

# DO WE CARRY TOO MANY CLUBS— OR TOO FEW?

*By S. L. McKinlay*

THE Americans, according to a report, are proposing to change that Rule of Golf which they introduced on 1st January, 1938, and which the R. and A., after an initial setback, brought into operation 16 months later.

The rule is the one limiting to 14 the number of clubs which a player may select before setting out on a round. There are refinements of the rule covering replacement of a club or clubs broken during the course of play (which have caused some grievous headaches in the past), but in general there has been universal acceptance of the limitation, and nothing in the record books suggests that standards have suffered because players are not allowed to carry a club for every shot they might be called upon to play.

Now the Americans are said to want an increase to 16, and, I suppose, if the Russians played golf, this would be the first step in an arms race and before long there would be something like an auction, ending in no limitation at all.

## **Large Profit.**

It is small wonder that a Glasgow business man told me the other evening that he was going to buy shares in an American company that is soon to start manufacturing golf clubs in Scotland. Only the manufacturers would profit from a lifting of the limit—and how they would profit, too. None of us is so good a putter as readily to resist the temptation to carry another implement against those days when the ball will not go into the hole.

Today, under the 14-club rule, a spare putter is a luxury, if not indeed a snare and delusion. But a spare driver, or an extra wedge, or a No. 5 wood (which has the approval of no less an expert than Bobby Locke), or a special chipper—any golfer of ambition could easily add at least two clubs to his kit in the fond hope that in so doing he might subtract as many strokes from his score.

Alas, as the poet said, regardless of their doom the little victims play.

It is odd that the Americans should want to raise the limit because when

they introduced the 14-club rule more than 20 years ago one of their arguments was that "the limitation of clubs would tend to restore the making of individual shots and increase the skill of the player. The multiplicity of clubs tends towards mechanisation of the game. In earlier days players used to change their swing in order to execute the various types of shots. In recent years the tendency has been merely to take a different club."

## **Professionals' Part.**

Perhaps the new generation of legislators takes a less austere view; perhaps the professionals in America, acting at the behest of the manufacturers who subsidise them, are now too powerful and persuasive. I, for one, would deplore any extension of the limit. I would not go so far as to insist on a return to the older custom when seven clubs were held to be sufficient and only the top professionals thought it necessary to carry more.

Vardon in his heyday carried only nine, and he was not a bad player. His nine, for those with a historical bent, were—driver, brassie, driving mashie, driving cleek, light cleek, iron, mashie, niblick, and putter. The driving mashie was similar to a modern No. 2 iron with perhaps a deeper face, the two cleeks corresponded, very roughly, to the modern No. 3 iron, and the iron was a short-shafted, fairly heavy club not unlike a modern No. 4 iron. The equivalents are very rough, but there was nothing rough about the way Vardon and the other old masters handled clubs that a modern professional would be hard put to wield with equal effect.

On the other hand, at the time the Americans gave a lead in limiting the ironmongery humped around by groaning caddies, it was not uncommon for the leading Americans, both professionals and amateurs, to have at their disposal upwards of 20 clubs. When Lawson Little won the Amateur Championship at Prestwick in 1934 his caddie staggered under a load of 22 clubs. He had some half-dozen pitching clubs, a veritable

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## HON. SECRETARY'S NOTES



### F. G. Hawtree Memorial Fund & The Tournament

The Spring course at the S.T.R.I. is already booked but I am hoping that it will be possible to include one more greenkeeper. Two places in the Autumn course are already reserved and I shall be inviting applications later.

It looks as if the popularity of these courses will require booking as far ahead

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battery with which, truth compels me to admit, he peppered the green with deadly accuracy. But he would have been equally effective, I am persuaded, with only half as many. And who is to say that Vardon would have won more than his six Open Championships if he had carried 18 clubs instead of nine?

### Clubs Used.

Let me suggest for those who may seek to anticipate the day when the 14-club limit may be raised a simple exercise in recollection. After your next round of golf make a count of the clubs you used. And count, too, the number of times you felt at a loss for a club. If your experience is anything like mine you will have to admit that you did not use more than three-quarters of your clubs and that you would not have trimmed your score by a single stroke if you had had an extra club to play with.

Most people have the standard set of clubs—four woods, nine irons—from 2 to 9 and the wedge—and a putter. How often, I wonder, do you use your No. 2 iron? And if you do use it how often do you play a satisfactory shot? For

After visiting the Sheffield Section to hear Mr. Hawtree's lecture on golf course design at the end of November, I travelled down to Bristol with him in December to hear a repeat performance for the South Western Section. A. A. Cockfield, the Section's Hon. Secretary had brought along a strong contingent from his club at Sham Castle, and as usual question time was a lively feature of the entertainment. I hope to get along to the Southern Section lecture on 31st January, and possibly to another Section this winter, if I can get a lift in the right direction at the right time.

as does August accommodation for the Tournament which will take place this year on the 13th, 14th and 15th August. Prospective competitors should be thinking about this. I hope we shall have an even bigger attendance this year.

A Happy New Year to you all,

C. H. Dix.

that matter, how many of our professionals will back themselves to hit and hold a green with a No. 2 iron? Precious few of them, for the bigger the iron the less assured are they, and the majority of golfers, of hitting an adequate shot.

No doubt the power of the modern professionals and the excellence of modern equipment combine to give them few opportunities of playing very long second shots. They are wonders with the medium and short irons, but notably weaker vessels when they have to use the big stick through the green. Why then should we handicap golfers think that we can rifle long iron shots to the heart of a green?

Perhaps these rather sour reflections are the best kind of argument for carrying the No. 5 wood, and we might have to be very strong-minded to jettison the No. 2 iron in its favour. I prefer to think that the Royal and Ancient, despite its known passion for solidarity with our American cousins, will cry "Hold, enough", and not tamper with at least one rule that has done no harm to golf and golfers.

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