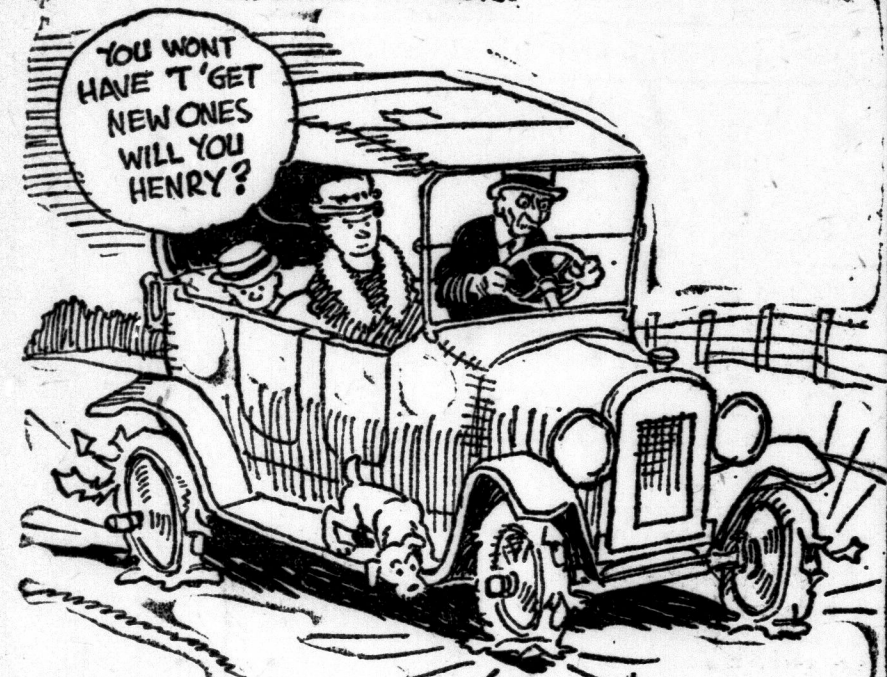


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MODERN GOLF

By W. J. & Frank Thompson

NOTED CANADIAN GOLFERS

NO. 6—GOLF COUEISM.

The time element in golf has more to do with its fascination and enigmatic character than any other factor. Substitute the moving ball for the stationary one (with the appropriate changes in the club) and you have, by reducing the time element, solved the mystery of golf. Several seconds elapse between the address and the despatch of the ball in which a thousand and one thoughts may occur. If there were no time to reflect in golf during the execution of the stroke, but it took place more or less automatically and unconsciously, as is the case in tennis or baseball, one would hear less about the psychology of the game. Golf is primarily a game of propulsion or muscular effort, or as physiologists would say, it has to do principally with the motor centers, whereas reflection has to do with what is called the ideational centers of the brain.

Now when we reflect how a stroke is to be made at the same time that we make it, there is a certain opposition between the motor and ideational centers resulting in more or less confusion. In playing golf the problem is to allow the motor centers to work while inhibiting all other centers. When we play our best golf we just play without thinking much how it is done, and numerous professionals have testified that while driving the ball their minds were more or less blank. As one said: "I didn't think at all, I just swoop her away."

Don't Think. Somewhat of this opposition is seen in the commonplace experience of thinking how one steps when walking down stairs. It slows up the pace and sometimes causes one to stumble. In the language of Coue, we substitute the words conscious and unconscious.

All our moral, social and intellectual concepts are the result of the conscious, while the action of the vital organs, as well as digestion, etc., are the work of the unconscious. The unconscious never makes a mistake in its work. Although it is the engineer, it is dependent on the conscious for its material. If the conscious thinks of a "bunker," the unconscious takes it at its word and realizes its suggestion. How this is done Coue does not say, any more than the physiologist can explain how his motor and ideational centers work. Coue is not interested in why or how suggestion works, but more in the fact that it does. His contribution has been in eliminating the element of effort. Whenever effort is present there is always a certain opposition going on. The efficacy of Coue's rosary is to keep prominently before us whatever is desired. The golfer has the same problem. He must keep before him the desired end, which is the ball. This alone should occupy his attention. Attention from the very nature of things tends

to fluctuate. It will be difficult enough to keep the eye on the ball without deliberately making it more so by thinking of bunkers which may or may not enter into the game.

Mental Hazards. When one looks at the flag and then at the bunker, the attention fluctuates from flag to bunker, resulting in a certain confusion, and as Coue says, the unconscious accepts the stronger suggestion. All short holes are for the most part mental hazards and are designed purposely to distract the player. If the bunkers were removed, the player would realize how ridiculously easy some of the present formidable-looking short holes are. Distraction may come from having different lines. Aim in golf is something far more than getting the feet in the right position. This is clearly seen in the case of those holes where there is an out-of-bounds to the right. The player usually faces away from the danger to avoid it, but instead of playing in the direction he stands the tendency is still to think of the out-of-bounds, and unconsciously he aims in this direction. The result is usually a worse slice than before. In fact, the stars try to reproduce the above conditions when they deliberately try for a slice.

The Putting Green. The putting green is a fertile field for the study of golf psychology. Due to the fact that the putt is the last stroke, the mistakes of the green become more apparent. It is oftentimes the last chance to recoup oneself against bad play in the field. The hole is more or less a converging point. Players become anxious and apprehensive, for they know what it means to hole or miss a putt. We hope we may hole it, but we fear that we shall not. The agitation is increased if one happens to have a reputation for being a putter. The task is made immeasurably more difficult if some one insinuates, while the putt is about to be made, that it is going to be missed. If one is blessed with a good putting style and is able to ignore such distraction, no harm is done. But for the person who is laboring under a bad putting spell such remarks are almost criminal.

Confidence First. Confidence on the green is more important than anything else. With it wonders can be accomplished, even with a defective style. Without it the most perfect mechanical swing is rendered useless. Usually when a player feels he can hole a putt, he does so, and the converse is true also of missing one when the player thinks it impossible of holing. Coue's explanation is that the unconscious accepts our fears and doubts because they are stronger, and realizes them. The cure is to think success. How this is to be done is the rub. It will depend largely on the ingenuity of the player. So long as he eliminates effort and remains quiet and calm, the problem should not be insoluble. Nothing succeeds like success, and this is the reason why a champion is usually so hard to dislodge from his position. He plays with such confidence. The reputation of a formidable player is an additional handicap for the young golfer to overcome so long as he dwells on it. It has well been said: "Towards die a thousand times before their death, the valiant never taste of death but once." (Copyrighted British and Colonial Press, Limited)

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