Chapter IV. Wrist Action and Pivoting

I have often heard the drive in golf described as a sweep, but I have no doubt in my mind that the tee shot is a hit; and the harder you hit the ball, provided everything is right, the further it will go. All those men who are reckoned the longest drivers, such as Mr. Blackwell, Ray, Braid; and Mitchell, hit and hit mighty hard. They differ just a little in their manner of hitting. First of all they are what I call, for want of a better term, two-handed up-swingers, and naturally they get as much power as possible out of both hands and arms in coming down. The moment at which one really sees the differences in their methods of hitting is when the club reaches the top of the swing. In each case, except Braid’s, the club is beyond the horizontal. Braid for a long time also had a long swing, but shortened it in 1912. We see Mr. Blackwell and Ray with the left wrist under the handle at the top and the club-face open. Mitchell’s club-face also tends to be open, but not to the same extent as that of Mr. Blackwell or Ray. The position of the hands during address will determine the position of the wrists at the top, and Braid having both hands more over towards the back of the shaft will have the left wrist
ALEX HERD

At the top of the swing when playing for a draw

The left wrist is not under the shaft and the club face shut...

Coming at the ball "from inside..."
MR. JOHN BAILLIE

A straight left arm with the left wrist not directly under the shaft at the top. This tends to shut the face of the club.

ALEX HERD

Playing to "hold up" the ball with a spoon. The left wrist is under the shaft and the club face open.
Wrist Action and Pivoting

less under at the top. On the position at this point depends the type of shot that will be struck, whether it will have a low trajectory with run or be one that is all carry.

It is perhaps a good thing for golfers generally that they cannot see the position of their wrists, at the top; otherwise they would be struggling with the old-fashioned idea that both wrists must at the top of the swing be under the shaft. As a matter of fact this is the correct thing to do if one wishes a little cut. I am not going to be bold enough to say that having the wrists under the shaft is the initial cause of all slicing, but it has a great deal to do with it. Two very different cases are those of Braid and Ray. Ray grips his club so that both V's point straight down the club, while Braid's V's are pointing at the back of the club. Now the position at the top is that Ray's wrists are much more under the handle than Braid's. Consequently Ray's club-face is open and Braid's is shut—that is to say, pointing upwards. This gives him an inclination when he is off the line to be on the left side of the fairway, whereas Ray is inclined to be on the right.

I have been having a look at Mr. George Beldam's book, Great Golfers, and taking a dozen of the best amateurs or professionals I find that eight of them play most of their shots with the club-face pointing upwards. This means that their wrists are not under the shaft at the top of the swing. Against that we have four who keep the face open although their wrists are not exactly under. Mr. John Ball has his elbows a great way apart at the top for a drive,
but when he is playing a high mashie shot the wrists work under the shaft. Mr. Hilton and Sandy Herd, I suppose, are the cleverest golfers at opening and shutting the club-face—that is, the putting under of the wrists or keeping them out according to whether they wish to steer a ball to the right or left. If either of these players wants the ball to go to the right, the left hand will move just a suspicion towards the right of the club and the right hand will move to the left. This will make it easier for them to work their wrists under by the time they get to the tee. At the same time their pivoting will be restricted. Should a draw be required the proceedings will be exactly reversed. The hands will move towards the right and the pivoting will be increased.

Of the twelve players in Mr. Beldam's book that I selected, I should say that only one, Taylor, strikes me as employing only one hand, the left, during a part of the uptake of the club. I think this fact may account for his abnormally flat swing. Taylor starts his uptake with a turn of his left wrist, and when this is completed, which is roughly three-quarters of the way up, his right hand takes charge and completes the swing with a half turn towards his head. I should describe Taylor's up-swing as a gradual turning of the wrists, first of the left and then of the right. Now Vardon's swing, which might better be described as a sling, is totally different, in that he uses both hands straight away in taking up the club. He actually drags the club nearly straight back for the first six inches; there is no turning of the left wrist yet, as the right is in charge. Then comes a sudden sling
of both wrists which carries him to the top of an upright swing.

