

Boomer Book Shows Pro Task in Teaching "Feel Habit"

By HERB GRAFFIS

PERCY BOOMER'S book, "On Learning Golf," has been published in the U. S. by Alfred A. Knopf, New York. It sells for \$2.75. It has a foreword by the Duke of Windsor who testifies as having been one of Percy's pupils who was, "the most persistent in the search for the secret of the correct swing."

The father of Percy and Aubrey Boomer was a schoolmaster who had among his pupils Harry Vardon. The elder Boomer, after retiring from school teaching at the age of 60, became a golf pro. Percy was educated to be a school teacher and did teach for a few years, prior to becoming, at the age of 22, 8th assistant at Queen's Park, Bournemouth.

With that pedagogical background it is to be expected that the Boomer book would have sound basis in the technique of teaching. And it so fully lives up to expectations in this respect that with not so much change in slant of the contents it could be called "On Teaching Golf."

And that brings up the subject of an unfilled gap in golf literature; that of an authoritative volume on teaching of the game. Admittedly, golf instruction is an art as well as a science. The personalities of the tutor and the pupil have to be a blend for good results, with the burden of effecting the blend being on the pro.

But what of the instruction books have gone into that essential part of teaching golf? That's where the Boomer book is unique and quite helpful for the studious pro who, if he's really good and keenly interested in his teaching, is disturbed by "divine discontent" at not being able to gear temperaments to reception and retention of instruction. And, as almost every pro will concede, restful instruction is more a matter of fathoming the pupil's temperament than it is a matter of the mechanics of fitting a swing to any type of physique or muscular condition.

Boomer is an advocate of the muscle-memory basis of golf teaching, a principle which, of course, is nothing new and is the definite objective in instruction of many highly successful American teachers. But how to get this feeling of conscious control so it will replace thinking and the disturbances of the mental state which the average golfer experiences when he rushes out to the first tee, is a baffling fundamental problem of golf instruction.

Pros As Psychologists

Younger pros will observe, as they look about them, that the practical psychology of veteran pros must have been sound in establishing games of their pupils which have stayed good through many years of the intermittent golf that businessmen must play. Boomer refers to this implanting of the habit of correct feel as developing "psychophysical union."

The tendency in golf instruction books is to deal almost altogether with the mechanics of the swing. That is fine, as far as it goes, but the pupil is not a machine and that bewildering organization, the brain, takes over and impairs control of the mechanical phases of the swing.

The technicalities of the swing are subject to various controversial interpretations, but as the PGA questionnaire on instruction some years ago showed conclusively, most of the arguments are the result of different ways of trying to say the same thing about the swing.

From Pupils' Viewpoints

However, there is an infinite variety in the temperament of pupils, and that's where the genius of the great instructors comes in. Boomer's "On Learning Golf" is an especially interesting and unusual treatment because so much of it is written from the perspective of pupils of varying temperaments back to the instructor's task in straightening out the students.

The method of printed golf instruction used almost without exception is to tell by picture and word how the instructor grips, stands, pivots, swings and performs other mechanical details of making the shot and counseling the pupil to do likewise. That's fine so far, but plainly by this means the psychophysical accent is on the master, not on the pupil who's bought the book.

Before the Snead and Nelson golf instruction books came along to hit big sales, by far the largest sale of any golf instruction book in the United States was that of Alex Morrison. And without disparaging the book, a great many of its readers said the ads of the book were better than the book itself. Why? For the simple reason that the ads played strong to the prospective buyer and were psy-

chologically effective in establishing an understanding with the customer; his status, his problems and hopes.

Harold Sampson, Pacific Coast pro, wrote a book on golf instruction a few years before the war. Harold wasn't able to get the book published. I thought at the time I looked over the manuscript it was a good job on the technicalities of instruction, and pros who were far more competent than I to appraise it in that respect, pronounced it sound. Now, after reading Boomer's book and discussing it with several pros who are very successful instructors, I think Percy has done a stand out job of the sort Harold ventured into.

And where the Boomer book should have definite and helpful influence on golf instruction books of the future is in Percy's reversal of the usual swing in golf instruction books. Percy swings from the outside (the pupil) in (to the teacher). As Hagen, Armour, Sarazen, Jones, Barnes, Kirkwood, Diegel, Hutchison, Mac and Horton Smith, Watrous and other American pros who know Percy Boomer, can tell you, he is a very brainy and sound man in this business.

Whether or not Boomer's hit on a new

formula in golf instruction books that may be instrumental in making these books powerful forces in promoting personal golf instruction on a more extensive and effective basis is anybody's guess in the golf business. I have a hunch there'll be books by American authorities before long, developing the outside-in pattern of Boomers' treatment. The pattern is too promising to be brushed off.

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