

# Indoor Golf.

By F. O. D.

(In Saturday Night-Toronto.)  
To the real golfer—the man, that is, who plays imaginary approach shots, he stands on the street corner waiting for a car—the interval between the last game in the fall and the first following spring is a dreadful one. It is eternities long and as barren of refreshment as the Sahara desert or a U. F. O. committee meeting.

Incidentally, talking of approach shots on the street corner, it is not a thing to be recklessly done. We speak whereof we know. We used to have a very handsome ebony cane. It was beautifully balanced, and of a most delectable and lustrous blackness. Then one very frosty evening, we stood waiting for a night car, and a nice round little ball of snow involuntarily teed up on the edge of an adjacent lawn. It was just the size of a golf ball and it stood up dutifully from the frozen grass.

Looking at the pretty little white ball of snow on the lawn, we felt that it was a chance to try out certain original theories of our own on the subject of stance and swing. So we moved over to the elabaster sphere, and took a firm but graceful position, and then with our walking stick reversed proceeded to address the ball.

A few preliminary waggles and we brought the improvised club slowly back. We did everything that we could have done—we turned our left foot in just the correct amount, and our wrists were bent under the shaft, and our head was as still as the head of the Sphinx, and our eye never for a fraction of a second wavered from the ball. Then the silver-mounted head started down with the easy flowing motion. Harry told himself could have done no better.

It was the prettiest shot we have ever made—or it should have been. Just as we made our perfect follow-through, the head of our stick slipped right at the ball, and what followed through we did was done about ten inches of the shaft, which we still clutched in our hands. That innocent and inviting little snowball had formed on the end of a galvanized pipe, which some plumber had stuck in the lawn there, presumably for the purpose of watering it. We hit the pipe full and true in the middle of our walking stick handle, which stopped dead and then made a lovely parabolic sixty feet in the air over our head. The silver mounting sparkled beautifully in the frosty air but we had no joy of it. We were thinking of the ten dollars we had paid for that stick—at pre-war prices, too—and we said things which should have made that little gob of ice melt right off the pipe.

Possibly it is the recollection of this unfortunate incident which has made us so chary of any practicing except what is done with real clubs on real turf. We always have a feeling that something is going to happen, something unpleasant, whenever we try it anywhere else. Even the backyard work which some of our friends put in for the improvement of their short game has no appeal for us. If we were to go out into our landlady's back yard with a putter, we know perfectly well that we would somehow manage to drive the ball through the kitchen window and bang that splendid woman on the coccu as she bent over the evening hash. It is our destiny.

Of course, lots of fellows do this sort of thing; and possibly they find that it does their game a deal of good. We met one wild man the other day who confessed that he practiced putting on the bed room rug and played short approach shots into the bed itself.

"I putt against the leg of the bed," he explained. "It's great fun and keeps the eye true."

We told him that he showed wonderful self-control in not boring a regulation hole down through the rug and the bedroom floor and sinking a tomato can in it so that he could putt properly. And no doubt there is also a lot of splendid sport and exercise in crawling under the bed after the balls and enticing them out from beneath the bureau where they would be almost certain to seek refuge.

"But how about those approach shots?" we asked. "Surely to heaven you don't take turf, do you?"

For the benefit of the untechnical reader it may be explained that when a real, honest-to-god golfer plays a short approach shot, he tears out a slab of grass about the size of a baby's grave. His idea is not so much to hit the ball as to move the whole neighboring section of lawn up to the flag. This is supposed to prevent the ball from rolling off the green when it gets there, and all the more earnest players do it.

Of course this sort of thing isn't so bad on grass, for you really can put the slab of turf back—most of them don't—and it will go right on growing. But on a rug! How the dickens are you to replace divots there? That's why we asked our golfing friend about taking turf in those bed-room approaches of his. His expression became rather thoughtful, not to say rueful.

"Well, it is a bit hard on the rugs," he admitted. "I have holes in several of mine as it is."

"What does your wife think of it?" we asked. That's the sort of fellow we are—always trying to dig painful information out of people.

"Well, you see, my wife doesn't play golf, and . . . and . . ."

