



Claude Harmon, Winged Foot CC professional on one of rare occasions giving instruction to a group. His ability to inspire confidence in his pupils enabling them to improve their own game comes with patient individual teaching.

Claude Harmon Studies the Golf Teaching Business

By LAWRENCE ROBINSON

Peggy Kirk's game went bad early this summer. She just couldn't seem to get the old swing back. So Peggy turned up at Winged Foot GC in Mamaroneck, N.Y. for an intensive rehabilitation process under Claude Harmon.

Jack Burke, Jr. is the brightest young prospect in pro golf today, virtually a cinch to make the Ryder Cup team and one of the top money winners.

When Jackie gets hitting too many into the rough he hustles off to nearby Winged Foot where he was assistant before shifting to Metropolis CC, for a lesson from Claude — whom he calls "Pro—ey."

But Peggy and Jack are adept and experienced to the degree that they need only the expert tuition of finishing school. The hundreds who are 80-, 90- and 100-and-over shooters who come to Harmon for the sessions that bring them delighting improvements in their scores really represent the most convincing exhibits of Claude's success at the very difficult and fundamental part of a club professional's job; the ability to improve scores and by improving

scores give the pupil more enjoyment from the game.

The fact is that Claude has a teacher's touch. Not only an outstanding golfer himself, who probably could grab a big bundle on the tournament circuit if he didn't have two such remunerative posts as Winged Foot in the summer and Seminole in the winter, Harmon has the knack of telling others how to do it.

It isn't all pure sagacity, nor does he have a little secret which changes dubs into champions. He inspires confidence in his pupils, and has teaching adaptability which enables him to help his clients to improve their own stroke to gratifying proportions.

Claude Harmon is a Florida kid who grew up in Orlando and was a top youngster in a highly competitive area. His game originally was self-taught, and he has made a lot of changes since 1937, principally on advice from his onetime boss at Winged Foot — his close friend Craig Wood.

Claude didn't pick up the game which makes him a topnotcher, and a former Masters Champion (1947) with any ease.

He had to work for everything he has in the way of a swing, and work hard. It wasn't any fun at all.

But in the process of revamping, he learned a great deal about the mechanics of golf and got a sort of self-administered Masters' degree which is paying off now. This experience also taught him to understand the problems of his pupils and to appreciate the best means of helping others.

To understand his development as a teacher, let's take up Harmon's history. A good golfer in 1937, Harmon continued to improve his game after turning pro and going to work in Chicago. But he was far from satisfied. He just couldn't seem to score consistently.

Then he moved to Winged Foot as assistant to Wood. That was in 1942. Wood, who held the U. S. Open title longer than any other golfer, (he won it in 1941 and it wasn't played for again until 1946), is a keen tutor, too.

Wood Revises Harmon's Swing

He set to work remodeling Harmon's swing, emphasizing the so-called "closed face" theory, which really means getting the clubface squarely at the ball at impact, and persuaded Claude to try it.

On his own, while working on Craig's style, Harmon decided to change his grip, from the generally-used overlapping to the rare interlocking. Claude believed he was not improving rapidly enough because his left thumb along the shaft, demanded unqualifiedly in the overlapping grip, caused his arm muscles to tighten up all the way to his shoulder.

He found he could get complete freedom at the top of the swing using the interlocking grip. It was difficult to do, and Harmon spent many a tedious hour on the practice tee apparently getting nowhere. But he finally mastered it, and with it the art of busting par.

Nevertheless, Claude does not readily recommend to pupils they change to his method of holding the club. If he believes they have the kind of swing which will adapt to the interlocking grip, he recommends but doesn't demand.

"I don't say every golfer should change by a long shot. A lot depends on the player. Temperament, knowledge of the mechanics of the swing and the amount of practice a player can give must determine this," declares Claude.

Make Pupils Know Their Faults

"But if any of my pupils want to change, I can show them how and it doesn't take as long as you might think. But always remember this—once you start it, keep at it. Trying to change back will ruin both grips, or at least the swing that goes with it," he adds.

Claude also believes the way to help a golfer improve his game is to make him

conscious of his swing faults. There is no mechanical method of doing this and the tutor must have infinite patience, more perhaps than the pupil.

Claude has one unchangeable formula, the position of the ball in relation to the left foot. He is convinced every shot, except the putt, should be played with the ball in a line with the inside of the left foot.

"The right foot is the one to move to adjust to the distance of the club," Harmon adds. "But you can't go far wrong if you standardize your left foot position."

From there the Winged Foot pro proceeds according to his evaluation of the client. If he believes the pupil can absorb the detailed niceties of the Craig Wood swing, which involves grooving the backswing to an outside arc with careful attention to the position of the club (closed) at the top of the swing, he will go ahead. If not, then he will proceed on the theory of improving the swing the client has developed.

