

Drastic Changes Coming In Golf Teaching

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

PROS WHOSE intelligence, business judgment and education would make them successful in any business are giving a great deal of thought to drastic revision of golf instruction.

And they are not the only ones who entertain this notion. Club officials and other amateurs who have seen the relationship between scoring abilities of members and the amount of play are questioning why the great increase in golf interest and play is not being accompanied by a corresponding increase of public interest in golf lessons.

There is, of course, the fact painful to pros that with prices increasing in everything else there has not been a noticeable increase in the price of golf instruction. Only a few pros with excellent reputations and results as teachers have increased their fees although the caddies who shag the balls for the lessons have hiked their prices.

Foundation of the pro's status as an authority on golf, consequently his merchandising position, is his service as an instructor. But that value must be constantly kept bright in the golfing public's mind. It is a sure thing that there is much work to be done by the pros and the PGA to revise and elevate public regard for golf teaching.

Golf instruction itself has advanced far more during the past decade than amateur golfers realize. Many back-stage factors in pro golf account for the advance. Instruction clinics of various PGA sections, study of slow motion pictures, observation and discussion of tournament players' methods, the discussion stirred up by the PGA instruction committee, and development of a scientific and open-minded attitude toward the whole subject, have given golf instruction far more progress than the pros have been able to get across to the public.

Instruction Over Obstacles

Numerous handicaps had to be overcome in making that progress. The variations of art and temperaments provided obstacles. There was some fear that uniformity in golf instruction might require a drastic revision in methods of older professionals who had done quite well as teachers. There was too much talk and undue alarm about the possibility of re-

search disclosing ideas contrary to those some pros had been teaching.

The truth is that the best of the older teachers are eager to learn anything that will better their effectiveness for their pupils. But having seen many theories come and go they are not inclined to hasten into adoption of any and every hunch that looks good, until it is tested and found of value.

Pros, no more than doctors, can expect to retain methods that have been improved upon by the march of their profession. And certainly the improved scoring in the tournaments is plain evidence that there has been improvement in the golf swing, regardless of what part improved implements and easier playing conditions have done to lower scores.

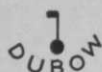
Changing Ideas

Most pros will remember the stories of Hagen in his budding days practicing with a handkerchief held by the upper part of his right arm against his body. Many of these pros comment on how the swings of Nelson, Hogan have developed Hagen's attention to the right elbow being kept close in.

Now there's talk about the grip of some outstanding tournament stars departing from what has been taught by spoken and printed word and picture. For years the recommendation has been to have the grip of the club run diagonally across the left hand so it is against the heel of the palm. Now it's noticed that several of the stars don't have the grip running at this angle, but have it almost even with the junction of the fingers and the palm. Perhaps that's promising as something that will help pros solve the problem of teaching a grip pupils can use easier and better; perhaps it isn't. But at least, when pros are giving considerable thought to the fraction of an inch change that might benefit their pupils, it's something that the pros should get to the public as evidence of the teaching pros' constant effort to find the answers for their students.

The golfing public has been inclined to criticize pros for not improving the standard of club members' golf. But the public doesn't appreciate—nor have the pros brought it to the public's attention—what far greater handicaps the pro has in his teaching compared with the less complex

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teaching problems of other sports coaches.

Pros' Job is Tougher

The coach of a football, basketball, baseball or boxing team can insist that the team members follow instructions, practice, and keep in training, or be dropped from the squad. But, in golf, if a pupil doesn't get magic results although not heeding instructions, not practicing to any extent, or not staying in any sort of training, the pro is dropped from the team.

Golf instruction is further handicapped by having started tail-end-to, as instruction of adults by men who'd not had training as teachers. Considering that background it is marvelous that golf instruction has advanced as greatly as it has.

Some of the veteran pros brought that point out to me years ago when class teaching of juniors began to get into the picture. George Sargent, Willie Ogg, Joe Novak, Johnnie Inglis and Stanley Davies were among those I recall as saying that the experience and study of pros in junior instruction was bound to have, eventually, a revolutionary effect on teaching methods.