We hastily changed the subject. We had an idea of just what his wife thought about it, and just how clearly and frankly she explained her ideas to him. We know what our landlady would think of us if she caught us making holes in our bed-room rug with a mashie-niblick. We would be lucky if she didn't take the club away from us and run us around the block two or three times. You see, our landlady doesn't play golf either, and . . . and . . ."

Now this friend of ours wants us to join one of those indoor golf schools. It seems that the energetic professional, not having anything to do in the winter, and being thoroughly aware of the golf fiend's insatiable craving for practice, has invented the indoor school. He simply takes a big room somewhere and hangs it with nets and puts a few thick mats on the floor and there you are. You

can go up there and for a nominal fee of a dollar or so an hour—or is it a half hour?—you can swing yourself black in the face and warty on the hands, under expert supervision.

"It's the best thing in the world to loosen up your swing," said our friend, "and if you have a chronic slice or anything that . . ."

We stopped him right there. We have a slice, a boomerang slice which comes to heel like a bird dog; but we don't believe that any amount of expert supervision could do anything for us indoors. You see our ball goes away sweet and clean and straight for the flag. And then when it gets about a hundred yards away from us and from the commanding glance of our eye, it notices something in the next field which attracts it. So it turns right around like a aeroplane doing a hair-pin curve, and usually we never see it again. For the display of our slice at its infernal best we require nothing less than a ten-acre field. For fifty yards we drive as straight as Chick Evans. It is after that that the trouble starts. We explained all this to our friend, but still he insisted on the excellence of indoor golfing.

"The pro will see what's the trouble with you right away," he said, "and he will be able to tell you just what you are doing wrong."

Of course, the pro would know what we were doing wrong. They always know. From a long and fruitful experience of dubs, they can recognize all the various symptoms of dubdom. They can even detect what a dub is thinking, if he ever does, and they don't mind telling him—nice frank lot of fellows, professionals. But what good does mere telling do?

We are quite convinced that we could attend every golf school in town all winter long, and could practice by the hour, and could get the feeling that we had finally conquered the darn game; and then next spring we would go out on the course, and the ball would feel like a set of picks, and we would swing ourself right off our feet, and if we hit the thing at all it would go sailing away into the neighboring woods and conceal itself in some poor little dicky-bird's nest.

That's the worst of this practicing. You can learn to do the trick perfectly, so long as nothing depends on it. How often have we slipped away alone on a quiet afternoon and put in an hour or so playing mashie shots or something like that behind a convenient hill. The balls always behaved beautifully. They were like little children just before Christmas. They would do everything that we expected of them. We could stand sixty or seventy yards away and drop them on a space about the size of a tea-cloth.

Then on the strength of this performance we would issue a challenge to someone we had been hoping to beat, and would get ready to give an exhibition which would shatter his golfing morale forever. In fact, at first we used even to feel a little guilty about getting in all this preliminary work—it seemed like a rather mean advantage to take of our friends, rather Tuetonic, you know. But after one or two trials of the system, we quit worrying about this

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aspect of the matter. The only thing that bothered us after that was to find an explanation for the gawd-awful performance we would give with the very club which the day before was a fairy wand in our hands. And we have never found an explanation. It is just golf psychology, that's all, however much or little that may mean.

But still one goes on practicing. This is one of the curious features of the disease. There is always some little point or other one wishes to work out, some tendency one has to correct, some new theory to experiment with. Even though the usual effect of all the theorizing and practicing is to blow one's game higher than a kite, the temptation is one which no true golfer can resist. It is this which causes stout, middle-aged men, presumably in the continued possession of their mental powers, to sneak into the drawing room, when the family isn't around, and practice full swings before the mirror. The usual result is that they bring the electrolier down in fragments on their bald heads and get into nasty arguments with their wives, but it doesn't stop them—nothing in the world can.

Having proved to the reader and to ourself the utter futility of indoor schools, we now begin to wonder if we have quite got over our distressing habit of dropping the right shoulder in our iron shots, and whether a little coaching might not be a good thing for our swing. We have had a good deal of trouble with our swing, and we can assure the reader that next to a bad heart or a floating kidney there is nothing like a bad swing to worry a fellow. Perhaps if we were to . . .

But the wise reader knows what all this is leading to. And if the reader,

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