

Aids to Golfers

Bracing Up the Left Side

By Gene Sarazen



EVERY golfer really wants to hit his tee shot a mile, and therefore any advice that will add even a yard to a drive is received with acclaim. One of the chief essentials to a long, straight drive is the brace-up of the left side before impact. This is not so simple as it may seem, but properly done it will add yards to the distance without pressing or hard hitting.

Almost all players, particularly in the early stages, have a tendency to let the left knee bend forward just at impact and so to allow the left side to become quite loose. Freedom is fine, but it is of little value unless there is at the same time a certain amount of tension. What is needed in the stroke is something which can be got by bracing up the whole of the left side and leg just before impact.

The Blow

The body relaxes immediately afterwards, but at the moment of the actual blow everything is taut. Personally, I always like to feel during the up swing that the left shoulder and arm are as taut as they can comfortably be—with an entire absence of looseness in the arm or in the side, as the left arm is used to act as a sort of jumping off place for the throw-over to the right. The right side begins to get taut as the club-head goes up, and from the top it throws it back again on to the left.

The left knee should bend very slightly out toward the hole, to get this tension before impact. The knee is pushed out as the club-head comes down, and after that the whole action of the player is to get the left leg straight and taut.

Almost all the weight of the body is thrown on to the left foot by the bend of the left knee, but the action is done so smoothly as to be unnoticed by the onlooker. However, if the golfer omits to bend the left knee and the leg tightens up too soon, the chances are considerable that the shot will be a bad one.

The Outward Bend

The outward bend is for the purpose of putting the golfer in what might be called a good hitting position, in order to allow the club-head to move well forward in the follow-through. If the left leg tightens up too soon, the arc of the club-head must be curtailed, and that is why the good driver looks as if he were sitting down a trifle before impact.

Just Before Impact

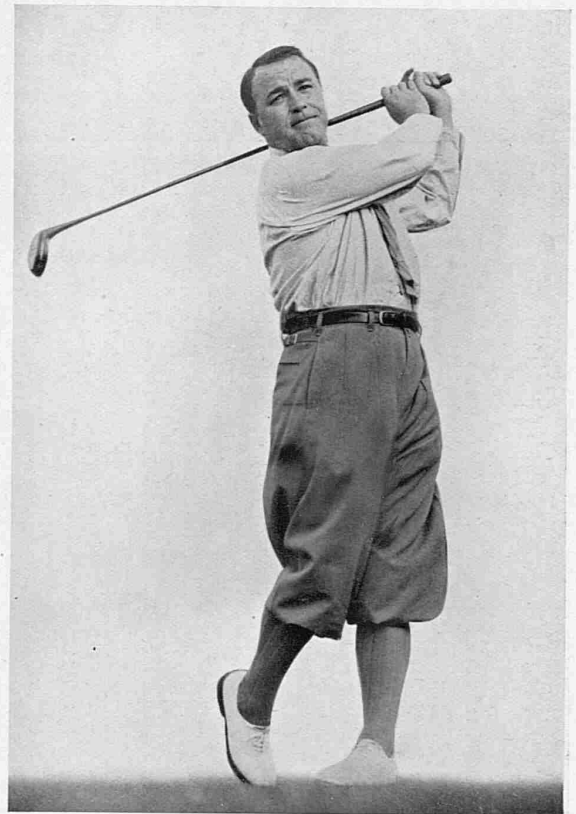
When driving well, the body will appear to get a second of time in which to perform this move slightly ahead of the moment when the club meets the ball. It is done as the swing down is made and not as we strike.

If the left leg is held stiffly all through the stroke the chances of the player raising the body too soon are greatly increased, and he may let down his hands under the impression that the ball may be

topped. This brace-up of the left leg comes into almost every stroke where power is needed.

Speed and Power

This brace-up also lends speed and power to the club-head, for when the golfer is unable to brace up firmly enough and at the right moment, the tendency is to loosen everything. The left-hand grip goes, and the arm becomes loose at the elbow.



THE AUTHOR: Gene Sarazen can explain how he plays, and this picture, taken by our photographer at peril of his life, certainly shows that he practises his teaching so far as the bracing of the left side is concerned. One can imagine the snap with which that knee goes back to the straight after the outward bend that he describes.

The left elbow should not give way before impact; it should be kept firm and in order to secure the firmness one must brace the left side. This may result in a tendency to pull one's shots, but this should be only temporary, because of being timed too soon and because the follow-through is not good. It is imperative that the club-head should go on after the ball.

There is a tendency to bring the hands round and in to the left side in this bracing process, but if the effort is rightly timed there will be less inclination toward a curtailed follow-through. I try always to play "through the ball" to ensure a complete follow-through.

THE bracing of the left side in the drive, described by Sarazen above, is demonstrated by J. Woollam in the film strip. In the address the poise of the body suggests concentrated energy, and the position at the beginning of the shot (2) shows that the balance is admirably adjusted, the right leg has taken the strain, but the forward movement has begun with the draw-down of the left hand. At the beginning of the hit (3) observe the position of the arms—left extended, but the right still into the side and the fractional outward bend of the left knee is evident. Compare this with its position in (4) showing the sudden bracing of the left side as the ball is hit. The knee is back in the straight and the left side is clearly firm. Note the high-flung hands in (5), there is no stiffness here, and at the finish the club-head has travelled over a large arc. But still the bracing of the left side, especially the leg, is unrelaxed.

A Drive by John Woollam