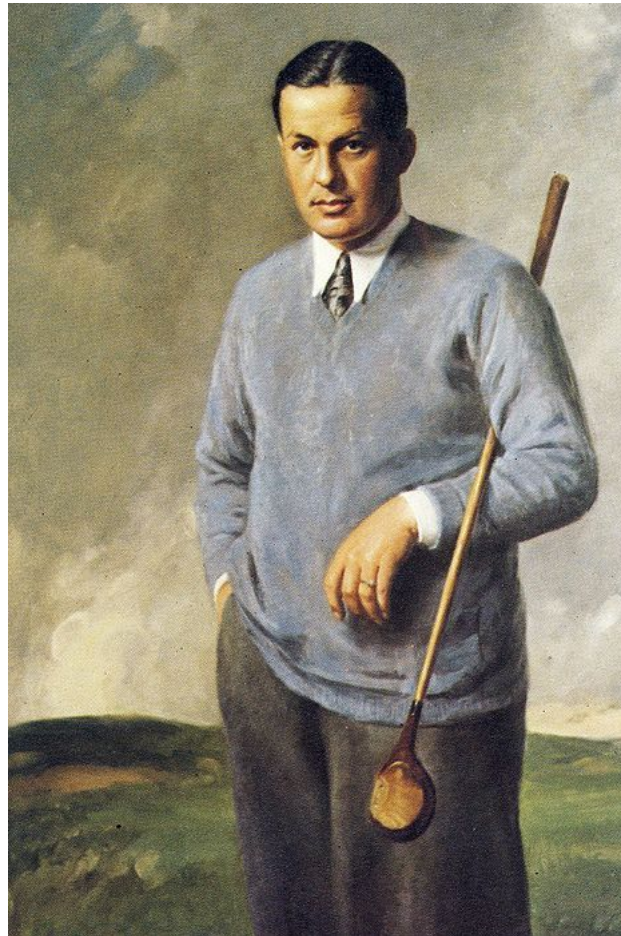


Learning from the Greats

Bobby Jones



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Robert Tyre Jones, better known as Bobby Jones, was one of the greatest golfers of all time. Jones is probably best known today as the founder of annual The Masters competition played on a course of which he was co-architect along with Alister MacKenzie that opened in 1933 with the first Masters being played in 1934.

Jones was to win 7 Majors in golf – 4 US Opens and 3 British Opens - in just 7 years - all as an amateur golfer, for he was never to turn professional.

Jones is listed as the 7th most successful Golf Major Champion winner of all time – a list headed up by Jack Nicklaus with some 18 titles that include all of the 4 Majors, one of which Jones could never compete, the US PGA as he was not a professional and the Masters, which of course did not exist in his playing day although he played in the inaugural 1934 event tying for 13th place despite four years of no competitive golf.

If we analyse the Major Champion winners a little bit more closely by taking out the PGA and Masters wins, Nicklaus' record is exactly the same as Jones: 4 US Opens and 3 British Opens. Interestingly, if we do the same with Tiger Woods (second on the list) he has 3 US Open Wins and 3 British opens – Jones has a better record!

His most famous feat that has never been, and is most unlikely to ever be, repeated is to have won the US Amateur, US Open, British Amateur, and British Open titles all in one year. With this feat achieved Jones retired from competitive golf at the age of just 28 years having won 13 Major and Amateur titles between 1923 and 1930.

Jones' decision to retire in 1930 he explained by saying: *'It [championship golf] is something like a cage. First you are expected to get into it and then you are expected to stay there.'* An insightful comment that is as appropriate to professional golf today as it was some 92 years ago. More significantly it opens a window into Jones' mind who was one of the first to recognise the importance of the mental side of golf and its role in both winning and losing.

In the January 1929 edition of Vanity Fair an article was published written by Jones. He was the current holder of the British Open and the US Amateur and was by now an established National hero, so an article by him in such a prestigious magazine was no surprise. However, what may have been a surprise to many was that he chose to write on the *'Mental Hazards of Golf'* but for those closer to Jones this was a natural externalisation of his perfectionist character.



