the game carefully. There is no reason why the duffer should not be as accurate as the most brilliant star (as indeed he often is even better).

I have no panacea for getting the ball into the hole in one putt. But every golfer has hopes.

I have a few observations which I think go to the root of the matter, irrespective of whatever system one uses. Putting is largely mental, and by this I do not mean that it is a question of nerve or courage and not even confidence, although to accomplish anything one must believe it possible to do. But it is mental largely because its difficulties are created ones. Instead of treating the putt as an abbreviated shot and playing it largely the way we do the other shots on a smaller scale, the majority of golfers devise some system for putting and the more complicated the system, the more enthusiastically do they shout about it. Vardon himself has fallen into this pitfall when he speaks of putting as a "game within a game." Vardon's poor putting is proverbial, but one should remember it is only his short putts. There is no better approach putter living than Vardon, and these he plays in a straight forward, simple method, but the short ones he jabs and stabs in an uncertain, agonizing manner. Whether he has any physical defect, as he supposes, is doubtful—at any rate if the putt is to be conceived as something different from the rest of the game from our viewpoint, his mental conception is the defect.

Putting is not a question of nerve. The average man has average courage. It is unnatural to believe that the man with courage in everything else will not display it on the putting green, if he has the knowledge to putt and understands his failure to do so.

There is the classical case of the ex-hunter who took up golf, who could not hole a two-footer although he could and had faced the man-eating tiger with the knowledge that the least tremor of his finger meant his death, and he had not failed. There is another case of an ex-rugby star, noted for his courage on the field, who after missing putt after putt, threw down his putter and offered to demonstrate his courage in fistie combat with any or all of the gallery. It seems to me that the failure of these men, like others, was due more to lack of knowledge than lack of nerve. True it is that a person must have confidence in himself. One must believe a putt is possible. The ideal is always to try to hole out so long as one is in range of the pin. Rarely should one be satisfied with "laying" dead, and indeed one will more often be trying to hole out than if he generally tries to get near the hole.

Of putting there are almost as many styles as there are golfers; men putt badly in all styles and well in all styles. Some advocate putting with an open stance; others putt with a closed one. Some putt with the weight on the left foot; others with it on the right; some putt standing straight up; others putt standing crouched low, so that there is little wonder that the beginner is perplexed by these different styles.

The root of the whole matter of stance is that one should stand the way he feels the most natural and the way in which he can the most easily see a line from his ball to the hole, for unless the player can see an imaginary line from ball to hole, I don't see how he can tell when the club is squarely behind the ball or at right angles to this line. Some players, in getting the line, pick out a blade of grass a couple of feet ahead of the ball on the line, and then line the club up with this. Sometimes I have done this in long putts, and anything which helps one get direction accurately is to be recommended. But usually I find looking

at the hole sufficient. One should then stand comfortably. Off hand I should say that this will be neither too straight nor too stooped, nor with the feet close together or too far apart, although in the particular case it may be any or all of these.

Usually players try to reduce putting to an exact science by taking up a mathematical stance. For example, the left toe pointing to the hole and the right foot at right angles. The whole body is held rigid, including the head. The arms are kept out of the shot. Every part of the body becomes set except the wrists, which take the club back with mathematical precision. Logically one is impressed with these systems; they are so very plausible on paper, but they are first and last artificial and unnatural methods.

The best putters are those who putt smoothly and easily, and it is impossible to putt freely when every part of the body is set. The whole basis of putting is absolute relaxation. The minute one "sets" himself is the moment he opens the door to all manner of putting evils.

Is not the true reason then why one misses so many short putts due solely to this fact of "setting" muscles. The short putt is so easy looking that we try all the harder to hole it so that we may not appear ludicrous if we miss it and by trying so hard we invariably tense ourselves. And when we tense ourselves it becomes so much more difficult to hit a true smooth blow, with the result that we usually stab and jab and do other numerous things. When one misses an easy putt our anxiety causes us to become more careful, which usually means becoming more tense, until finally it becomes impossible to hole out even if the hole were the size of a pail.

Instead of setting ourselves as statues, one should relax. Concentrate on developing a smooth, easy stroke, and above all try to hit the ball truly in the centre of the club. Few golfers realize how easy it is to miss-hit a putt. The results are not so glaring as in a miss-hit drive and for this reason one is apt to go on repeating; but failure on the green is more disastrous for a missed drive may be retrieved, but a missed putt is lost beyond recall.

In gauging a putt we assume that if the ball is hit truly it will require so much strength. Now a topped ball or

a schlaflied ball will not run the same distance as a truly hit one. Neither will a heeled ball nor a toed ball have the same results as one hit in the centre of the club; so above all, watch the ball until the club strikes it fairly.

So far as the mechanics of the swing are concerned, if one putts in the same way as he plays, the other shots, it should mean that the club will pass along the imaginary line running through the ball to the hole, before and after the ball is struck for some distance. The putter should pass along and inside this line, but rarely, I think, if ever, outside of it. Although it should pass inside the line, not, I think, in too sharp an arc.

One should check up his putting swing occasionally to see if it is mechanically correct. If the putt is mechanically wrong, in all probability the rest of his shots are, unless he is consciously putting according to some system. Some deliberately cut their putt, or in other words, slice them. Others again try to putt with drag or back spin. Frankly, I strongly advise players not to attempt any of these refinements, for it is only making something complex which is otherwise simple. Remember, the shortest distance between two points, which for our purpose is the ball and the hole, is in a straight line.

Then, of course, one should be up or give the hole a chance. There have been some good putters who have dribbled the ball into the hole, notably Kirkaldy, and Travis when he won the British Amateur. But as a general rule, golfers are faint-hearted on the putting green, with this proviso, that usually in four-ball games one usually goes for the hole so vigorously that even where direction is perfect the ball rarely gobbles the hole because of its strength.

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Next article: Common Faults.

Iroquois Falls is organizing for the establishment of a public library in that town. The initiative in the matter was taken by the Iroquois Falls Board of Trade.

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