Chapter I. The Methods of Champions

POWER IN THE LONG GAME AND HOW THEY GET IT

Power in the long game is to-day of the very first importance. I never can agree with Willie Park when he says that 'the man who can putt is a match for any one.' There seems to be a law of averages which works out fairly certainly in putting. It may seem strange, but it is perfectly true that when a man becomes a first-class golfer his putting becomes 'just average.' I have a case in mind. C. H. Mayo burst into golfing fame, as I did myself, in 1906 at Hollinwell, when he ran up to Sandy Herd in the *News of the World* final. Now Mayo in 1906 was not a first-class golfer, but he certainly could putt, and most people thought his good results were the outcome of the amount of trouble he took on the green. He came to take all this trouble in rather an amusing way. James Braid was in his heyday when Mayo first took part in a tournament. Being a keen student of the game, Mayo had a look at the then champion, who left, as he still leaves, nothing to chance on the green. He thought that this walking up and down the line was the right thing to do; so he proceeded to adopt Braid's 'don't hurry' methods. The only difference between them then
was that Mayo used to get the putts in, whereas Braid didn't. In time Mayo improved his general game. Then his putting became normal, and so it happens to most golfers. When I hear of a likely young player, the first thing I ask about him is, 'How big is he?' If he is big enough I always think he has a chance. In these days of 6300-yard courses a budding champion has to be able to hit the ball far enough. He is no good otherwise. You must have the punch. There is no doubt in my mind that Abe Mitchell's greatest asset is his length, and so it is with Ted Ray. It is easier to get near a hole with an iron than with a brassy. I don't think it would be a match if either Ray or Mitchell were to play any of his rivals on a course where there were a dozen holes over five hundred yards. Either of them would be just as likely to be on all those twelve greens with a couple of shots as is the other man with two and a mashie, and I always prefer the man who can hit them to the man who depends upon holing them. Both Ray and Mitchell make the ball do all its work in the air, on account of their both having upright swings and not being too heavy on the left foot at the top of their swings. I must add, however, that in the last year Ray has more or less done away with the sway of the body and taken to what I think a better method, that of keeping his body within the space that it occupied while he was addressing the ball. This means that he has now more weight on the left foot at the top of the swing. The result is that he hits the ball well more often and it has a lower trajectory, though his shots are still all carry. James
Braid, another big driver, noticeably against a wind, has relatively more weight on the left foot or, to be exact, on the ball of the left great toe than has any other first-class player. Consequently his trajectory is much lower than either Mitchell's or Ray's.

The difference in method as regards the disposition of weight at the top of the swing comes to this, that Braid being heavy on the left foot at the top of the swing hits the ball down, whereas Ray and Mitchell, having less pressure on the left at the top, hit it up. For this reason Braid will outdrive Ray against a wind, and vice versa. One often sees in front of the spot where Braid's ball lay the roots of the grass laid bare by his club, but you will never see this done by Ray. Unfortunately for him Ray cannot successfully apply this extra pressure on the left that he wants when he is battling against a wind, nor can Braid get any lighter on the left when he wants to get height. This is really the ideal to be aimed at: heavy on the left when you want to keep or hit the ball down, and light on the left when you wish to get height.

Mention of playing in a wind brings to my mind some of the wonderful performances of the redboundable J. H. Taylor. Taylor has always been looked upon as the prospective champion if only it blows hard enough; but I should never back Taylor to beat Braid at keeping a ball down against a head-wind, nor could one ever compare their respective lengths, for Taylor has always played the odd to Braid. The whole secret of Taylor's golf lies in the amount of under-spin he gets on the ball. He has always been
content to keep the face of his clubs 'open,' so sacrificing length for direction. In his old age he threatens to 'shut' the face of his club in order to get length, but it cannot be. That left wrist of his works its way under the handle of the club until there are wrinkles in it which will tell a tale one day. On account of his flat swing Taylor has to be light on his left at the top; as a matter of fact he requires so little pressure there that he is on the tip of his toe, which cannot possibly take much weight. But Taylor stands a little more in front of the ball than do most players, and this counterbalances the small amount of weight that he has on his left foot at the top of the swing.