'The Mental Hazards of Golf'

Jones' article, *'The Mental Hazards of Golf,'* carried an interesting sub-title: *'Stray Thoughts on Worry, Nerves, Temperament, and Lack of Concentration in the Game'*. There is nothing 'stray' in this two-page article that goes to the very core of the mental game and requires more than one or more reads to fully take in (see Appendix for the full article).

Jones was human and as such subject to nerves, worry, emotional dispositions and reactions, as well as possessing a fear of losing concentration as more in depth reading of his own writings and that of others attests.

An Analysis of Parts of Jones' Article

'Golf is assuredly a mystifying game. Even the very best players cannot step on the first tee with any assurance as to what they are going to do.'

Jones commences his article by raising the issue of **Consistency** – one of golf's most elusive factors affecting every golfer whether club golfer or professional. Jones illustrates this by taking another golfing 'great' and a major competitor of his at the time: *'Even Walter Hagen may have a putting slump from which he cannot recover in an entire round.'* (Hagen was an 11 time Major winner between 1914 and 1929 and is third after Nicklaus and Woods on the most Major wins).

Jones continues: *'It would seem that if a person has hit a golf ball a thousand times he should be able to duplicate the performance almost at will. But such is certainly not the case.'* Here he adds **Interference factors** – mental factors that 'interfere' with our ability to perform.

Whilst in the next paragraph he expands further, and that *'...we have no worries when we are playing well'*. He concluded by suggesting that *'...we play well because we are able to play without giving thought to our method'*. Now he refers to what sports psychologists refer to toady as 'Being In the Zone' - a phenomenon where everything happens with ease or thought.

With these first three paragraphs we have sufficient things to consider further, but in paragraphs 17 and 18, and still on the first page, Jones raises another key issue writing; *'I usually play better on the first round than I do on the next four or five. It is one of those phenomena hard to explain'* continuing to say that: *'When a player is familiar with the course and has played it many times, as each hole comes up to be played, it is natural, I think, for him to conjure up in his mind visions of the way in which he has naturally encountered trouble at that hole'*.



Here we have the issues of familiarity where we let in **The Inner Critic** and **Polar Thinking**, well-illustrated as he continues, *'He will perhaps remember how he sliced his shot into a trap (bunker) and took a six or a seven. Then, as he hits the ball, he will be determined to avoid the trap at all costs – and usually with disastrous consequences.* Already part of his concentration has gone and a part of his ability to play the stroke correctly.

What can we Learn?

Jones has introduced in a few short paragraphs some key Sports Psychology themes. At the time of writing this article Sports Psychology was very much in its infancy with the first book on Sports Psychology being published in German in 1920, *'Body and Mind in Sport'*, by Dr Carl Diem based in Berlin and it was not until the mid-1920s that the field Sports Psychology took root in the USA.

Nonetheless, Jones had previously eluded many times to the 'mental game of golf' in his first book, *'Down the Fairway'*, published in 1927, writing that: *'Golf is a game that is played on a five inch course – the distance between your ears'*. (The original edition of *'Down the Fairway'* was a limited 300 copy run that now passes hands for many thousands of dollars and is still today one of the greatest books on golf.)

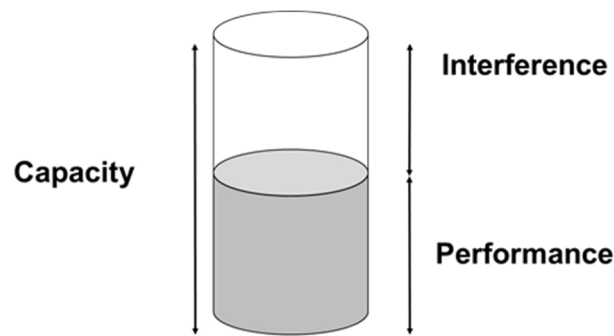
Performance

Golf is a fascinating game for it is comprised of a number of 'inner' games: Player vs the course (matching or beating par) ; Player vs Players against the course (Strokeplay); Player vs Player (Matchplay); and of course Self vs the game! Golf comprises of the physical and mechanical ability to swing a club effectively and efficiently but more importantly it is primarily also a Mental game particularly when it comes to performance.