Some of the things Harmon does with his pupils cannot be set down on paper. They include a keen analysis of the mental side and an appreciation of just how much the player can absorb.

For instance, two winters ago at Seminole veteran Johnny DeForest, former British Amateur champion, just couldn't get out of traps in championship style. DeForest, by no means a player you can talk to and expect results, had to be shown.

So Harmon's lesson in sand shot play consisted mainly of demonstration, of showing the Briton just how to use the proper technique. In a half hour, Claude had Johnny laying shots stiff.

It was typical of Harmon that, while going through his teaching routine and talking while he swung, he holed out several of his shots.

Body Action Prime Feature

"The first thing I look for in a golfer who feels hopeless about his game is his body action," says Claude of his teaching.

"If I see him taking a peculiar twist, or playing with too much rigidity, I aim more to halt this than to fix up his swing. As a matter of fact, when you overcome the body faults his swing usually will step up its efficiency as if by magic."

Claude says once he has a pupil set on his grip, his main thought from then on is to eliminate consciousness of use of the hands. He believes the body, arms and feet are the important factors from there on; that spontaneous, natural unison of action by these components will insure proper hand action.

None of this is startling or deviates from methods and policies of other master golf instructors. But Claude has the ability to

teach it forcefully without bringing his pupils to befuddlement. That is always the basis of sound teaching.

Harmon is convinced teaching is an individual to individual proposition, that group instruction except to youngsters, is not practical with adult golfers who have played much. He bases this on an experience at Winged Foot when he first took over as head pro.

Trying to give the members a well-rounded job, Claude inaugurated the stunt of picking up a foursome on the first tee each Sunday morning and another in the afternoon and playing a round with them. He offered advice freely, without charge, and was genuinely concerned with helping members improve their games by instruction while in the course of playing a round.

After a couple of Sundays of this, Claude noticed a certain coldness and a grudging consent from sundry groups when he asked to join them.

To his amazement he discovered the players resented him because they felt uncomfortable and played wretchedly because they thought they had to do well under the eyes of their pro and were prone to press and overswing.

Since then Claude has stuck to one pupil on the practice tee or, if playing a round, making sure he wouldn't paralyze any of his fellow players. It is strange he should have to fear this, because there isn't a nicer guy to play a round of golf with than Harmon. For that matter, there isn't a nicer guy to spend a half hour with on the practice tee.

Harmon is a strong believer in protecting his pupils against the dangers of misinterpretation. In putting across the swing idea clearly through feel and mind picture and to prevent misunderstanding and implant a sound swing pattern Claude makes extensive use of motion pictures and photographs by Polaroid Land camera which stops action quick enough to show what Harmon wants the pupil to see and yields a print in a minute.

Harmon has adopted the old Chinese maxim "A picture says more than a thousand words" and finds that it helps the pupil when the pupil has been given enough basic understanding to understand the picture. Claude isn't one to talk a lesson. Too much talk by the teacher often confuses the pupil and, in many instances, encourages the pupil to talk rather than let his muscles do the listening and talking.

Like all other successful golf instructors Harmon is a canny practical psychologist. Creating the right attitude for learning he regards as important as any of the essential elements of teaching. He cites the cases of most pros getting good results from golf instruction they have received

because they have been in the right attitude for learning and have complete confidence in their instructors. A great many pupils at a club subconsciously have more interest in being taught than they have in learning. Balancing those two factors gets the pupil conditioned properly for receiving lasting results from the lessons, Harmon declares.

An important phase of his entire instruction plan is that of fully acquainting his assistants with his general and detailed instruction ideas, supervising assistant's instruction of members so the entire instruction work is unified and coordinated and discussing with his assistants the teaching problems that confront them.

Caddie Minimum Wages Proposed in New York State

Eastern New York Golf Assn. is drafting proposed minimum wage scale for caddies to be submitted to Edward Corsi, Industrial Commissioner of N. Y., following the appearance of Pierce Hull Russell, attorney representing the golf organization, on Sept. 11 at Albany discussing the basic minimum rates proposed by the state board.

The entire proposal set forth by the board was:

"\$1 per bag for each round of 9 holes or less.

"\$2 per bag for each round of 10 holes to 18 holes."

As Russell pointed out the proposed scale is an over-simplification of the situation. Currently in Eastern N. Y. rates for Class B caddies are about half the proposed rate and slightly more than half for Class A caddies. Under the proposed scale a caddie would get \$2 for carrying double one hole or \$4 for carrying double 10 holes.

Eastern N. Y. caddies this year made from \$10 to \$25 a week.

Increase in caddie rates, golfers declare, would result in considerable reduction in caddie earnings as many golfers would use carts. The proposed rates would cut caddie earnings for their own use and as contributions to family budgets and would diminish golf's efforts to provide supervised healthy light work in offsetting juvenile delinquency.

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