The greatest trouble that both Taylor and Vardon have in playing golf is to keep the right from doing more than its share in the up-swing. It is a very common trouble with many less famous golfers, so often are we tempted to try a little extra pressure. Then that right hand increases its pressure and the whole swing is spoiled. Naturally if the right hand is gripping the club tight it will take the nearest way to the top, and instead of our swinging or slinging the club up it is lifted up. It is impossible to get the true arc if the right hand absolutely overpowers the left at the start, as the left shoulder is doing nothing, and a swing cannot be accomplished unless the left shoulder is moving. This brings us to pivoting, but before I say something about that I ought to give a definite opinion as to which is the better method—to have the left wrist under or not. I have little hesitation in saying that for the average golfer it will be better for him to get the left wrist as nearly under the shaft as possible, since the shut-face method is very dangerous. How often does one find a player using a brassy, yes and sometimes a spoon, off the tee! Or perhaps he comes into the shop to have just a little more loft put on the face of his wooden club. And all the time it was not the face but the shutting of it that was the trouble.

Now for something as to ‘pivoting.’ A good player can best be picked out from a distance by watching how much space his body occupies during his uptake. A good golfer should not as a rule use any more space
with his trunk during the swing than that which he takes up when addressing the ball. I have seen a lot of players pivoting on the ball of the left foot, but the only good one was Massy the famous Frenchman. Screwing the body round on the left foot is not pivoting. Pivoting is a gradual turning of the body, which starts simultaneously with the club-head and continues until the club reaches the top, and the two main points to watch are the left shoulder and the right hip. Some people will tell you that the shoulder is the more important, and others the hip. I think it on the whole the best plan to tell my pupils to bear both equally in mind.

Really I feel almost inclined to say that pivoting is the whole secret of golf, and that nothing else matters. This much is pretty certain, that unless the left shoulder starts going round with the club it is all up with you and your shot. Once that left shoulder gets left behind it is a bad job. We all know very well the feeling that comes over us at the top of the swing, that we have gone up wrong and so we are going to come down wrong. If we had time to shout at that moment we should scream, 'I'm going to miss it.' I know that at least one very fine golfer, James Sherlock, does not altogether agree with me about this, and thinks that matters can often be put right on the way down. However, I shall 'stick to my guns about it, and in my belief that feeling of coming failure at the top of the swing generally, comes from bad pivoting and leaving, as I call it, the left shoulder behind.

Some players, when they are conscious that they
have not pivoted properly in this up-swing, seem to try to make up for it by deliberately whipping the right shoulder round on the way down, but I am afraid that is no good. The coming round of the right shoulder on the way down ought to follow automatically on the proper coming round of the left shoulder on the way up, and you cannot force the ending to come right when the beginning has been wrong.

To pivot freely and correctly is not an easy thing to do, and I do not pretend that it is. The full turn comes much more easily to some people than others. They are naturally built for it. Abe Mitchell is a splendid example. He turns so fully and freely as he swings, that, if you are standing in front of him, he presents nearly his whole back to you. Another instance is that of Mr. John Ball. He has the most beautiful pivoting movement imaginable, and seems to be able to turn without the very slightest effort. This perfect and easy pivoting has been, I think, the strong point of his game. It seems to make things so simple for him. Indeed, the value of good pivoting cannot be exaggerated. When things go wrong it is always worth thinking about, because it is so easy to imagine that you are doing it properly, when in fact you are not fully completing the turning movement in the up-swing. The stance may make correct pivoting harder or easier. I think I ought to say something quite definitely on the question of stance, because I have a very decided opinion about it, and this seems a convenient place for me to air it. I am all for the square stance, as
opposed to the open. Most good golfers are to-day of the same mind. Especially is this noticeable in America, where they think very hard about their golf. All the good American players are standing palpably square: we saw this in the case of Hagen and Barnes last year. Moreover they are getting very good results from it. I believe that the open stance has had its day. In fact one might say that the world is growing squarer.