In looking at the Mental side of performance we can use a simple formula to illustrate the challenge: $P = C - I$

Performance (P) being the outcome of our Capacity (C), the current level of our ability, less the Interference (I) factors present that affects our capability to perform. The diagram below illustrates this process more clearly with the vessel being our Capacity with our Performance going up and down dependent on the level of Interference currently present:





Interference Factors

Interference factors come in two forms.

The first are External Interference factors that in golf include for instance such things such the weather, the course condition, other players and how they are performing, as well as other external factors that can get dragged on to the course e.g. home-life issues etc.

The second are Internal Interference factors that are the inner distractions that are constantly passing through our mind through our 'internal chatter', the volume of which can go up and down depending on pressure or stress, the main sources in golf being:

- Beliefs
- Expectations
- Perfectionism
- Self-consciousness
- Lack of Confidence
- Frustrations

The Inner Critic

We all converse with ourselves as we go through our daily life and when under some kind of pressure the inner 'chatter' can turn negative very quickly as our Inner Critic goes to work 'feeding' off false and skewed Beliefs, Lack of confidence, and Frustrations.

Golf is a game where the Inner Critic can quickly go to work so destroying our game. For example, we stand on the first tee and already the volume on the 'chatter' can start turning up:

'I screwed-up this drive last week'. You look around you and your confidence drops as you are self-conscious of repeating the same poor drive in front of your golfing mates and your Inner Critic tells you: *'They are better than me'*. Sure enough you slice the drive into the trees'. You now embed a belief (possibly false): *'I always slice'*.



You approach the ball that fortunately is lying well with a good line for the green. However, the 'chatter' volume goes up again saying: *'That bunker is in play on the right'* and sure enough you have given yourself an embedded command and that's where you go.

Standing in the bunker over the ball you are saying to yourself: *'I don't play well out of the sand'* and with a further embedded command you thin the shot and shoot over the green into the rough just beyond the fringe.

You decide you cannot putt it, so you have to either chip or pitch the ball. The 'chatter' now splits into two potential possibilities and you are now in the clutches of **Polar Thinking**. You have green to work with so you can chip but the 'chatter' tells you that *'you are not a great chipper'* so you then start thinking of pitching and the 'chatter' reminds you that *'you have left these short before'*. With confidence evaporating fast you grab the wedge and rush a pitch that shoots to the right but ends up on the green way from the hole. You now express your frustration loudly to your golfing buddies : *'There we go the shank is back'*.

The Inner Critic is quick to step-in and point out: *'You could easily take three putts from here.'* You read the green and see a potential double borrow, or do you? You set up to putt as the 'chatter' reminds you: *'You have been misreading a few putts recently'*. You compensate and push it wide and 3 feet past the hole. The Inner Critic is quick to say: *'There you go. You now have a putt you can easily miss'*. Sure enough you miss it and walk off with a 7 on your card.

Hopefully, this does not sound familiar but if it does you can learn to take control of the Inner Critic.

Beliefs

Beliefs can be divided into those that are positive and those that are negative.

Neuro Science has confirmed what psychologists have thought for years: each day we have some 50,000 thoughts a day of which 40,000 are negative. These thoughts are beliefs with significantly only 1 in every 5 five being positive, so accounting for why negative beliefs through our Inner Critic can creep into our golf game.

With this knowledge in mind the challenge must be to continually ask ourself questions that challenge and change mindset: *'Why am I thinking negatively when I can be thinking positively?'*

Positive thinking is the enemy of the Inner Critic and not falling into its clutches is vital and can be achieved through a positive mindset that sets realistic and achievable goals.



