

My Theories On "How To Teach"

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THE past 15 years have seen an unparalleled advance in the teaching of golf. The search for teaching truths has held no theory too sacred for careful scrutiny. Everybody's credos from those of Horton Smith, Tommy Armour, and Henry Picard to those of Bobby Jones, Alex Morrison and Ernest Jones, have been held up for merciless examination.

In their earnest groping ways, pros have rediscovered the Law of Individual Differences. This only served to complicate the teaching issue. No set rule of form or procedure could be held up as final for the one person involved—the pupil of the moment.

As diagnosticians, golf professionals have few equals in athletics. They seem to have a sixth sense. And this in view of the fact that they can't see with the naked eye most of the action they are trying to teach. Some, like Al Watrous, have a "camera eye" and cannot only remember swings but can detect minute changes in them. With the general use of the motion picture and the fast lens camera in analyzing golf swings this eye diagnosis faculty has been heightened. The instructor better knows what to look for.

Simplicity Is Success Secret

Of late the focus in golf has turned from "how to play" to "how to teach." On one score there will be agreement: simplicity is the keynote of successful instruction. The Piltown Man had his club and his elementary urges. The veneer of 20th century civilization can't remove the fact that a man with a club and a ball down in front of him has much the same urges. He wants to sock the ball and chase it. With that primal urge a golfer can't rea-

sonably be expected to learn more than one thing at a time.

Harry Pressler out in Los Angeles has the right idea; he teaches the big swing in sequence. After getting you set as far as placement of feet, hands and ball are concerned, he drills on the start away from the ball (truly a climax point in the swing). Then comes in order the swing of the hands and the club up to the top of the backstroke, the start down, the swing through the hitting area, the finish, etc. Pressler's success and popularity speak for themselves. Incidentally, Harry makes his pupils drill and drill until they can't help but do as the maestro dictates.

Such a method is called teaching from the specific move up to the big general move. Its success would depend in large part upon first establishing in the pupil's mind a mental picture of the entire stroke. Almost anything we learn well or do well is preceded by a mental picture, a mind's eye flash of the entirety. It is comparable to having all the green light "go" signals turned on in our complicated bodily mechanism.

A mental picture of the swing might show a whirling move in a tilted elliptical arc revolving around the head as a center. The move would be one continuous action building up gradually to a healthy whirl, and coasting to a finish. The hands, the feet, and the club would move in time.

How Does Golfer Learn?

But we get ahead of our story. Before talking about simple mental pictures, about learning one thing at a time, about teaching from the specific to the general, we should explore how a person learns. How does a golfer learn? A youngster sees and imitates even as Bobby Jones aped Stewart Maiden. This imitative faculty exists in diminishing degrees in older persons.

Adults have a combined physical, mental and neural performance such as swinging a golf club, through the medium of habit formation. Old habits, which have become ingrained in a golfer's swing pattern, are hard to eradicate (ask any one of a thousand perspiring pros). But

The Ogden (Utah) G&CC 'Club Bulletin,' which, by the way, is one of the newest club organs it has lately been our pleasure to peruse, reprints in its June issue some of the prize entries in GOLFING'S May Querie Contest, and at the same time, announces that the club will hereafter conduct a 'screwy golf story' contest of its own, and will award suitable prizes for the best entries. The Ogden club will print the best stories in the July issue of the Bulletin. Gus Wright edits the lively club monthly.

habits can be broken and supplanted by new reaction tendencies. Seven years ago when I started teaching golf I borrowed a phrase from the psychology books, "make your (golfing) habits your friends and not your enemies."

If we pros would but open an education book or two or delve into the field of educational psychology, we would find this whole business of how we learn, how to teach, and what the future horizons in learning might be.

Most pros began as caddies and learned on the field of battle. Their contact with the college campus is often limited to Saturday afternoon football. Theirs is an intimate knowledge of golf from practical experience. Their actual experience in play and teaching would enable them to get a wealth of good from ascertained educational facts.

To begin with, the golf swing is not inherent or natural, but is an overlaid function which has to be learned. (By overlaid function is meant that parts of the body coordinated in the swinging act have other functions to perform which are more vital than swinging a golf club and for which they primarily exist.)

Learn In Three Stages

Learning takes time and we learn in three different stages: 1. The awkward stage of the beginner. 2. The intermediate stage of development where the golfer would alternately get the swing and lose it. 3. The smooth running stage of the expert. Any expert golfer who laid off for a few months would briefly go through these stages. Maybe you have felt them.

If you could graph the progress of a beginning golfer, you might find he would improve rapidly and then level off. At this point don't let him place all the blame on you because he has hit what is called a "plateau" in learning. For him to reach a higher level of attainment will take time, practice sessions, more lessons under your eagle eye, and some help from the deities.

