

CHAPTER II

The Racquet and how to hold it

THE choice of a racquet is the first step in the education of a player and it is also of first importance. It is necessary, from the very beginning, to become acquainted with the most suitable type of racquet. I advise every beginner to start with the best possible. This is a game in which delicacy of touch is one of the salient characteristics, and only a very delicately balanced instrument is capable of giving very delicate results. There is no special make that is superior to the others. The best racquets of the leading makers maintain a uniform level of excellence.

The racquet should not be too heavy or too light. If it is too weighty you will find that, although it may add pace to your smash and length to your clearing shots, yet these advantages will be more than counter-balanced by the fact that it is entirely unsuitable for strokes where a light touch is necessary, and that it tires your arm considerably in a long match. On the other hand the very light racquet, while better for such strokes as 'drops,' takes away from the pace of your 'kill.' I have tried both kinds and have found that a racquet weighing about $5\frac{1}{2}$ oz. suits me best, and the weight of those used by other first-class players is not

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very different—certainly the difference is not more than $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. in either direction.

The size of the handle depends on the size of the hand. I like it to be about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. No fixed rule can be given, but you should always be sure that the racquet feels comfortable to grip. If this is so, you have a handle of the right size.

It is a debatable point whether there should be much weight in the head or not. Players who base their tactics mainly on the smash prefer a heavy head; those who employ drop-shots to any great extent the reverse. Personally, I think that a racquet with just the merest *souffçon* of weight in the head is the best. It is not enough to interfere with the execution of drop-shots, and it is sufficient to give the extra sting and crispness so essential in the smash.

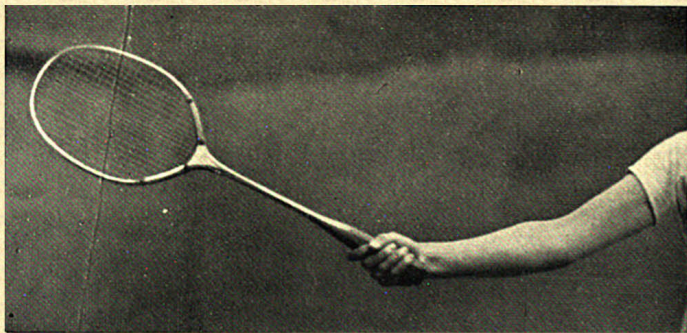
The grip for the forearm shots is practically the same in the case of all first-class players. It is illustrated in Plate B, I. Grip the racquet in the manner most convenient to yourself and you will probably find, when you compare it with the illustration, that there is little or no difference between the two. In the execution of a stroke, you must be careful to avoid making your grip too tight. If you make this mistake, you will find that, in addition to the needless expenditure of energy involved, you will not be able to shift with sufficient quickness to the backhand in a fast rally. The importance of being able to effect this change in the minimum of time cannot be overestimated. Rapidity of stroke-production without loss of accuracy is vital, and

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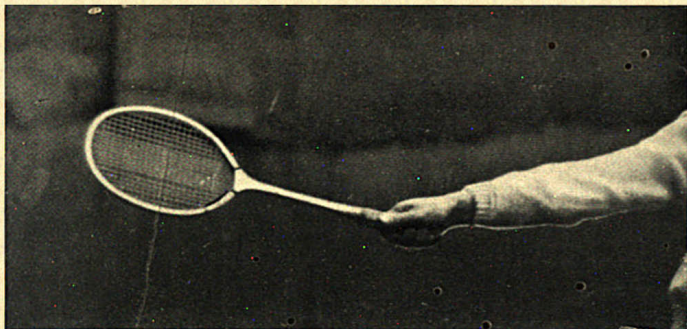
anything that is of assistance must be studied closely. It is equally ruinous to hold the racquet too loosely. Your strokes undoubtedly will be lacking in forcefulness and decision, because you are bound to lose a certain amount of control through this fault. There are certain shots, such as the drop-shot close to the net, illustrated in Plate A, in the execution of which the racquet has to be held more tightly than usual. As a general rule, however, the player must cultivate the golden mean for ordinary shots—that is, a grip neither too tight nor too loose. Once he has learnt this, experience will teach him to relax or tighten at the right time.

There are two main points to be considered about the backhand grip: firstly, which side of the racquet to use in striking the shuttle; and secondly, what grip to employ. With regard to the first question, the consensus of opinion is that the same side of the racquet ought not to be used for backhand and forearm strokes. You will see some first-class players do this occasionally, and more rarely still you will see a good shot performed thus. They only do so when they are *in extremis*, so to speak. It is in the nature of a despairing effort and it therefore comes under the category of flukes. This should warn lesser players off such a shot. It is possible in lawn tennis and has become the national backhand of the Australians, yet even so it is said to be much inferior to the more usual method adopted by the Americans and French. It is not impossible in Badminton, but should not be attempted except in cases of the utmost necessity.

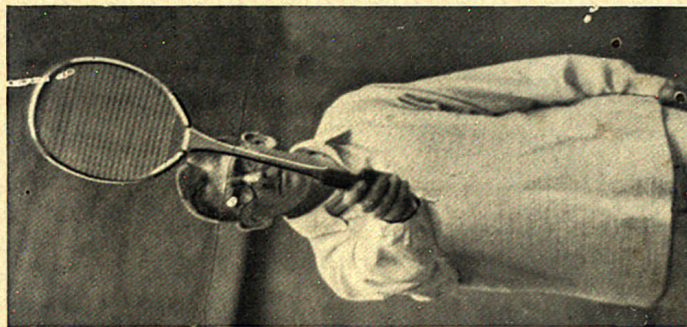
PLATE B



I. FOREHAND GRIP



II. BACKHAND GRIP



III. SPECIAL GRIP 18

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There is a great controversy as to the proper back-hand grip. Most first-class players favour the ordinary grip, in which the position of the fingers and thumb is relatively the same as for the forearm. This is shown on Plate B, II. In addition there is the 'thumb-up' grip, illustrated on the same plate, III. It is impossible to lay down any hard-and-fast rule on the subject, and each player must select the one that seems to suit him the better. The weight of authority lies on the side of the ordinary grip; in fact I think that, with the exception of Mr J. F. Devlin and myself, it would be hard to find any first-class players using the other. This grip comes naturally to me, however, and in my case yields more satisfactory results than the usual method. I have tried the other in practice, but it has not proved successful. With the thumb-up grip you seem to be able to acquire more pace and more control, and it is of material assistance in the drop from the back of the court, illustrated in Plate F, for it gives you more of a purchase and enables you to come down crisply and accurately on the shuttle. Indeed, to me it is practically an impossibility to execute that backhand drop using the ordinary grip. An objection made against the less ordinary grip is that it takes more time to shift from the forehand to it, and *vice versa*, than in the other. This, of course, is not so. Changing grips very soon becomes automatic, and the loss of time in either instance, if the racquet is not held too tightly, is to all intents and purposes negligible.

However, you must use the grip with which Nature

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has endowed you. Practise diligently until you have found which of the two is the more suitable, and base your backhand strokes upon it. If you find after careful consideration that you like one just as much as the other, then I should recommend you to develop the thumb-up grip. But you must be very sure of your ground before doing this, for a method of producing a stroke which is contrary to natural inclinations cannot but have unsatisfactory results.