Harry Vardon, who is above everything else a stylist, had ten years ago what I call a very comfortable way of getting his poise at the top. He employed a great deal of right hand in the up-swing and did not allow the club-head to lead. This had the effect of bringing practically all the weight from the left foot on to the right; in other words, he had a slight sway of the body. Then, when the club was more than half-way up, the weight gradually followed the club-head forward, so that by the time he had reached the top of the swing the ball of the left toe was carrying a good deal of pressure. Nowadays Vardon's body only occupies during his up-swing the space which it takes up when he is addressing the ball. This means that he pivots more, and a flatter swing results. The weight at the top of the swing is distributed in the same way as by his old method, but this result is arrived at in a different way. The
screwing up of the body during the up-swing is physically much harder work than the right and left sway, but this latter method is so exacting in another way that all hard hitting has to be left out.

Here, then, we see that Vardon, Herd, and Ray, after twenty years of swaying in different degrees, have come to make their up-swings in no more space than they take up when addressing the ball. I like the look of Ray and Herd much better now than formerly, but I should like to see Vardon back at his double body movement.

I have said that Vardon’s right hand has a lot to do in the making of his swing. As a matter of fact, whether a man has an upright swing or a flat one entirely depends upon whether he is a two-handed swinger, or a left-handed swinger such as J. H. Taylor. In Taylor and Vardon we have the two greatest exponents of the two methods. Taylor works the club to the top of his swing, which is flat, with a gradual turning of the left wrist, so that at the top of the swing this wrist is under the club-handle. His greatest trouble is to keep the right hand out of his up-swing. Vardon is the upright swinger, who slings the club to the top with both hands employed. The movement that I call the ‘sling’ comes from a sudden bending of both wrists, which takes place when the club-head has travelled six inches from the ball. Mitchell, Braid, and Ray are all two-handed swingers. Ray adopts Vardon’s method of letting the hands lead the way for a few inches, and then comes the sudden wristwork which actually carries the club to the top. Braid and Mitchell make the club-head lead,
so that their swings are flatter, and the wristwork to the top is more gradual. Moreover, they have a way of pivoting suddenly with the body, and this helps the club to the top.

The length of swing varies in the case of these different players, and in a very interesting way. The swings of Vardon, Ray, and Mitchell all go beyond the horizontal, while those of Braid and Taylor do not. On account of its flatness Taylor's swing never could have been a long one, such as Vardon had a number of years ago. Personally I am rather in favour of the shorter swing, and to-day there is a general tendency towards a shortening of the swing. If one looks at the photographs taken fifteen years ago and compares them with recent ones, it becomes clear that swings have been cut down considerably. And a good thing too, as nobody can hit the ball any further with a swing that goes beyond the horizontal than it can be hit with a shorter swing. Only the other day Mitchell was telling me that he had ricked a shoulder muscle, which made his swing for the time being quite perceptibly shorter, and he described in very forcible language the length of the shots he was hitting. 'What hopes would he have had with the gutty?' we often hear people say when some one with a swing such as is commonly called a half swing knocks a modern ball two hundred and thirty yards. As a matter of fact one of the longest drivers I ever saw with a gutty was a man whose swing was well short of the horizontal. I never saw the long-hitting Douglas Rolland, but I have been told that he had a 'full' swing—that is, one that went beyond
A DRIVE BY ABE MITCHELL

This set of pictures is composed of two series, the second of which was taken in order to fill some gaps in the first and so show the entire swing.
A DRIVE BY ABE MITCHELL
A DRIVE BY ABE MITCHELL.
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A DRIVE BY DUNCAN
A DRIVE BY DUNCAN
A DRIVE BY HARRY VARDON
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the horizontal. There may be this to be said in favour of the long swing. There is not the same tendency to hit straight away as soon as ever the player has arrived at the top. He is not yet in a position to deliver a blow, since his wrists are relaxed and his hands open. There may thus be less danger of his hitting too soon. On the other hand, the player in this style has to readjust his grip before the blow can be delivered, and this is not an easy matter by any means.