

# Teach Golf Better By Learning What Goes On Inside Pupil

By LES BOLSTAD

Golf Instructor, Univ. of Minnesota

At the end of each quarter of golf I have followed the practices of having the students write their impressions of the golf class, both good and bad. Some of their conclusions have surprised me. It is from these revelations from the minds of the pupils themselves that I have made changes and alterations in my presentation of golf. I know that the learner does the job—not the teacher. He is only a guide in the process. I wanted to find out what went on in the pupils' minds.

One fact had escaped me. Many people stay away from golf because of a lack of confidence. They sense the intricacy of golf and realize it is a game which demands of them a certain social behavior. I suspect, now, that many people take one or two tries at golf and then give it up. They may not live in an environment which enables them to learn golf by trial and error. The game licks them because they have no knowledge of the skill involved. The novice may dub around a couple of times but his interest is not aroused because he doesn't do well enough to ever really get the feel of the game. His confidence sinks because he senses himself to be awkward and inept especially in the presence of more skillful players. He is apt to be ill at ease because he fears he may unwittingly make a social faux pas.

The net result is that he quits—and that is bad for everybody in golf; the manufacturers, the pros, the players.

By far the greatest percentage of those in golf classes are rank beginners. Their papers begin, "As I had never played the game of golf—" A great untapped potential exists. If the proper channels were opened, more golf courses would have to be built to handle the influx.

A frequent comment is, "I didn't realize there was as much to this game as has been brought out in class." Not knowing about golf, the game was a meaningless thing to them and they had little appreciation of the skill and technique involved. To them golf had seemed cow-pasture pool where you hit a ball and chase it—not as a refined game full of meaning.

With only one quarter of class training behind them this trend was reversed. "This course gave me more interest and I found out golf is not such an easy game." —

"My interest in the game certainly has improved since the first time I played. As I find myself able to play better, my interest increases." — "Now that I know more about the game it is more of a challenge to me." — "When later I continue to play golf, I will have a basis from which to work and from which I can improve, I hope." — "Now that I have had this class, I'll enjoy playing and not feel out of place." — "During this session I have been stimulated to an intense interest in the sport. I have purchased a set of clubs and look forward to playing for many years to come." — "In rounds I played concurrent with the classes I got more enjoyment out of the game. I felt I was doing some of the things correctly." — "I am confident that I will improve even more." — "This golf class is my first try at the game. It's the best physical education class I've taken. When I do start playing, I figure what I've learned in this class will give me a great boost."

## Etiquette and Rules Neglected

In a golf program you assume that you as a teacher will put proper emphasis on what is expected in etiquette and behavior and the rules which govern the game. When you are associated with a sport over a period of years, I suppose these things get hum-drum. At least that was the way I felt, but the general response from the class jolted me out of that attitude. These people who had never played were overwhelmingly grateful to be told what was expected of them in regard to etiquette and rules.

No matter how much you feel the bulkiness of a group, you shouldn't ignore the individual. He feels acutely ignored if you don't call on him in correction sessions. He "likes the personal instruction given." Group instruction inevitably leads to individual instruction anyhow. If you make a practice of walking up and down behind a line of players who are hitting balls, you soon get the knack of sizing up the situation, making a suggestion, and then walking along to the next golfer.

Let a pupil feel that you have no interest in tackling his own personal swing problem and you lose him.

That's where the correction session comes in handy. Every pupil (let's say

there are 20) gets to hit half a dozen balls before the assembled class. The student is stimulated to do his best. After a student has exhibited his swing the instructor may ask the class for suggestions as to what improvement could be made. Or the instructor might make a constructive criticism followed by a suggested swing change. An attempt at a swing change is made right on the spot.

One learning golfer did think "the individual correction sessions before the assembled class made a good way for improvement whether one was the individual being corrected or a spectator." Another "liked the opportunity of class members to observe each other to see how bad we were." Yet another voiced a frequent response by saying, "I liked the idea of having my swing faults pointed out."

The time element in learning and the effect of directed and supervised practice drew this comment: "Hitting balls three times a week during the class period helped me to coordinate my swing and make it a full and connected movement."

The slice, always a big factor for beginners, drew this remark, "the golf instruction was a great benefit because I learned how to correct my slice by way of the left hand counter-clockwise flip."

"I wish we could have had a little more explanation on when and where to use the different irons," was one lament.

These few revelations from the minds of

golf students in university classes could be multiplied many times over in bringing out to us in pro golf that we have plenty of problems to solve in making it easier and quicker for our pupils to learn. We need to study the learning angle with the same intensity and thoroughness we have been devoting to teaching. The effective golf lesson is an informed partnership.

We have to discover what our students' inward reactions are. I have found that the delayed cadence of the swing with its slight pause at the turning point of the swing seems to be remembered by almost all my pupils at the University of Minnesota. Sometimes pupils will show up at later classes greatly improved. I will ask "how did you do it?" The answer often is "it was that short swing exercise which you recommended. I go through it every day." At the time I presented the exercise I had suspected most of my pupils were disinterested.

But, when I got the answers by questioning the pupils I found that my judgment of their reaction had been wrong. The university golf classes lend themselves to this sort of search for what goes on in the pupils' minds. The same conditions do not prevail in giving private lessons at clubs but I am sure that more attention given to what the pupil is thinking rather than the dominating accent on telling the pupil may be a factor in attaining the results from golf instruction that the pro and each of his pupils earnestly seek.

### **Golf Grows in School Sports Program**

More than 50,000 students in nearly half of the nation's colleges and universities offering a broad sports program now are learning to play golf according to a recent survey made by the National Golf Foundation. Actual figures taken from reports of 475 schools filed with the Foundation show 53,191 students taking golf in phys. ed. classes, playing on intramural teams or competing on the school golf team.

A further tabulation shows the total to be made up of the following groups:

- 24,106 men in phys. ed. classes,
- 16,529 women in phys. ed. classes,
- 15,474 men in intramural golf programs,
- 3,566 women in intramural golf programs,
- 3,233 men on golf teams and
- 183 women on golf teams.

Other reports show:

- 102 colleges and universities now have their own golf course facilities,

- 2,184 high schools now have golf teams and

- 1,351 high schools conduct intramural golf tournaments.

The above totals are based on enrollments for the 1950-51 school year. They represent a growth that could best be shown by comparative data taken at some previous time but there are apparently no similar records available. The above survey, rather broad in scope, is the first of its kind to be made and in order to learn what growth, if any, there has been in golf in the school sports program each school was asked to give the year when golf was first introduced to the phys. ed. classes, added to the intramural sports program and the year the school had its first golf team. On the basis of the information submitted less than 25 schools had golf in phys. ed. classes 25 years ago. The remarkable growth has been since World War II. Reports show that 48 per cent of all schools reporting have added golf during the past five years.