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GOLF And It's Minimum Essentials

by FRANK THOMPSON, AMATEUR CHAMPION OF CANADA.

No. 8—COMMON FAULTS

In writing of the faults of golf one has a sort of negative check on the swing. By emphasizing the "don'ts" the essentials of the swing stand out in sharp relief. The writer hopes that if any essentials have been missed in the positive articles they may be covered in this one.

Of all the faults which beset the golfer, the greatest is a faulty co-operation between the hands and the body. When every muscle works harmoniously from the hands to the feet, there results what is called timing, without which par golf is impossible.

The hands should dominate the swing from its inception until its completion. They should have such control of the club that if necessary they could make the club head describe an arc in any plane. They should be masterful, assertive, compelling, and dictatorial, for whatever power goes into the shot must of necessity go by way of them.

A distinction has been drawn between what are called initiatory movements and responsive ones. The hands initiate the swing and the knees, shoulders, etc. respond to the urge started by the hands. This is a sound doctrine with perhaps certain qualifications. We know too well that the moment we lose control of the club, the hands cease to function. The precaution is this, that it is just possible and is often the case, to delay the movement of the body too long. The pictures show that the left knees of the stars bend exceedingly early in the swing, and any conscious attempt to delay this movement until the club reaches the horizontal will destroy timing. This is not an uncommon sight, but is, however, not so common as the reverse, which is getting the body into the swing too quickly, or trying to do the work with the body. This is certainly the commonest of all faults. In the up-swing the body attempts to start the swing, and in the down swing it gets ahead of the club and exerts its effort far too soon. How often we hear "Body in too soon." The player should place the emphasis on the hands, which should be the masters of the swing, and the knees, shoulders, etc. should be willing helpers, which enter into the swing willingly and promptly.

It should be remembered that the swing of the star blends so harmoniously that it is impossible to tell when one movement starts and another finishes. This is attained largely, I think, by placing emphasis on the hands, which should always be active. Another prevalent fault, one which also militates against proper timing, is tensing of the muscles. Every player, and especially every beginner, must continually be on his guard for this. Success at golf comes through ease rather than effort. But there are very few who ever learn this thoroughly. Whenever we attempt to get a little distance or play into a wind, we invariably tighten our muscles, with the result that we do not get as far as usual.

Relaxation is the key to success at golf; and the earlier a beginner learns this, the quicker will his progress be. Tension is usually exhibited in the grip, the forearm muscles and in the legs. Most beginners stand with their feet too far apart. Usually when we try to put any great effort into anything, we brace ourselves by separating our feet, but golf is a scientific game, and success does not come by great effort. I strongly recommend beginners and others to stand with the feet close together, as it becomes more difficult to swipe and easier to get rhythm into the swing than when the feet are wide apart. Don't strain, but relax, and it is a safe rule to go on, that whenever tension is present the swing is wrong.

Another common fault is falling back and in extreme cases running away from the ball. This often causes the ball to be topped, and altogether ruins the swing, as a great deal of energy is never exerted on the ball. This is often caused by the desire to keep the head still. When one tries to keep the head still he invariably makes the body rigid. In the player's mad attempt to keep his head still he often crowds extra weight onto the left foot and with extra weight on the left foot it becomes so much easier to fall back. The cure is to allow the body to move naturally and let it turn quite freely and fully. Forget about the head, for every good player moves his head slightly, which of necessity he must, unless his neck is made of rubber. It inclines slightly but does not move up or down, nor from side to side.

Another temptation is curing one fault by substituting another; or mistaking symptoms for causes; or building the swing up by artificial means. Sometimes one can be cured of slicing by turning the face of the club in,

This is only offsetting one fault by substituting another, and does not change the swing at all. The cure does not go to the root of the matter and should only be resorted to in extreme cases, and then usually as a means of restoring confidence, which it sometimes does.

The fact that the right elbow is close to the body and the left arm comparatively straight, is not the cause of a good swing, but the symptom, and this is vastly different. An observer notices that with good players the right elbow slips around the body, the left shoulder goes well around, the left knee bends well in, and the left arm assumes straightness and the observer consciously tries to duplicate these things. He may succeed and yet the result is anything but a good swing. All these points are symptoms of a good swing, and not necessarily the cause of it. By deliberately straightening the left arm the whole swing is deadened and rendered lifeless. The main thing is to see that the hands are under control and if they are these minutiae will in all probability be present.

As body movement has been touched on before, I shall leave it here with this reminder, that in order to send the ball a great distance there must be a free, full twist to the body. Certainly with a restricted body movement slicing is apt to be prevalent in the drive. In iron work there is not the same necessity for free body movement, as it is accuracy and not distance that is aimed at. And then a slice is not so disastrous in iron play, in fact cultivated by many.

At the risk of repetition I again warn the reader against the temptation of slavishly imitating other players. Imitation may be the sincerest kind of flattery, but one should remember that an imitation rarely, if ever, equals the original. So long as the mechanical principles underlying the swing are correct the player should not worry about personal characteristics or idiosyncrasies. These lend color to the swing making it free and spontaneous rather than studied and stereotyped.

One should play golf in the easiest way possible, and a player must in the end find this out for himself. Certainly trying to play a shot exactly as another player as a rule will not be satisfactory. The substance of the swing of most of the leading players is iden-

tical, but the form is vastly different. There are numerous faults, such as slicing, pulling, socketing, topping, etc. but I hope the above has been general and wide enough in its treatment to include all these. (Copyrighted British and Colonial Press, Limited).
Next articles: Tournament Golf.

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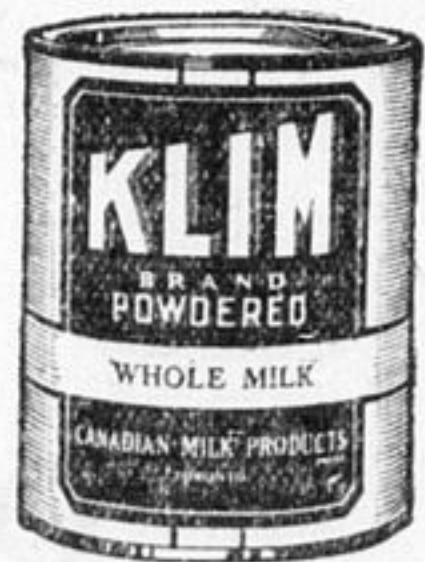
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