Chap. VIII. On the Importance of the Waggle

It may seem absurd to devote a separate chapter, even if only a very little one, to the waggle, which is a mere preliminary to the stroke, but I maintain that there is a good deal in waggling, though I don’t do very much of it myself. I know that when I was a small boy I and my fellow caddies would devote quite a long time to waggling and imitating other people’s waggles without ever swinging our clubs. You can see the same thing going on round any caddie shed to-day. I really believe we thought the waggle more important than the swing. There perhaps we were wrong, but it is important, and it is a firm belief of mine that as you waggle so you swing.

You have only to look at the next few golfers you meet on the course to see the truth of this. Take, for instance, the man who has what I call a ‘flash’ waggle, with exaggerated wrist and knee work in it, just such a waggle in fact as we boys used to practise. You know at once what kind of a swing his will be—a florid swing, nice enough to look at, possibly with lots of wrist in it but no real punch. Or look at the player who waggles by aiming stiffly backwards and forwards behind the ball. There will be no wrist in his swing, nor any speed nor any pivoting. It will
be all tension and stiffness. Again, there are some who, after settling well down to address the ball, pull themselves up to their full height in their waggle as if they were looking at the surrounding country. The result is that they lift themselves up in the course of their swing. I could give many other instances. Some people let their right hands come open and away from the left as they waggle, others let the right elbow move backwards and forwards with something like the action of a piston, and you will see these same blemishes reproduced in their swings.

I have seen it laid down in books exactly how a waggle should be made. It is said, I think, that the club-head should describe something like the figure eight in the air. I do not believe in this. I ask nobody to make a particular pattern in the air. All I want to begin with is that there should be nice free wristwork in it. But there is one kind of freedom that is all wrong, and it is very frequently seen. It consists in that opening of the right hand which I mentioned before. Now when you address the ball—I assume the overlapping grip—the pad at the base of your right thumb is pressed firmly against your left thumb which is down the shaft. There it ought to stay throughout your swing. I believe this is very important indeed. I always think that it is one of the great merits of Harry Vardon's methods that he follows this rule so thoroughly. Look at him when he is going to play an iron shot and you will see that he seems almost to screw one hand into the other. His grip looks and is perfectly firm. You will never see any daylight between that right pad and that left
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thumb of his. Now if you keep your hands well together in your waggle, it will make it far easier for you to do so in the swing. A great many golfers have the habit of partially opening the right hand in the waggle without being conscious of it. That is why I am so emphatic about looking out for this fault. I have had a player come to me, for the time being utterly incapable of hitting a shot, and found that it was entirely due to this opening of the right hand which had crept first into his waggle and then into his swing.

There is another point that wants watching. I have said elsewhere that the golfer's body should in the course of the swing take up no more than the space which it originally occupied at the time of the address. The same remark applies to the waggle. This is of course the ideal. Perhaps nobody quite attains to it, and the player must not think so much of it as to get cramped; but there should certainly be no superfluous body movement, and particularly no drawing up of the body.

Finally, the waggling process should not take too long. All players cannot get ready to play their shots at the same pace, and it is no good forcing yourself into a method too hurried for you, but it cannot do any good to hang over the shot beyond a reasonable time.