

THE WISDOM OF BRAID

THE GREAT JAMES BRAID, FIVE TIMES OPEN CHAMPION OF THE WORLD, GIVES A LESSON IN THE CUNNING OF MATCH PLAY.

IT IS DIFFICULT for one with the wrong kind of temperament to become a first-class player, and to a large extent the temperaments are born with the players; but there is such a thing as training the temperament for the purposes of golf, and this amounts in reality to the application to one's game of various rules of what may be called common sense. Therefore one can hardly teach a man to be either a good match or medal player; the only thing one can do is to remind him of the chief matters for consideration in either case. They are the same game up to a certain point; but there are times in each when a slightly different policy has to be pursued, according as to whether you are playing against a man or are out to do a better score than the field. Now in match play you are playing against the one man, and you have to beat him and him alone, and while a 4 at a par 4 hole may be good enough in a medal round, and generally is quite satisfying, it may not be good enough in a match. Therefore it goes without saying that you have to keep a very sharp eye on what your opponent is doing, and that in a large measure your own play must be regulated according to his; but there is such a thing as caring too much what he does, and struggling too much, to the detriment of your own game.

DON'T TRY TOO MUCH

REMEMBER that you do not so often win holes as the result of your brilliant play as by mistakes that the other man makes. If he gives you no chance of winning a hole, it is not generally the correct policy to play desperately in order to make a chance for yourself. At such times the half ought to be enough, in the absence of a special piece of luck in your favour; and the game must be to nip in and take every opportunity of gaining a point when the opponent makes a slip. When you look at things in this way, you will see that it is not generally a good thing to try to drive as far as the opponent, when he is really a longer driver than yourself, and is generally outdriving you. By pressing beyond your known capabilities you are only spoiling your game, and certainly losing

more than you would do if you drove quietly and steadily, and contented yourself with losing just a few yards in the tee shot, which may very likely be made up for afterwards. So generally you should not mind what he does until it comes to the short game, and there is the last chance offered to either of you for winning or halving the hole. That is really the whole secret of good match play—simply to play your steadiest and best, and not to care about the opponent's game until it is absolutely necessary to do so. Simple as such a rule may appear, it is a very difficult one for anyone who has not got a perfect golfing temperament to abide by, and that is why match play is not by any means such an easy thing in comparison with practice golf alone, as it might appear to some who do not thoroughly understand the game.

PLAYING SHORT

FROM THIS it is evident that no rule can be laid down, as some people seem to think there might be, as to what a player should go for and what he should not. Clearly everything depends upon circumstances that exist at the time. It is not much use, in fact it would be unwise, to play for a difficult carry that is not by any means certain to come off, and failure at which probably means a bad case of bunkering, unless there is a decided advantage to be gained. At such times the steady game is best, and undue risks should be avoided. This, however, is not by any means to say that a pawky game should be played whenever you have just a little in hand. There are some men who at such times will play short of a bunker that they would carry five times out of six, and this is a great mistake, for two or three reasons. For one thing, it very often happens that a shot played short in circumstances of this sort goes wrong, and then you are confronted with the fact that you have nothing whatever to give away if you are to win the hole. The result is a little anxiety, nervousness, and very often a failure with the next shot.

Secondly, always remember that the other man is after all not done with, and he may quite possibly accomplish something very

surprising towards the finish of his play to this particular hole, which will make you regret not having taken the chance you had. He may lay a long approach dead, or he may hole a long putt. Thirdly, constant playing short in the way I have spoken of reduces your ability in going for things when it is necessary to do so. You get afraid of quite easy shots, and quite the wrong sort of temperament is encouraged. What I say, therefore, is that you should play the steady game, and play short, if it is best, when you have something in hand, but only play short when it would be risking too much to go for all that there is. It is plain that all this applies more to the game that has to be played when approaching the hole than to any other part of the match. If both play steadily, there is not generally much to be won or lost in playing from the tee; but it often happens in match play between too fairly good players that the second shot is the critical one, and it is at this shot that you most frequently have that awkward problem set which we have just been discussing, as to whether you shall go for a long carry or not. It is at a time like that the longer driver has a great advantage, not merely in his being able to make the carry more easily, but in the fact that his opponent has to play first, and he sees whether he gets over or not, and what it is necessary for himself to do. In a doubtful case like this, when you are playing the odd you must generally give your opponent the credit for being able to do his best when wanted, and must go for everything yourself. Playing short with the odd must at all times be a very dangerous game.

A RISK THAT PAYS

A THING to bear in mind most clearly in cases of this kind, is the distance that the green is beyond the bunker that has to be carried. It frequently happens that it is only a matter of some thirty yards or so beyond, and that the ball that carries the bunker will get on the putting green—a great gain. In such a case as this it is well worth any risk that there may be in attempting a long carry, for the success of such a shot means a clear gain of a stroke, and very probably will make all the difference in the result of the hole. Again, let it be remembered that even if the shot does not come off, and the ball gets bunkered, there will still be quite a good chance

of getting out of the bunker on to the green in one stroke, so that nothing may have been lost as compared with playing short. It may be a different matter when there is a fairly long shot to be made after a long carry has been done; but if the long carry means getting on to the green, it may very likely be worth going for.