A Positive Approach

It is important to recognise that our handicap is a good indicator of our capacity to perform. It is therefore not realistic with a 24 handicap to think we can play many holes to par – we must think and plan how we are going to play the course by looking at the card but recognising that ‘plans rarely survive contact with the enemy’. Here the ‘enemy’ ranges from the course, our opponent/s, and ourselves.

With this in mind managing yourself starts with thinking that the par 4 first hole is a par 5 and that achieving that is a good start with your goal to play for that. You have no unrealistic expectations. You know that a good but not exceptional drive down the middle will set this goal in motion. Mentally rehearse that shot in your mind and visual yourself achieving it – the mind can easily be tricked, indeed it is what the Inner Critic is good at! If you can keep visualising the shot you will probably be surprised to find that that your drive has been successful.

Keeping your mind free of ‘chatter’ you approach your ball on the fairway visualising your next shot from a few yards behind. The distance may be too far for you, so play within yourself and visualise the shot that will put you in the right place on the fairway for a clear chip or pitch for the pin with your third shot – shut the right side bunker out from your thinking and certainly do not let Polar Thinking overtake you by trying to hit that ‘big shot’, for now is the time to build confidence by playing within your capabilities. You take a 5 iron and swing smoothly with the ball landing about 40 yards to the left of the green.

You walk up and visualise the perfect pitch. Without any other thought entering your mind you rehearse the shot and see it in your mind flying high on line and then running up to the hole.

You play the shot and come up 10 foot from the hole.

You might make this putt and indeed you rehearse and visualise it but remember that your goal is a 5 so accept that in your mind so you can relax on the putt and go with no pressure. You read the green and visualise that it will break from the left lip. You line up and strike it with confidence. It slides by but you remain calm as you have achieved your goal.

You are currently ‘winning in the mind game’. Relax, for you are now being fuelled on positive beliefs and there are 17 more holes to concentrate on. The challenge is to remain positively focused shutting out the Inner Critic remembering Kipling’s advice: *‘To keep your head when all around are losing theirs’*.



Consistency

Consistency of performance is without doubt the 'Holy Grail' of golf and has to be accepted as illusive – what happens in one round may not in the next. Golf is a game that requires a complex synchronisation of the physical mechanics of the swing with the mental game.

Too many golfers focus on the physical side of the game and overlook the mental, the latter of which is far easier to practice and conquer. Indeed, some pretty poor professional swingers of a golf club have been able to win because of the strength of their mental game to overcome the days that consistency of the physical game is not there.

In the days that Jones played US and Open Championships they were often decided by match play over 36 holes – a real golf challenge, perhaps sadly missing today. Jones would dread the lunch break between rounds, for he was aware that a good round on the first 18 had no certainty of being repeated in the afternoon – the physical inactivity was a time for our inner critic to go to work and take control. He also recognised it as a time to refocus his mind if the morning had not gone well.

For the weekly golfer Jones gives good advice saying that whilst '*... we are able to play without giving thought to our method*' the reality is, however, those times when '*... we puzzle ourselves over the wheres and whyfores when we are having our troubles*'. Accepting and understanding these is a good reason as to why we should spend more time understanding and practicing the mental game as opposed to going to the range and thoughtlessly hammering balls. The mental game can be practiced off the course or range, in our home, and as we go about our daily lives thinking positively not negatively.



Jones with his 4 'Grand Slam' Trophies won in 1930



Appendix

‘Mental Hazards: Stray Thoughts on Worry, Nerves, Temperament, and Lack of Concentration in the Game’

‘Vanity Fair’, 29th January 1929



Mental Hazards of Golf

Stray Thoughts on Worry, Nerves, Temperament and Lack of Concentration in the Game

By ROBERT T. JONES, Jr., National Amateur Champion

EDITOR'S NOTE:—The following article by the National Amateur Champion is published in *Vanity Fair* by permission of the Bell Syndicate, Incorporated.

