

Pro Teaching Clinics Neglect Pupils' Psychology?

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

THE morning after the PGA instruction clinic I had breakfast with one of the most successful golf teachers in the country. Tournament stars pay respectful attention to his analyses. Several of the most promising younger tournament players credit him with having put them on the road to stardom. But this post-graduate phase of his instruction is decidedly secondary to his achievement over many years in converting middle-aged men and women of long-established bad swings into consistent low-handicap players.

What got us off on the subject of instruction was my expressed belief that the previous evening's session had been devoted almost entirely to the mechanical phases of the swing which really required, for explanation, a knowledge of anatomy. Pros' successful experience with applied psychology qualifies them to talk with authority, I maintained; partly because from the pupil's viewpoint I think the pros' controversies about the mechanics tend to confuse the pupils, and partly because I wanted to stir up this veteran pro and get him into another one of the arguments that have enlightened me.

"Almost any pro discussion of the swing these days," said the veteran, "is bound to be strong on speculation about the mechanics. And for a very simple reason. Byron Nelson is the first to have solved the problem of transition from the hickory to steel shaft. That has more ramifications than pros generally have talked about. But, by taking Nelson's game apart and examining it—which is what many of these clinics amount to—they'll probably make some discoveries that will be very helpful in determining the mechanics we want to apply to our pupils.

Clinics on Swing Research

"Whatever the new discoveries about swing mechanics will be, it's a sure thing that we won't be able to make them quickly, anymore than scientists could come right up with the sulfa drugs or penicillin. The discussions at our clinics are fishing expeditions in trying to determine the magic key to golf. Perhaps one of the best things about them is the way in which they show the open-minded research basis of pros. Certainly their exchange of ideas have given younger pros help

that has saved them and their pupils a lot of time."

That comment somewhat cleared me up on the idea of the clinic being a research into the swing rather than a broad investigation of the teaching problem.

I remarked that there were two ideas mentioned the night before that I wished the general golfing public could learn about as examples of how the pros are trying to look at the instruction problem from the pupils' viewpoint. One was the way in which Bob Gutwein demonstrated how he got pupils acquainted with the feel of the correct swing. I've seen several very successful pros, much older than Bob, use the method with success and wondered why it wasn't more extensively employed.

The other idea was Joe Mozel's statement about using the phrase "holding the club" instead of the more common term, "gripping the club," because any emphasis on the word grip had the tendency to get the pupil to tighten up. The dictionary definitions of grips are: to catch with the hand and clasp closely with the fingers; to hold tight or close; to clutch; to seize and hold fast; to clench; to tighten." Consequently a word that means to the pupil a tension that is almost the contrary to what the pro really wants done.

Yet Joe's suggestion was received apparently with indifference instead of sparking a discussion on what is a highly important element in revising golf teaching procedure; the need of a correct nomenclature that's easily and clearly understood by the pupils. How acute this need is became obvious later in the clinic during the controversy on open and closed faces.

After I'd popped off about my reaction, as a pupil of pros, to the Mozel suggestion, my veteran friend said:

What Do Pros Mean?

"Probably we should give more consideration to the semantics—the science of meanings—as this science can be applied to eliminate confusion in golf instruction. The golf teacher's basic problem is that of personality coordination with his pupil. It's impossible to solve that problem if the pupil doesn't understand and accurately interpret the teacher's words.

"I have found that the most effective

way to get a pupil to have a clear understanding of what I tell him is to learn the pupil's hobby—if any. Then I try to find the common denominators of his hobby and golf so I can get him thinking of the golf stroke lines that he can understand and receive most easily. Baseball, tennis, football, horses, dancing, and swimming all supply vivid parallels for golf.

"I get them telling me what are the fundamentals of, for instance, riding. The rider will tell me about the seat, the knees, the hands in controlling the horse, and about the necessity of balance and confidence when one is on a horse.

"Then, after 3 or 4 lessons without a club, the pupil is deeply interested in demonstrating to me the application of the principles of good horsemanship to good golf. I have got the pupil as my partner. In some cases, of course, the pro's personality can be so dominating he can become Svengali to the pupil and virtually hypnotize the pupil into becoming a good mechanical golfer. But my members all are men and women of strong personalities and the logical policy for me is to apply the power of their personalities in getting them to learn golf.

Use Other Pros' Help

"Of course I can't succeed in all cases. Can any doctor cure all his patients? I have no hesitancy in sending pupils who do not respond to my treatment to another pro whose method of treatment I believe may help. What the pupil comes to me for is to learn to play consistently up to somewhere near the limit of his possibilities, and not just to have the pleasure of my company on the lesson tee. It is entirely within the realm of reason that there are cases other competent instructors will solve without much trouble after I've been baffled.

"So to be honest with the pupil why not send him to a professional colleague who may help? Isn't it more of a truly professional attitude for a pro to recommend another good pro than to have the pupil have to wander around and come to the conclusion there is narrow-mindedness and jealousy on the highest level of pro instruction?

"Pupils come to me after other pros haven't been able to teach these pupils because of some psychological or technical gears that don't mesh. And I know that these pros who have not had good results in these particular cases have been responsible for the development of sound games in thousands of other cases.