POLICY IN PUTTING

"NEVER UP, NEVER IN," is a safe rule for the putting in every match, and a vast number of holes are lost when the player has two putts for them, and thinks he can afford to be almost anywhere with the first one. This generally results in his being short, when he may have cause to fear missing the next one; for it is a thing to bear in mind that it is generally easier to putt back to the hole, unless it happens to be downhill, than it is to continue on the same line again with a putt that was previously short. Why this should be so is not quite clear, but nearly every player finds that it is so. It may be partly due to the fact that when he has to putt back from the far side of the hole the player has at any rate the satisfaction of knowing that he gave the hole the chance that it was his duty to give it. Trifles of this kind make a considerable difference in the long run.

Mentioning the putting also reminds one that it is a bad habit to be always expecting a half to be given when neither ball is exactly what you might call dead, and that it is just as bad to propose the half when your own ball is slightly nearer the hole, but still not dead. In ordinary play there is rather too much of this giving of halves, and the consequence is that players lose the nerve and the ability that are necessary for the holing of short putts, and fail at them when they are made to putt. They are as much a part of the game as anything else, and halves ought rarely to be agreed upon unless the balls are so close to the hole that it is next to impossible for the putts to be missed. Not only in this respect but in all others it is generally better to play the full game, and to play it according to the strict rules. Then there can never be any misunderstanding or difficulty, and there can also be no after regrets, for a man who gives a rather difficult putt for a half when he is four up, may, however good a sportsman he may be, sometimes regret that he did so when it

turns out that the other man becomes dormy one on him, and he has to fight hard to save the match.

COVET EVERY HOLE

YOU SHOULD always try to win every hole of the match; any other policy is fatal. You sometimes hear men say they do not like winning the first hole; this is all nonsense. A hole at the beginning counts as much as one at the end, and in moral effect it sometimes counts a little more. Play for all you are worth at the start, and establish a lead, and, even when you have got it and are nearing home, never for a moment slacken, in the idea that you can afford to take it easily. In a case like this the other man only wants a very little encouragement to make him play an exceedingly hot game, and at the same time the loss of even one hole of the three or four that you may be up sometimes seems like a disaster, and has a distinctly bad effect on your play. Many matches have been lost by slackness of this sort after a man has been in a winning position.

To consider the reverse case, it should never be taken too much to heart when the other man gets well ahead at the beginning of the round. Of course he has an advantage then, but it should be considered that there are fluctuations in the great majority of games; that you will probably at least have some good chances of getting on even terms again; and that, after all, it is at the end of the round that matches are won and not at the beginning. This is to say, that of the two things a brilliant finish is generally better than a brilliant start. But much better is it to be brilliant all through.

SILENCE, PLEASE

GIVE NOTHING AWAY that you can help, either in the matter of the rules, the play, or in anything else, particularly in things that may tend to cause irritation or to disturb your mind from the serious study of the game. There may be times when it is necessary to be very sociable and talkative in the course of a game, but one could hardly regard such a game as a serious one. The very talkative golfer is more often a nuisance than not. The game is played better, and, what is more, it is certainly enjoyed better, when there is as little talking as possible. The time that is spent in walking from the place where the ball was last struck to that at which it stopped

again, and from which the next shot will have to be played, had better be occupied in thinking out the problems of that next shot rather than in general conversation. Too much thought can never be given to a consideration of the circumstances at times like these.

There is the wind question to reckon up, for unless the ball was hit quite straight towards the hole, the wind may not be in quite the same quarter with relation to the line of the next shot as it was to that just played. Then there is the lie of the land to think about, and, if it is an approach that will have to be played next time there is the important question as to whether it shall be pitched or run up, which may be considered before the ball is reached, even if final decision is not arrived at. The state of the ground, and a dozen other details, can all be taken into account. There is at the most a couple of minutes for all this thinking, and when the ball is reached only a few seconds will be left. Besides, even if he thinks very little about his next shot, nearly every golfer will be the better and play the better for keeping his mind on the game right the whole way through it, and not talking about matters that have got nothing to do with golf, as some are so much inclined to do. It is always said that one of the great advantages of the game is that you can think of nothing else while playing it; but at the same time many players seem to try to think of other things, and to make their opponents do so also.

GIVING AWAY SECRETS

VERY TALKATIVE golfers often prejudice their chances of winning the match in other ways than those mentioned. They explain their shots to their opponents, what they found out when playing them, and certain peculiarities of the situation that they had not suspected. "The ball caught the wind more just over that hill," or "I never noticed that little slope on the left-hand side of the hole," and things of that kind, are very valuable points of information to the opponent who has just to make the same sort of shot, and without it might easily have fallen into the same mistake. A sensible player would have kept silence and watched for the opponent committing himself in the same way; but he loses his chance through his talk. On the other side, always be ready to profit by any information given you in this way; and particularly

get into the habit of watching your opponent's stroke and what happens to his ball when he is playing from anything like the same position as you are in. You may find out something very much worth knowing about the way in which your own shot will have to be played.

Lastly, when the match is delayed in the middle, through a block in front or the slowness of the preceding couple, let it be borne in mind that during the period of waiting the eyes should be given as much rest as possible. It often happens that players occupy this interval by staring hard at the green in the distance, waiting for the couple ahead to hole out and get along. This course of procedure has two great disadvantages. In the first place, it is nearly

always very irritating to the player, because the men who are putting always seem to be much slower than they really are; and, in the second place, it will generally be found, when the player brings his sight back to his own ball, that he has difficulty both in focussing it and seeing it properly after the strain that his eyes have just been put to. This is a very frequent cause of missed shots. The best thing to do during a period of waiting is neither to look ahead all the time, nor at one's ball, but just to turn one's back on the latter and look about. Then when all is ready one seems to come fresh up to the ball, without experiencing any of the usual disadvantages of waiting. I think that this is a most valuable hint.