It is curious that opinion on this subject has come back to where it started. When the 'Badminton' volume on golf and Sir Walter Simpson's *Art of Golf* were written—in the eighties—the authors recommended that, in driving, the player should have his right foot an inch or two in rear of his left. Mr. John Ball then stood open, but he was treated as the exception to prove the rule. Later on, however, came Taylor and Vardon, doing wonderful things and standing also perceptibly open: opinions were revised and many people copied these two champions. To-day Vardon has still a touch of the open stance, but Taylor's stance is far squarer than it used to be. Mr. Ball, too, has for a long while given up his markedly open stance. In these cases Anno Domini may have something to do with it, for an open stance makes it harder work to pivot, but there is more in it than that, I fancy. Of the younger generation Mitchell is the only fine driver I can think of who stands open, and he only does so a very little. When I first came south from Scotland I had a decidedly flat swing and an open stance. As soon as I determined to master the overlapping grip I found myself terribly
inclined to slice. I could not get the club to go round properly. Holding the left thumb in its unfamiliar position down the shaft seemed to make me push the club out to the right. To counteract this I squared my stance, overcame the slice, and have stood square ever since. The finest advertisement that I know for the square stance is Braid. He has never wavered but has always stood square, and for more than twenty years now, day in and day out, he has been as long a driver as any one in the history of the game.

To me the square stance seems to give the easier attitude from which to hit the ball straight. I feel this more and more, and to-day I find myself standing quite square even for little pitching shots. This last perhaps is a peculiarity of my own, but as regards driving I can give some more solid reasons for my belief. It is of the greatest importance to get comfortably and correctly to the top of the swing, because, if you do, the rest will come right too. Now the square stance makes it much easier to get to the top comfortably. If you put the right foot forward and try a swing, you see that decidedly more effort is needed. You have, by comparison, to wrench your body round to get to the proper position. There is an inclination to be lazy in your pivoting, just because pivoting is more difficult. Put the right foot back and pivoting is ever so much easier.

A good illustration of this fact I can give from my own game. There is just one shot in which I feel disposed to stand open, namely, when I am trying to cut the ball up with a spoon. In that 'cut up' shot pivoting should be to some extent restricted, and so
in playing it I almost instinctively stand a little open, because that stance helps me to restrain my pivoting. In the ordinary driving shot the one thing you do not want to do is to restrict your pivoting. So stand square and make it as easy for yourself as you can.

I should like also to say a word or two here about the length of the swing. The swing has in recent years tended to become shorter, and this may be accounted for by the modern ball, since it takes less getting up than the gutty did. The best way of getting height is to get the left wrist under the shaft, and a long swing is necessary to get it under to the greatest possible extent. Our longest drivers to-day under certain conditions still swing their clubs beyond the horizontal, and they naturally hit a very high shot, as the left wrist has time, on account of the length of their swings, to work under the club, but against a wind they can be outdriven by a shorter swinger who shuts the face. On the whole, however, golfers are to-day swinging shorter than they used to do, and find with the help of the rubber-cored ball they can get all the height they want.

I do not see any necessity for the uptake to go beyond the horizontal, for the reason that once the club is beyond that line the player is out of position for hitting. Even in the old days the club was only taken back so far to allow the left wrist to get under. The hitting does not, or should not, begin until the hands have got into a position whence they can deliver the hardest blow—that is, when they are level with the right shoulder or just below it on the down-swing. A certain amount of swing beyond the
position from which you are to hit is necessary. There is an adjusting of the balance to be done when you get to the top before you are poised to make your effort. The best way to get to the top is by allowing the club-head to lead, and this can only be done by chiefly employing the left hand, though a little help from the right is also necessary to improve the pace. The great struggle is against the natural tendency of the right hand to make all the swing. So at the very start of the swing you must remember the old teaching of the 'loose right' until half-way up, when the danger of the right ruining the swing is past. The right will then complete the swing. Golfers in the novice stage have great difficulty in keeping the right out of the start of the swing, and also in realising that they have wrist-joints that will bend and turn.

On the down-swing there is a new impetus given to the club at the point where the right hand catches up the left. This has been described as a flick of the wrists, but it is really the leverage caused by the whole of the left side of the body pushing against the right side and so increasing the speed of the club-head at impact. I am indebted to Dr. Cormack, a brother Scot, for drawing my attention to this feature in the swing. I have no doubt in my mind that a great deal of levering takes place just before impact, but this item will come into the discussion of transference of weight.