

# Henry Cotton on Golf

## Why I Dislike the 17th at Royal Mid-Surrey

**W**HEN I say I dislike a certain golf hole, it is usually "sour grapes," for I do not play that particular hole well. I score badly at it, not because it is very difficult, for, in a general sense, the really difficult holes inspire me, and I play them well, but because I cannot see how to get a good result at it with an orthodox shot.

A hole at which I always score badly is the 17th at the Royal Mid-Surrey, 450-yard hole with a very conspicuous plateau green which has a slope on it, from front to back; and this slope is very steep and very undulating on its surface. So the green itself is almost too tricky and can provide many impossible putts at times, as there seems no flat place to cut the hole, and so the ball always seems to be skidding sideways as it begins to die near the hole.

I take three putts from the front of this green regularly, and for that matter, so do most other golfers, but I suppose it is this knowledge and the consequent anxiety to get as near the pin as possible that makes the second shot appear so difficult for me. I have a terrible job judging the distance of my second shot, too.

### The Drive is Good

I play well from the 17th tee—it is a drive I rather like, as the cross bunkers with a narrow gap between them are something to go for, and I often hit an extra long drive on this hole, but whether the shot left is a No. 6 iron or a brassie, depending on the weather and the ground, I never quite decide what shot to play.

As the green is so built up and the sides are steep, a shot dropping from quite a height a yard wide only of the putting surface will shoot off sideways, leaving a very difficult

recovery shot back from the side of the green, whereas a running shot on the same line will stop on the bank of the green and will often leave a simple uphill chip.

Having taken five so many times I can never quite decide what to do. I decide up to the point of taking the club and hitting the ball with the best of intentions, but there is always some kind of a doubt left in me, and so rarely do I play the shot I have pictured that I am ever ready to reproach myself for having elected to play, say, a low shot instead of, say, a high one or *vice versa*.

In the final of the "News of the World" tournament at Royal Mid-Surrey this spring, Alfred Padgham and I had a close match all day, and although on the shots played I should have had a handsome lead, either I kept slipping up when I had a hole obviously won or he saved himself with a long putt.

### Lots of Trouble

We came to the 17th hole, the 35th of the day, all-square. After two good drives it was just my turn to play first, and there again was the 17th green about 160 yards away with a slight breeze off the right. I was not quite sure whether to play a high No. 3 iron or try to run the ball up to the top of the slope with a half No. 2 iron. I decided to play a low shot. It had just too much swing on it, and it ran across the corner of the green and disappeared down the bank towards the bunker.

I was annoyed with myself for having decided to play a low shot after all, because I had been playing the ordinary shots very well. The next thing to do was to get a four somehow.

Padgham took advantage of the fact that I had missed the green and played a beautiful

high No. 3 iron, which in the air looked as though it was going to be dead. But the ball actually finished well past the pin and lay on the back edge of the green, some six yards above the hole.

My ball was lying beautifully two feet from the top of the bank, and, except for an awkward stance, I could play it easily. I could not see a line to the hole side, nor could I visualise the shot—every time I tried to pick a spot to land the ball on, it looked, as I traced out the path of the ball to the hole, as though the ball could not go "dead." Finally, I decided I must take a chance, but I was not mentally ready, and, although I went through all the actions, I made a poor attempt when it came to striking the ball, and it ran feebly towards the hole, turned sideways down the bank, and when it came to rest it was so far away from the hole it was still my turn to play.

### Padgham Missed, Too

I felt all was lost, as the last hole was the sort of hole that was halved in four. I putted too cautiously, and the ball stopped four feet short and still left me with a side hill putt. Padgham had now two for the hole. He putted carefully down the slope, but misjudged a small hog's back along which his ball had to run, and his putt finished about three feet six inches wide. I holed my putt and then to everybody's surprise Padgham missed his. He hit his ball too weakly to keep the difficult line, and so I scrambled out of this hole with a half. What a hard-worked-for five, especially after such a drive!

The 36th we halved in four, as I expected, and so we went on. At the 230-yard 1st, we both missed the green on the left of the pin and I had to play first, a little pitch over the shoulder of a bunker, the ball lay only about six yards from the pin, and it was a delicate shot, for the ball had to be stopped on a fast, dry surface. I played a lovely shot to two feet from the hole, and Padgham, hesitating between a pitch and a pitch and run, for he had nothing between his ball and the pin, played a poor shot and ran the ball five yards past the pin. He took two putts, and I won the hole and the match with a three.

### A Five Every Time

As my other matches had finished early, I had not played the 17th except in the morning round of the final, when I took a five and lost it. I am glad I did not have to play it, because I felt I could not picture the ball going up on the green, and I looked like taking a five every time.

The green, which is a very big one, is the sort where, if you are an inch or two out in your guess of the line to the hole, the ball can finish yards away. On the practice day, I usually put down a few balls at the bottom of the green and slog them up the slope, for the stroke cannot be called a putt, and I generally give up in disgust, as no putt seems to finish near the pin at all. I often wonder how much the green has sunk since it was originally constructed, as the slope is too severe ever to have been designed like that.

I have done it at times as I would have chosen, but I do not ever feel comfortable as I line up to play my second to that green, to say the least of it, although it "pulled a fast one" on my opponent as well at a crucial moment and saved my neck.



JOHN BALL AT HOYLAKES

This picture of the famous amateur golfer, whose death occurred last week, was taken during the Amateur Championship of 1921 at Hoylake, his native course, on which he won three of the eight amateur championships which fell to him between 1888 and 1912. In 1890 he won both Amateur and Open championships—a feat unequalled until Bobby

Jones triumphed in 1930. For many years before the last war he played for England against Scotland and captained the English team on 10 occasions. Ball's prowess at golf was apparent at an early age, and he was only 15 when in 1876 he finished sixth in the Open, being but eight strokes behind the winner, Bob Martin.

*Henry Cotton*

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