How would you handle a beginner? By now it's old stuff "to know your pupil." Yes, and it adds an air of thoroughness when you ask how much he has played, how much instruction he's had, what his athletic background is, etc. Incidentally, he's sizing you up, too. Sometimes a smile, your voice tone, your neatness of dress, the condition of your nails, or the note of authority in your statements may determine your success with him as much as



Shown above is the new practice driving shed constructed this year at the Whitmarsh Valley CC in the Philadelphia District. The cost of the shed was around \$300, according to Pro Morrie Talman. Morrie is now able to give lessons at any time, rain or shine, and can also provide an added bit of privacy for students taking lessons from him. The practice shed has been 'well worth the cost,' Morrie says.

your knowledge of golf. To a beginner you should map out your intentions for the one particular lesson and for the ensuing series.

I like to say: "The golf swing has to be learned and learned in sequence. I don't make any pretense to teach you how to hit the ball. I will teach you a method of swinging and the hitting of the ball should follow. First, I will hit some balls and give you a mental picture of the entire swing. Then I will show you how to stand, how to hold the club, and how to work your feet."

(At this point an assignment of two exercises is given the pupil. He is taught how to exercise his feet and hold his head steady minus any club. And he is importuned to exercise his hands up and down while his club is held out in front of him. This is to make the grip comfortable. These assigned exercises are an important part of orderly progress.)

Study Swing Thoroughly

"In this first lesson I will show you how to start the swing back and probably a little about how to reach the top of the swing. Beyond this we won't go. The second lesson may be an exact duplicate of this without a new word added. It takes time to learn and you will learn by drilling these things time and again."

At the conclusion of this and every lesson, a resume of what has been done could well be impressed on the willing learner. It focuses attention.

Care should be taken to make your language understandable to your pupil. You must remember that to many such seemingly well-known terms as stance, pivot, top of the backswing, coordination, timing, swing from the inside, hitting area

etc., are so much Greek. Your helpful pupil probably won't pipe up and reveal his or her shameful ignorance.

At this point some of your golf-wise professionals are saying, "you should start them off with the short shots and teach them how to control the club with the hands." Whether your teaching method involves working up from the short shots or from the big swing down to the wee ones shouldn't matter. I personally like to start an aspirant out with a driver because I think he gets more of a kick out of it. Should he exhibit a marked inability to hit the ball a quick switch is made to a mashie. The moral might be, "never let your pupil fail."

I'd like to have a shilling for every pupil I've tried to teach too much or tried to teach him something he couldn't do. I allowed those pupils to fail. If I get an awkward pupil and have to start him with a one inch putt and keep him at putting for a whole series, it will be because I won't let my pupil become discouraged.

It doesn't take a Dies investigation to prove that golf, on the whole, is badly played in this country. When I look at the list of 30 handicappers who belong to my club, the Minneapolis Golf Club, I feel a sense of humility at my inability to reach them. If we pros, as salesmen of golf, could only get close enough to these high-handicap players long enough to make them realize nobody can expect to play good golf until he has learned to swing into the ball from inside the line of flight, there might be less weeping and gnashing of teeth at the locker-room bar.

A golfer who swings into the ball from outside the line of flight has about as much chance of waylaying General Par and Colonel Bogey as a driver going down the wrong side of the street has of living.

WHEN you're boosting your junior classes for the good will, insurance, and professional pride that's in this pro activity, you might use a line like Jack Fox uses in his junior class announcements.

Jack says:

"If you have any old clubs that can be cut down for these youngsters, I am sure they would be appreciated. There is no charge for my services."

This overcomes the reservations of the parent who would like to have his youngsters take up golf but is scared that new expense for clubs immediately will be slapped on him.

Baseball Players to Compete for New Golf Trophy in '41

PARTICIPANTS in the 1941 National Baseball Players' Golf Championship, to be conducted at St. Petersburg, Fla., in 1941, will compete for a new trophy to be awarded by J. G. Taylor Spink, publisher of *The Sporting News*, national baseball weekly.

Publisher Spink offered the new award after the Powel Crosley trophy, placed in competition by the president of the Cin-



cinnati Reds, was retired as the permanent possession of Pitcher Wes Ferrell, whose 1940 victory was his third in the event.

The Sporting News Trophy, in ivory and gold finish, is surmounted by figures of baseball and golf players and provides space for the inscription of the names of the yearly winners.

Willie Hoare Keeps Active—Willie Hoare, widely known veteran pro, continues to keep sprightly in spirit and light action, despite an illness that's had him confined for almost 5 years. One of Willie's recent enterprises has been that of getting together a collection of postage stamps bearing signatures of U. S. and British Open and Amateur champions.