

The dropped right shoulder

Patrick Smartt

The fascination of golf is that you never know what will turn up next, on or off the course. A study of a group of golfers standing, rather than a cursory glance, will show that the right shoulder is perceptibly lower than the left.

That may come as a surprise to those disinterested in detail. It does not need a camera to prove this. A look round your fellow golfers will provide the answer. It is an occupational disfigurement—if that be not too strong a word. A partial cause is that the right hand is lower on the club grip than the left.

It is so too with the cricketer, but when he is striking, the ball is at least a foot above the ground. The golfer has to reach down and through. In playing his stroke the cricketer's feet alter their position. When he is going for a drive the left foot is advanced down the pitch, in a defensive stroke he steps back. All this must reduce the strain imposed on his spine. The golfer, who with his feet retaining the position as in the address, is twisting his back.

Some time ago, I watched that great batsman, Tom Graveney, demonstrating strokes on television. If one ignored foot action, there was a distinct similarity with golf. The more so if the viewer came from hickory days, when the hands were used to a greater extent. The timing was perfect, and at no time did the back have to twist, although in the hook or sweep his shoulders followed right

round. But, and this should be emphasised, they had not turned in the reverse direction as would a golfer's at the start.

It is not insignificant that in recent years, we hear quite often of tournament players complaining of bad backs. My impression is that we seldom hear of it where cricketers are concerned, though it might be expected from the speed bowlers.

That great, and highly intelligent golfer, Henry Cotton, has on more than one occasion stated that he wished he had done corrective exercises, in his youthful, hard practising days. He has not mentioned a damaged ligament of the spine, but he has the rounded shoulders prevalent with many golfers. Whatever he says has to be listened to, and so far as I am concerned, accepted.

In the middle and late 1920s, when the immortal Bobby Jones was at his summit, a doctor after watching his full swing, remarked that no spine could stand up to that torsion for long. And so, alas, it was to be. His latter years were spent in a wheel chair, because a spinal ailment induced a form of creeping paralysis. A terrible end to a magnificent career.

It is worthy of note that Jones had a more pronounced hip turn than the modern player. Pivot, it was called, referring to the hips and not the shoulders. It is seldom heard today, for the shoulder turn of the 'name' players is fuller than that of the hips. On my old principle of testing the

validity of statements, I have stood up and turned the shoulders without any hip movement, followed by shoulders and hip pivot.

Experiment is ever useful, it produces an effect expected or unexpected. The result revealed something. It was a test on a dicky spine, which called a halt to golf a long time ago, though not caused by it. The first, with shoulders only, caused no discomfort. When there was a pivot, there was a protest at the base of the spine.

Why, as a layman, that should be, must be left to the medical profession. It has to be taken into account that the modern player, with steel shafts, hits harder than his predecessors. He is in tournament contention many more times than those of an earlier era.

Perhaps as one grows older, and the shoulders incline to stoop, this deformity is more apparent. Some twelve years ago, my daughter was getting married. Father visited a small country town—his last visit to London, but no longer the London he knew was in 1959—where a man's shop was agent for a well known clothiers in London. Climbing into the morning coat on the special day, the right shoulder felt different to the other. It had been slightly padded to make it level with the left. A remarkable piece of observation on the part of the agent.

The whole, thinking of that dropped right shoulder, of which most golfers are unaware, and not all have it, begs the question do spines permanently out of true, lead to trouble in the end?

One wonders whether Sherlock Holmes walking in the street with his usual companion, on seeing one of our subjects, would have had the percipience to notice, and remark: "That man plays golf, my dear Watson."

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