Chapter II. The Methods of Champions (contd.)

How they play in a wind

It has been a long-accepted doctrine that at the top of the swing the toe of the club should point to the ground, but it is a fact that championships have been won with clubs the toes of which have not pointed to the ground. Braid is an exponent of the art of what I call shutting the club-face. I mean that at the top of the swing the club-face is nearly pointing to the sky. Taylor on the other hand, as I said before, keeps the face open, and whether the club-face is open or shut depends upon the position of the left wrist at the top. To keep the face open one has to get the left wrist directly under the handle of the club. Braid starts his swing with his left hand more over than Taylor. Consequently at the top it has a tendency to keep away from under the handle, and he is quite content to let it do so.

Now let us look at the result of the shut and open methods when either of these players is off the line. Taylor with his open-faced club is on the right of the exact line and Braid on the left. Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages. Taylor can make a swiftly flying ball stop just as easily as Braid can a slowly flying one. Braid can make a
ball run, and in this Taylor finds the utmost difficulty. At the moment of impact, just as at the top of the swing, the face of Braid's club is shut, so that he must be hitting the ball nearer to its centre than Taylor does. Taylor with the face open is employing all the loft on his club-face, which must be meeting the ball nearer the bottom, and so he gets more under-spin. Ray and Mitchell have more or less the same method as Taylor of keeping the face of the club open at the top. Vardon and Herd can do either, and open or shut the face according as a particular shot may demand. Vardon, however, prefers it open, while Herd likes to get that bit of hook he is so fond of.

This difference of method in shutting or opening the club-face at the moment of impact has brought about a difference of opinion as to the depth of the club-face. Taylor can get the height he likes with a depth of an inch and a half or perhaps a little more, whereas Braid must have a shallower face. Ray uses a deep-faced driver, and even then has difficulty in keeping the ball down on account of his left wrist being so much under the handle at the top. Mitchell, like Ray, uses deep-faced clubs. He also gets the left wrist under the shaft at the top, but not so much as Ray does, for he has a straight left arm.

It must be admitted that the angle of shaft at the top of the swing is much more important to the man in the street than the angle of the face.

The opening and shutting of the club-face is a very difficult and delicate operation. I say elsewhere, but say again here, that for the average golfer it is best to stand in the old ways and not experiment
with the shut face. Nevertheless it can be done, and the ability to do it is a very great asset. The golf at Deal at the time of the Open Championship in June of last year was a great test in this respect. A cross-wind from the land blew on one's back going out and in one's face coming home. Braid or Jim Barnes found it easiest to keep on the fairway going out, as they naturally shut the face and so held the ball up into the wind, but their difficulties from the tee started on the way home. For the home-coming drives Ray or Mitchell was the man, or any one of those players who employ the open face. A lot of people think that a first-class player uses a cross-wind to help him to get distance, but this is quite a mistake. Any first-class player is quite content to find the fairway when playing in a cross-wind. This can be achieved with least difficulty by sacrificing a few yards of length. Thus it is easier to drive the ball into a left-hand wind with a shut club-face than to open the face and allow for a little slice. In just the same way it is easier to keep the ball on the fairway with an open face when the wind is in your face and the natural tendency is to hook. These methods entail, of course, a sacrifice of distance. Every now and then one comes to a fairway which is wide enough to risk a bit of hook or cut as the case may be, but I have never yet seen any one good enough consistently to use the wind: it is too risky a business. Even if it came off eight times in ten—and one must be very clever to accomplish so much—the chances are that a bunker would find one of the two shots that were off the course. One cannot
JAMES BRAID
Addressing the ball. The left hand is noticeably far over the shaft and the weight on the right leg.

JAMES BRAID
At the beginning of the swing. The left wrist has not yet turned.
JAMES BRAID

At the top of the swing. The left wrist is not under the shaft and the club face is shut.

JAMES BRAID

Nearly at the finish of a drive, showing the natural “climb over” of the right hand which begins immediately after impact.
afford this at a long hole, and what would be gained by another ten yards of length from the tee would hardly make up for getting badly into a bunker.

The holding up of the ball into a left-hand wind is easy to Braid on account of his left hand being so far over. Standing opposite Braid one can see nearly all the back of his left hand, and this all helps the shutting of his club-face. In the case of a player like Ray one can only see two knuckles of his left hand. The only hope he has of driving the ball into the wind lies in shutting the face of the club with the right hand—that is to say, as soon as he starts his up-swing he must turn the club-face towards the ground instead of letting it turn naturally away from it. This extra right hand or wrist movement has also the effect of altering the plane of the swing and makes it more upright. So much for the wind from left to right. Now let us see what Braid does to keep on the fairway in a wind from the right. At St. Andrews he wouldn't alter his natural methods much, for is not the Auld Grey Toon the hooker's paradise? We will go back to Deal, where it was no joke to get off the course no matter on which side. The first hole where he would have had to try an alteration in his style would have been the twelfth. Here one had to hit a good straight one; a bit of hook or slice meant a five, whereas a straight one gave one a reasonable chance of a four. We cannot see Braid altering the angle of his club-face with his hands or wristwork during the swing. He does it rather with his body: I will say by restricted pivoting. When he wishes to hold a ball up into a right-
hand wind he depends upon the amount that he allows the shoulders and hips to turn on the up-swing. In this case he will not turn them quite so much, making his up-swing more upright. Thus the club-head will come down with a more upright swing and more directly on the ball, whereas Braid's natural bent is to come on to the ball from inside the line of flight.