GOLF is assuredly a mystifying game. Even the very best players cannot step on to the first tee with any assurance as to what they are going to do. Abe Mitchell may drive flawlessly today, but he cannot be sure he will do so tomorrow. Even Walter Hagen may have a putting slump from which he cannot recover in an entire round. It would seem that if a person has hit a golf ball correctly a thousand times he should be able to duplicate the performance almost at will. But such is certainly not the case.

Mr. Harold H. Hilton advanced the opinion that we give too little attention to the "Dos" and too much to the "Don'ts". In other words, when everything is going smoothly we accept our good fortune complacently with no questions asked. We only puzzle ourselves over the wheres and wherefores when we are having our troubles.

He says that we have no worries when we are playing well. That statement involves the concession that we give no thought to our method because we are playing well. But it seems to me that he has put the cart before the horse for I should rather say that we play well because we are able to play without giving thought to our method.

THE golf swing is a most complicated combination of muscular actions, too complex to be controlled by objective, conscious mental effort. It is impossible to direct every muscle in its peculiar sphere of activity. Consequently we must rely a good deal upon the instinctive reactions acquired by long practice. It has been my experience that the more completely we can depend upon this instinct—the more thoroughly we can divest the subjective mind of conscious control—the more perfectly can we execute our shots. I have even had the experience that when I played some of my best shots in trying situations I had not the slightest recollection of hitting the ball. That intense concentration upon results (to the absolute exclusion of all thoughts as to method) is the secret of a good shot. Few great shots are played when the mind is fixed on the position of the feet, the behaviour of the left arm, etc.

Since I began playing golf, I have played three iron shots that I shall always remember. Each of them won an open championship for me—at Inwood, at St. Andrew's and at Columbus. Of the shot at Inwood I have no recollection whatever other than that of seeing the ball in the air against a black cloud on the horizon. But I remember distinctly that on the two other occasions my knees were actually knocking together as I addressed the ball. I think it may have been pure nervousness and unadulterated fright that made me hit those shots correctly.

The great match-players among the amateurs are of the nervous type. Von Elm and Sweetser are as high-strung as thoroughbred

race horses. It is that quality which makes it certain that they will never descend to plodding mediocrity.

Almost every contestant leaves the first tee with a certain amount of apprehension in his soul. But a lot of them make the mistake of trying to assume an indifferent attitude. In trying to quiet a pounding heart or still a trembling hand, it is quite possible to fall into a lazy slackness which cannot be shaken. The competitor who can keep himself concentrated and "on edge" is the hard man to beat.

In playing any golf shot it always helps if the player can shut out from his mind all worry over the result of the effort, at least while he is in the act of playing the shot. It is well to be apprised of all dangers, and the chances of failure (and the penalty likely to be incurred in the event of such a failure) ought to be weighed carefully before deciding upon the shot. But, after taking the stance, it is too late to worry. The only thing to do then is to hit the ball.

I DO not believe it is possible to stress this point unduly. It is not easy, even with the assistance of a first-class teacher, for a man to develop a sound golfing style. But it is possible and practicable for a person to cultivate a mental attitude toward the game which will enable him to get everything possible out of his own capabilities.

Medal competition is the most diabolical sort of golf because it puts so many worries into the player's head. Unseen rivals are pictured as never missing a shot. When we ourselves make a slip, we feel that every man in the field is going to take advantage of it. We cannot conceive that the others are also having their difficulties. Strangely, too, every report borne about among the gallery which reaches the player's ears has to do with some other man's marvellous start, or his "three birdies in a row". If a man listens to all these reports he can hardly be blamed for stumbling a bit.

Suppose your opponent, in match play, plays a fine shot dead on the flag and, from the place where you stand, his ball appears to be within a few inches of the hole. What will you do? Very likely you will strain every muscle and nerve to lay your ball inside of his. You will try so hard to do this that you will probably hook or slice into a bunker and permit your opponent to win the hole without the necessity of holing his putt.