"I have the highest respect for these pros. I have talked golf instruction with them for hours and have a far better knowledge of their excellence as instruc-

tors than any amateur pupil could have. For the good of golf instruction, which means my own good, shouldn't I make use of the talents of these men in helping pupils who, for some reason or another, baffle me?

"I think it's a great thing for all golf instruction to have Ernest Jones strongly publicized. I have sent pupils to him, willingly and hopefully, just for the same reason that I would expect a good doctor, in case I had a prolonged and perplexing illness, to send me to another authority.

"What would greatly benefit pro golf would be a disposition toward building up the general public reputation of more instructors instead of a narrow and negative attitude. We all have a rather complex job of sports instruction and considering the nature of our task probably have a far more commendable percent of good results than we realize. Certainly we do much better than the public generally appreciates.

Pro Patience Essential

"The pro's temperamental essential is absolute self-control. He can't show impatience. He is constantly challenged by the problem of dramatizing his teaching. I've had—and so have other pros had—pupils who were booked for a half hour or an hour, but the pupil and I have stayed on the tee for 5 hours, so fascinating and mutually informative has been the lesson. The reverse also has been true. I've had half hours that have seemed much longer. Then the matter of keeping one's interest keen and fresh is about as tough as any instructor can get.

"One of the most difficult problems I've had in teaching was that of a youngster whose parents insisted that he learn golf. The approach was wrong. The lad was defiant. The attitude probably accounts for boys being pushed into piano lessons and resisting instruction until the teacher and the parent finally give up. Years later the youngster wishes he'd been kept at the lessons.

"It took me almost a year's patient work to get that youngster interested. Now he's a keen and fine young golfer. But how trying that experience was for me! I learned plenty about the psychology of teaching from that case.

Finding Key to the Pupil

"Another case that was a challenge was that of a diplomatic corps man who had not been able to get much out of instruction although he was eager to learn, not only because of the exercise but because of the contacts the game opened to him. In this case, as in others, I didn't

(Continued on page 26)

take the pupil to the tee cold. We discussed the background and foundation of the game while I was looking for angles to which the pupil would be most responsive. I got talking about the driving machine and found the pupil intensely interested. He was an engineer. So, with the driving machine idea in mind as the model, this pupil put the picture of the swing into his mind.

"Where I think we pros can change our general teaching policy in saving time is in encouraging the pupils to get an idea of the ABC of the game from instruction books. We've spent 30 years or more arguing over the ABCs of golf and I think we'd better put an end to the controversy and agree publicly on the simple starting points. I've found that by selling Nelson's book at my shop and helping my pupils correctly interpret it I've enlarged their understanding and given myself a more responsive field for my teaching.

"We might as well admit that we can't avoid being somewhat puzzled by the mechanics of the finer details of the swing. That is inevitable. It is a spur to progress. We must remember that it took Nelson about 6 years to rebuild his game, and Hogan 3 years for an overhauling of his game. Yet we, as pros, have the work of rebuilding the game of many of those who come to us and expect great results in a few weeks. Because of that we are restricted much of the time to implanting deeply just a few fundamentals so the pupil can go a good part of the rest of the way himself.

"I have learned a lot about playing and teaching golf by playing with my worst-scoring pupils. I wondered why they kept at it. They were responsibilities of mine because they are my friends and I want them to enjoy golf to the fullest. I found that they considered golf on a relative basis. The 85 shooter among men of 45 or over is a big shot in his group of businessmen, and he is justifiably so considering the comparatively little time he has to play. What pros can do to improve his score is one of their challenging jobs. He may be so set in his possibly peculiar but effective manner of hitting the ball that suggestions of changing his unorthodox style may be dangerous.

"Every Friday afternoon I keep free for playing with my pupils. It is not a paying session in cash. The pupil I invite arranges the rest of the foursome or, if he wishes, I'll do it. If the players ask for advice about making a shot I'm glad to give it. Sometimes, when I can do it discreetly without interjecting any note that may make a man conscious of an instruction rather than a primarily pleasure angle to the game, I will make a suggestion about his swing.

"The strictly golf swing part of our teaching is not the most difficult part of our job. But the matter of adjusting our personalities to those of our pupils is the study that never will end for the pro."

"So you think that at this stage of the PGA campaign to raise the general level of pro instruction it might be wise to put more accent on the psychology of instruction instead of dealing almost altogether with the swing mechanics?" I asked.

"I definitely do," the veteran declared. "Look around and you'll see that the best golf teachers are pretty smart psychologists rather than experts in mechanics."

PGA SIGNS CORCORAN AND MOORE

Fred Corcoran's contract as tournament bureau mgr. of the PGA was renewed for 3 years at a PGA executive committee meeting held during the pro association's championship at Portland. Corcoran now handles the interests of Ted Williams, Boston Red Sox star. Corcoran will make his headquarters in New York and continue making high spots on the tourna-



Gerry Moore

ment circuit which has become a big money and complicated problem since the great development of the tournaments during his administration as bureau chief. Gerry Moore, late of the Boston Globe, treas., Boston Chapter of the Baseball Writers Assn., and formerly golf writer for the Globe, has been engaged by the PGA as Corcoran's assistant and will make all tournaments. The tournament bureau, with Corcoran and Moore both on the job, plans expansion of publicity and other services that were beyond the capacity of any one man.