The angle of the club-shaft has also a lot to do with the way in which the ball is going to travel. Looking from the green at the player on the tee a keen student of the game can tell, when the club is at the top of the swing, what sort of a shot is intended. For instance if Braid wishes to make the ball swerve from right to left, his club-head at the top of the swing will point more at the right of the fairway, whereas if a straight one is wanted it will point at the middle of the course. When Ray wishes a little left to right spin his club-head will point to the left of the middle of the fairway. A club-head which at the top points to the left of the centre of the course must have a tendency to cross the line of flight at impact; but it does not necessarily follow that the ball will swerve from left to right. The club-face must be open to accomplish this: if it is shut, the ball will be driven straight to the left, which means that the shutting of the club-face counteracts the inward blow. Just the reverse happens when the player is trying to get a little draw on the ball. The club-head may at the top of the swing be pointing at the right of the fairway, but unless the club-face is shut at impact he will not get his pull: the ball will
go straight out to the right. Now take the case in which the ball is pushed out. We see this happen most commonly when the ball has to be driven against a head-wind. One naturally tries in these circumstances to keep the ball down as much as possible by putting additional pressure on the left foot during the up-swing. In this position, when the left foot is carrying most of the weight, the timing of the effort has to be a little longer delayed than in an ordinary shot, because the weight has farther to travel before it gets behind the club at impact. There is a temptation to 'hit too soon from the top'—that is, to lash out the very moment one has arrived at the top of the swing. The consequence will be that the club-head will not have had time to get square at the moment of impact. The result of this shot the professional would describe by saying that he 'pushed it.' The man in the street is describing the same thing when he says, 'I got my body in too soon.' Remember, however, it does not follow that, because you are heavy on the left foot at the top of the swing and hit out just as soon as ever you arrive there, a push will necessarily result. No, this is far too complicated a game for only one result inevitably to ensue. Oftener than not, a slice results. In that case the weight has suddenly been thrown on to the right leg. On that leg it stays; the club is checked on its forward movement and comes across the ball.

In talking about those who are 'too heavy on the left at the top,' I am particularly thinking of those gentlemen—they amount perhaps to ten per cent.
of the whole golfing population—who have a horror of swaying. In order to avoid swaying their weight on to the right foot they overdo the weight on the left at the top. It is perhaps not such a bad fault as swaying, but it can produce equally bad results. However, for the moment I shall leave these gentlemen and their faults and say a word or two about under-spin. Under-spin is the soul of golf, and here we have the great difference between the amateur and the professional game. The application of under-spin is the real art of golf, and up till now J. H. Taylor had mastered it best to my way of thinking. His are the methods of the open club-face and of hitting down. Observe that I say 'hitting': I do not mean letting the weight of the club and body propel the ball. All these things tend to produce with all clubs the type of shot wherein the ball starts fast and low, gradually rising until it is spent, and then falls straight down with but little life left in it.

There are other players who get as much under-spin as Taylor with wooden clubs. We only see his greatest excellence when he starts playing with his iron clubs. How many players, at a range of anything from fifty yards to one hundred and fifty yards from the hole, can make the ball travel as fast as he can and make it stay on the green? Not so many. So now we have found why Taylor starts favourite in a Championship when it blows. His swifter-travelling ball beats the wind, no matter which direction it comes from, more easily than do the higher and slower-moving balls of his rivals. Taylor has the happy knack of placing him-
Addressing the ball. The ball is nearly in a line with the left heel and most of the weight on the right foot.

At the beginning of the swing, showing that he has not turned the left wrist.
J. H. TAYLOR
At the top of the swing, showing the left wrist under the shaft and the club face open.

J. H. TAYLOR
At the top of a mashie shot. The left wrist is in correct position for this shot, under the shaft, and the blade open.
At the moment of impact in a drive, there is surprisingly little tension noticeable.

Half-way down. A moment of great tension.
J. H. TAYLOR

Almost at the finish. The feet are kept firmly on the ground and there is a pronounced "climb over" of the wrists.
self in such a position when he takes up his stance as ensures his hitting the ball a descending blow. He can hit a ball that is midway between his feet without any difference in the distribution of his weight, whereas other players have the ball more in front of the middle and so have a tendency to hit the ball up. Braid when playing a long shot is the exception to this rule on account of his being so heavy on his left foot at the top. This in his case gives the same effect as Taylor produces by standing in front. There is always a certain amount of under-spin on the ordinary common or garden shot—that is, the ascending blow—for the simple reason that the ball is hit below its centre. When, however, in a shot of that type the ball has travelled a hundred yards or so in a cross-wind, the wind begins to have its effect on it, whereas a ball that has been hit a descending blow, and has thus the maximum amount of under-spin, will keep its original direction. I do not propose to calculate how often a ball revolves in the course of a two-hundred-yard carry. It is enough for us to learn how to make it revolve as often as possible and whenever possible. As to side-spins, they are the golfers’ nightmare, more especially the one that is caused by an inward blow with the club-face open. Now and again a golfer will be heard sorrowfully explaining how he took seven or so through hooking a tee shot. But as a rule there are at least half a dozen slices for every one hook, for the pull comes much nearer than the slice to being a good shot.