What you should do is to tell yourself that your opponent's ball is not likely to be as close to the hole as it appears to be. Probably he is short, and at least he may have left himself a very missable putt. Tell yourself also that you are going to try to hit your shot well in order to get close to the hole, but that you will make sure that you get on the green somewhere within reasonable holing distance so that your opponent will at least have to hole out his putt in order to win the hole.

An approach may stop only six or eight feet away from the hole, yet there still remains

the putt to be holed, which is not always a simple procedure. The man who, in playing his approach, keeps one eye on the ball of his opponent which is already on the green is simply looking for trouble.

On the putting green, too, it is often hard to keep from thinking about the importance of the putt rather than about hitting the ball properly. The thought that a miss may mean defeat or at least an almost hopeless position is often an absolute bar to concentration. The observer can usually tell what is in the player's mind by the way the player strokes the ball, even when the putt, by good fortune, tumbles in. A quick, nervous jab betrays the anxiety in the player's mind.

I shall always remember Johnny Farrell's marvellous composure and concentration on the thirty-sixth green at Olympia Fields. Confronted by a putt of about ten feet (over a sloping green) on which the championship depended, he was all set to putt when the cameras at the edge of the green began to grind loudly. The strain showing in his face, Johnny stepped away from his ball while the machines were silenced. After some delay, he putted and down went the ball. The fact that the putt was holed was by no means the impressive part of it. That might have happened in a number of ways. But whatever strain was reflected in Johnny's face had no visible effect upon the smooth, beautifully timed stroke which rolled the ball gently into the hole. It was as fine an example of true concentration as I have ever seen.

I AM sure it has been a source of wonder to many how even a first class golfer can go out in an exhibition match on a course he has never before seen, and equal or beat the par for the course the first time around. I remember watching Leo Diegel shoot a sixty-five over the Louisville Country Club course the day after the National Open at Detroit. He had never played the course before, yet his score was two or three strokes better than the existing course record.

In playing various charity matches I myself have gained a little experience along that line. I have found that if the putting greens are good and the distances not too hard to judge, I usually play better on the first round than I do on the next four or five. It is one of those phenomena which are hard to explain.

When a player is familiar with the course and has played it many times, as each hole comes up to be played, it is natural, I think, for him to conjure up in his mind visions of the way in which he has usually encountered trouble on that hole. He will, perhaps, remember how he sliced his shot into a trap and took a six or seven. Then, as he hits the ball, he will be determined to avoid that trap at all costs—and usually with disastrous consequences. Already a part of his concentration has gone and a part of his ability to play the stroke correctly.

When playing a course for the first
(Continued on page 92)

Mental Hazards of Golf

(Continued from page 68)

time there are no unpleasant recollections coming up to spoil the shot. The player usually sees only the flag and the green, and if his glance does fall upon a guarding bunker it is only for a moment. The hazards are all a part of the background, instead of being in the centre of his mental picture.

The ability to hit the shot for the flag and to let trouble take care of itself is a rare attribute among golfers. I think it is one of the chief *fortes* of Walter Hagen and Harry Cooper. Neither appears to give a thought to what may happen to the shot. I am sure that they see only the green as the inevitable destination of the ball.

I suppose it is some complex of this sort that has caused me to find, upon every course, at least one hole that I simply cannot play. I get into trouble on it once and after that I always get into trouble on it again, and almost always in a different way. There are four bunkers around the sixth green at Oakmont. I think I got into all of them during the four rounds of the tournament there.

I shall not soon forget how I struggled, at Olympia Fields, to overcome a fear of getting off the course. The fairways of that course appeared to be impossibly narrow, and in trying to guide the ball down the restricted lanes, I would alternately push it off to one side or the other. And, try as I would, (although I knew my trouble was purely a mental one) it was not until the last round of the play-off that I was able to swing freely and without a feeling of tenseness. That in a nutshell explains the difficulty experienced by ranking players, when opposed to men of less reputation, in an eighteen hole match. Afraid to allow his opponent to gain encouragement and inspiration by an early lead, the seeded player begins by being over cautious, attempting to keep meticulously to the paths of virtue and thus give his adversary no openings. The other man, feeling that he is to be beaten in any event, starts off in an aggressive frame of mind, intent only upon playing his best, or better than his best if possible.

