

Still the Same—or Different?

IT is only necessary to pick up an old golf book and read through it to find that the golf swing has not changed fundamentally. As I study these old volumes I realise that I am impressed more by the dress of the day, by the coats the players wore, by their small-diameter caps, by their cycling breeches and hickory-shafted clubs, and my eye tends to brand the action as old-fashioned before I have even studied the swing itself.

I often wish I could dress up some of the old champions in the modern sweater and slacks, two-coloured shoes and, say, an eye-shield, and then ask golf students to say what era they represent and from what country they come. This difference would be even more marked in the female ranks,



GEOFFREY MUSCUTT has been awarded his Blue for Cambridge and will play in the 'Varsity match at Rye in March.

for the ankle-length skirts, heavy-looking headgear and blouses or long coats would be seen to be replaced by the below-knee-length skirt and short-sleeved sweater with, perhaps, an eye-shield too. I know that golf-clubs have changed most of all, and Charles ("Chick") Evans, writing in a golf magazine in which he was interested in 1914, said it took him four years to collect together a set of iron clubs which balanced up and which pleased him. I wonder what the modern golfer would think of this extra problem if it existed to-day! It was, of course, a reason to go to every pro.'s shop, hoping to find the club missing from your set or maybe to find a better and more steely hickory shaft which would be an improvement on what you already used.

History repeats itself, runs the old adage, and when in pre-1914 days one reads that a serious, successful golf-ball manufacturer declared that finality had been reached in the distance a golf-ball could travel, then it is amusing to think that there is quite a firm opinion to-day that the limit has been reached once again.

The thicker grip of some fifty years ago, necessary because of the cushioning effect

required to deaden the sting of the impact with the non-resilient gutty ball of the day, made the position of the hands on the shaft look agricultural by our standards, when a sort of finger-grip is a natural because of the thinner grips in vogue.

I have proved to my satisfaction by my own experiences, and from encouraging others to use the two-knuckle grip (where the back of the left hand is facing the hole at the address) that if this hand is so placed on the club, a lot of latitude can be allowed in the positioning of the right hand. This means that it can be set at any angle, even palm-upwards, and good results can come—it can even be a complete palm grip with the shaft lying between the first finger and thumb.

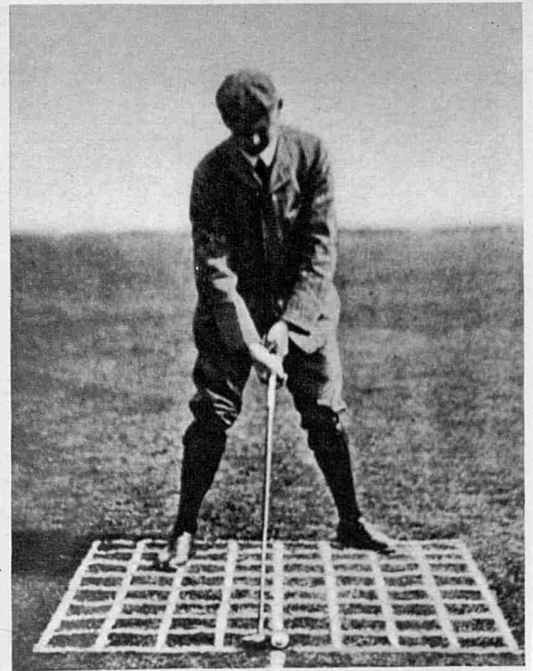
I start out by teaching the two V's up the shaft as a classical approach, but if I find it "heavy going," then I will settle for a free, fast hit-through with the right hand in any position, stipulating only that the left hand stays put.

I have come across a photograph of one of our greatest old-timers, John Ball, who has a terrific championship record: he was a lightweight, too, and yet played the testing Hoylake course, his home ground, better than his contemporaries, using a double-handed grip, with a perfect left-hand position and the palm grip with the right hand. To succeed as he did is not entirely a question of method, for a good nerve and a courageous spirit are almost as important; but, whatever the method, it must be one that is tension-free under pressure.

I have an idea that the main value of a palm grip with the right hand is that it allows a non-cramped top-of-the-swing position and permits the club-head to be thrown freely at the ball on impact. No tightening is really possible if the fingers are kept out of it. We have had many champions since John Ball, using a palm grip with the right hand, and I created a very surprised and contented pupil only a short time ago by



MISS BRIDGET JACKSON, eighteen-year-old girl champion and Midland Ladies Champion, who has been invited to make a six-months tour of Australia during this year.



A GIANT OF THE PAST: John Ball addressing the ball for a drive. He won the Amateur Championship eight times and the Open once. His left-hand grip is clearly seen.

"selling" him such a grip when he had been persevering not too satisfactorily with an orthodox overlapping grip for a long time. It comes as a real shock to a conservative frame of mind to find an experienced teacher asking him to forget all he has learned in the way of hand action and to begin again to swing the club with this most unusual and ungainly form of grip—for it does not look elegant.

There is one definitely encouraging aspect to such an experiment: it feels so different that any open-minded golfer must say to himself: "At least this I have not tried. It must open a new world of experiment for me." The throwing about of the club-shaft in the hands during the swing is a very frightening thing to players educated to hang on all the time; they feel at first that it cannot be right, and only the results begin to persuade them that perhaps it will work after all.

To-day one never hears of a push-shot, yet all the low-flying shots to the pin are played in the same way as they always have been, the loft on the club-face being diminished by the action of pushing the hands forward in the impact area. The common wedge shot of to-day is actually a push-shot with a heavy, broad-soled niblick. In golf played with the bigger ball, even the thick top bladed clubs are designed to contribute to keeping the ready-to-fly-high ball from achieving too high a trajectory and so not being progressive enough. The push-shot gives a more forceful, flying type of ball, one which goes to the pin by the shortest air route.

The interesting part about these lower-flying strokes is that they can also be produced by a controlled wrist-rolling action, and this has always been a popular way to play them, but it must be acknowledged that this action gives a more running type of ball, for the ball is not squeezed as much as in the square-bladed push-stroke, for it is hit down but with a combined up-and-over action.

So, taking all in all, everything is still the same in the action of striking the ball; golfers have only altered their actions a little to cope with the different peculiarities of the ever-improving golf-balls and clubs.

Henry Cotton

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