Teaching Psychology Wrong

Tommy Armour brought out, in a memorable talk at a Minnesota PGA clinic, that the usual psychology of golf instruction is an almost insurmountable handicap. The pro often tees the balls and otherwise subconsciously creates the mood of the pupil being the master mind of the session. Armour maintained that if the same insidious procedure were followed in school teaching the pupils' progress would be extremely slow. In that observation he was confirmed by University of Minnesota faculty members and athletic instructors who also appeared on the program.

Changing that relationship is part of the job ahead in modernizing golf instruction. There is another fundamental change that will have to be made in the general

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pattern of golf instruction, according to statements of many club officials and representative members who've been queried by Golfdom.

That change is that of outlining first to the adult pupil what the pro expects to teach him.

Most pupils come to the pro believing that the immediate objective of the pro is that of teaching the student to score better. But what the pro has in his mind is teaching the pupil to hit the ball with reasonable uniformity.

Pro and Pupil Difference

There is considerable difference between what the pupil believes he is being taught and what the pro believes he is teaching. That difference, in the opinion of most of the amateur golfers queried, accounts for the one statement of pupils that has been most damaging testimony concerning pro instruction. The statement is the oft-heard one of the pupil saying he scored worse after taking lessons than before.

What the pro had been trying to do was to establish a swing habit that would increase the pupil's chances of hitting the ball squarely. Such a habit is not established quickly when bad habits first must be eliminated. The alteration naturally would upset the pupil temporarily.

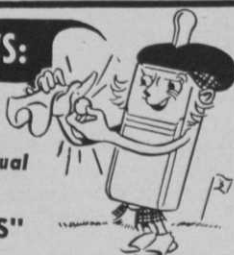
However, the average pupil lacking an explanation and warning of the usual early aftermath of a golf lesson, thinks the lesson has done harm to his scoring hopes rather than benefitting them.

Several amateurs who've had lessons from many pros suggested that golf instruction of adults might be made more effective if the pro could devote the first lesson or two to a sort of a classroom session with the pupil in which the simplest fundamentals of golf swing theory

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and mechanics were explained and discussed.

The adult pupil of the pro is accustomed to understanding what he is expected to do and why, before receiving instructions to do it, when he is being tutored in anything else but golf. In golf he goes into his lesson tee session trying to work from his confused and clumsy self down to the ball.

The pupil seldom realizes that theoretically the club is an extension of the hands or considers the reasons why clubs are designed and made as they are.

Printed golf lesson outlines for preliminary information and discussion have been proposed by amateur golfers experienced in teaching university, business and trade students. Such material would give the golf pupil a sound basis for understanding and absorbing tee instruction when the time for that is reached, in due course. Such, at any rate, is the belief of those who propose this method. They maintain that the great majority of the adult golf pupils are accustomed to having reading study coordinated with instruction by teachers, hence would respond more to golf instruction along this line. By this method each pro could supply his own printed or mimeographed material or use such material as the PGA instruction committee might prepare.

Tradition Retards Teaching

But how long it might take to accustom the golfers to this method, after the policy of rushing them out to the tee for the first lesson, is hard to say. It might click soon and it might flop. Probably it would depend on the pro himself, more than on the pupils.

The idea of charging a set seasonal fee to all members for instruction as needed has been used at a few clubs. Theoretically it looks good; practically, it has not worked out any too well, mainly because of the difficulty the pro has in providing the time demanded by the pupils.

In that respect golf instruction is bound by tradition. The traditional lesson time is a half hour. Experts in teaching the manual arts to school and shop students say that 15 minute tee instruction sessions often are as long as most adult golf students can effectively absorb.

What a survey of the status of golf instruction does indicate quite definitely is that in study of details of the swing the pros are far ahead of their study of the basic platform of golf instruction. Study of the golf pupil as a human has not been kept up to the study of the golf swing.

There are great changes coming in golf instruction that will balance progress in analysis of the swing with progress in applying the findings to the temperament and physique of the average American citizen. Those changes will mean increased income for competent pros and improved results for the golfing public.