Chapter XV. The Younger Generation of British Players

As I have dealt with American golfers I think I ought to add something about the younger generation of British ones with whom the task of representing us against America will rest. And I want to say again that if I appear critical it is only because one cannot analyse a golfer's methods without some measure of criticism. It is, as I am sure my readers will believe, meant to be the friendliest kind of criticism.

There are now in this country a very large and continually increasing number of good players, but I do not, at the moment, see any who are likely quite to take the place of the 'triumvirate' among the professionals or of Mr. Ball and Mr. Hilton among the amateurs. I hope I am wrong, but I can only say what I think. It seems to me that for the time being people are sacrificing accuracy too much for length. I don't think there is any particular secret to explain the modern long driving. The ball has a great deal to do with it. There are certainly many fine long drivers, but as compared with those elder players they go more frequently off the course. They can, and do often, play brilliantly, but I do not quite see them keeping on and on, always at the top or thereabouts, like the champions I have mentioned.

And now to take some individual players. I will
begin with the professionals and naturally first of all with Havers the Open Champion. The strongest points of Havers's game are perhaps his physique and his temperament. He is a fine, big, strong man and has a splendid temperament, never getting unduly elated or depressed, and always pegging away. Moreover, he has undoubtedly got the punch. He can hit that ball, and he has this great merit that he goes slow over it. That is a very good thing because he has a swing which might go decidedly wrong if he hurried it. I do not honestly think that his methods are quite as sound and orthodox as his predecessors'. The two points that I venture to criticise are his management of his hands and of his left foot. I think that his hands are too far over the club—one sees too many of his knuckles. The result is that, to my mind, there is too much turning over of the wrists. He begins his swing by a turn of the left wrist, and one notices it particularly in his iron clubs, with which his swing is very decidedly flat. As to his left foot he seems to me inclined to throw too much weight on to it and that too soon. There is none of that slight sway to the right to begin with which I like to see. Possibly he may slightly modify these points of method as he gets older, and I think he will be a better player if he does. Whether I am right or wrong as to this he has clearly got a very fine game in him.

Of all our other younger players I believe that Percy Allis will turn out to be the best. He is twenty-six now but he still has plenty of time and his methods seem to me almost ideal, with a beautiful grip and
the swing of the club well under control. Of all the younger ones he has the soundest style. Boomer is another player of great possibilities, a fine natural athlete and player of games. I regard him as still learning. He has a brother who knows the game well, but I think he has learned something too from Mr. Esmond who plays in Paris. He does not 'sling' the club, but then neither does Havers. He takes it up chiefly with the left hand and comes down with great power. He might do great things.

Another strong player is C. A. Whitcombe, a fine big fellow. Whitcombe gave me a great fight in the News of the World Tournament at Walton Heath in 1919, and as that was one of his first appearances in a big tournament I was struck both by his play and his power of sticking to it. I do not like that 'sliding' grip of his which allows the club to drop into the web of the thumb. Otherwise, it is a fine style. A player of a different sort is Frank Ball. He has not the same power and physique nor so good a style, but he is a wonderfully game player and is a most difficult man to beat. He is the sort of player who at a critical moment will hit his ball bang up to the hole when there is a wood close behind the green and everybody else is short. And he will bang his ball at the hole likewise and hole the putts.

Then there are some older players who have lately come into greater prominence than before. There is James Ockenden, who this year won the French Championship, a good player and a great fighter. He looks like Braid in miniature as he gets that right shoulder of his into the ball. His is, on the whole, a
Younger Generation of British Players

very good style with a very free use of his body. He always looks to me a little as if he was standing too far behind his ball. The ball is about opposite his left heel, whereas with almost all the other good professionals it is four inches inside that heel. R. G. Wilson, last autumn's News of the World winner, has also done better lately than ever before, though I fancy he has been just about as good a player as he is to-day for the last ten years. He is not very well made for the game and does not look very strong, but he can hit the ball far enough. He has a weakness in the form of a right elbow that is too high in the air at the top of the swing. This puts his timing out of gear sometimes, as it did in his second round against Renouf in the News of the World final. On that occasion he saved himself again and again by magnificent putting; he is always a good putter and has also a very good pitching shot. His predecessor as winner of this tournament was George Gadd. His up-swing is an odd one, as he begins it by pushing the club outward to the right, and he is what I call a 'late pivoter,' but his down-swing is fine and he comes well through.

I do not know the play of many of our good amateurs as well as I should like to, and I say here again that it would be a very good thing if they would play more with professionals as the Americans do. Of those whose game I do know I like Mr. Holderness's methods better than any: they are both sound and graceful. But I think the two most interesting players, because of their great power and possibilities, are Mr. Wethered and Mr. Tolley.
There are things about Mr. Wethered's game that I don't altogether like. For instance, there is that very wide straddle of his. Especially with iron clubs does it lead sometimes to mischief. I have seen him much too heavy on his left foot with a long iron shot, with the result that the ball was pushed far out to the right, almost, if not quite, off the socket. Still the actual swing of his club is a fine one. He is inclined to 'speed up' too much now and then, but he has much more control than he used to have and there is one very fine point in his swing. I think that he and Abe Mitchell have the best left legs in all golf. Look how splendidly firm that left leg is at the moment of impact. That is the thing to give the length. Mr. Wethered can make more noise with his club when swinging without a ball than anybody I know. It whizzes.

One of his most telling strokes is his short pitch, and he plays it unlike other people, with a sort of flick and very great freedom of wrist. He can get a tremendous lot of stop on the ball, and this, as far as I can see, he does by shoving the right hand low and through, so that at the moment of impact the top of the blade seems to be moving backwards away from the ball. It is a difficult thing to explain, but if you try shoving that right hand through and watch the blade, I think you will see what I mean.

Mr. Tolley is a player of a rather different type. He gives one the impression of being afraid of nothing. I remember the first time I met him at North Berwick in the summer of 1919. He began by trying to drive the first hole and topped his drive into the road.
From there with apparent ease he played the most wonderful iron shot on to the green, gave himself a putt for three and took five. After that he hit one vast tee shot and did not hit much else, but within less than a year of that time he was the Amateur Champion. He has enormous power, is capable of the most brilliant shots, and I cannot quite understand why with that nice grip and fine true swing he should sometimes go as crooked as he does. However, he has got a great deal steadier and straighter lately. He has lately taken to turning his left toe much more in. This is not such a pretty stance as his old one, but I suppose he finds that it adds still more resisting power to that left leg, and, as I said before, that is very important.

I have really seen so little of the other amateurs' game that I hesitate to say anything about them. I very much want to see one about whom I have heard a great deal, Mr. W. L. Hartley. Both Fred Robson and Frank Ball tell me he is very good, and if they say so I am sure he must be. He has, I know, great power, and that is an invaluable asset though it must be kept under control. I do hope we shall produce more and more of these strong young golfers, because we certainly want them all.