Even the narrowest fairways are wide enough for a well-hit shot. The difficulty arises when we allow the sight of them to upset our manner of hitting. If we ease off at the last minute, or whip the club through with a jerk, no fairway in America will be wide enough to hold the ball.

On the seventeenth hole at Brae Burn, in the first qualifying round, I hit one of the worst shots I can ever remember hitting. The seventeenth hole is 255 yards and requires a very accurate brassie shot. The more serious difficulty there lies to the right, and this was the side I determined to avoid. But, as I addressed the ball, I was thinking more about keeping away from the danger on the right than

about driving to the green, and, as I hit the ball, I did something—Heaven knows what—that sent the ball an inconceivable distance into the very woods I was trying to avoid. I was very lucky to get out of that scrape with a four. This desire to *guide* the shot is the most difficult fault in golf to overcome.

To think too much of the swing while playing a golf shot is usually disastrous. It is a difficult matter to be conscious of every detail of the stroke and still retain a modicum of concentration upon driving the ball to a desired spot. It is this difficulty which leads the average golfer to believe that the expert player must have nothing to worry about except hitting the ball.

We hear so much talk of "machine-like play" that it is no wonder that a good player is often thought of as an automaton who keeps swinging his clubs in the same groove day after day. It would be an exceedingly happy circumstance if such were the case, but it is unfortunately not so, and not likely to be so as long as the mortals who struggle with the game remain in their present stage of earthly advancement. The expert has to make use of his golfing intelligence and experience every time he strikes a ball, and it is his ability quickly to discover, and remedy, the defects in his swing which enables him to widen the space that separates him from the ordinary player.

That is the one great reason that I always try to manage five or ten minutes practice before starting out on a competitive round. The practice is not, as some may think, indulged in for the purpose of learning something new, nor yet in the hope of substantially increasing any skill I may already possess. My sole and only purpose is to make whatever adjustments may be necessary to gain confidence and control. When a player steps to the first tee without having hit a ball that day, he is taking a step in the dark. In such a case he must feel his way for the first few holes until he can become oriented, and discover whether his clubs are going to feel like broom handles, fish poles, or golf clubs in his hands.

I do not think it matters a great deal whether the preliminary practice is satisfying or not, although, if time permits, it ought to be continued until the shots begin to go. In five minutes one can hit as many shots on a practice field as in five or six holes of actual play, and that should give us an ample opportunity to "get the feel" of our clubs. In this little workout, or warming-up skirmish, I personally like to give every club a little attention—that is, a few shots each with driver, spoon, mid-iron, mashie, and mashie-niblick, followed by a half-minute or so on the putting green with three or four balls.



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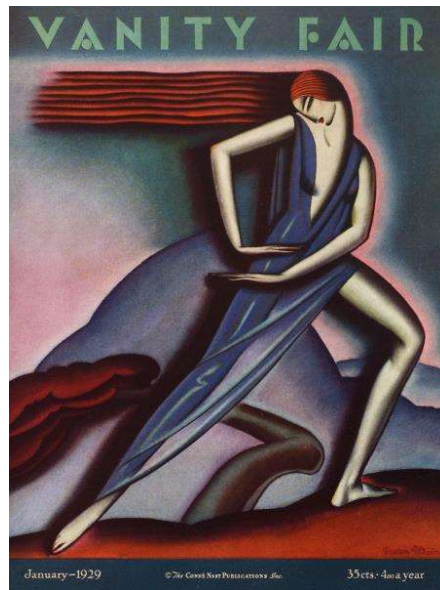
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