

Style Variations Make Golf Teaching A Difficult Art

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The teaching of golf is difficult. The teaching of anything, whether it be mathematics, history or economy, is difficult. It calls for mental preparation far beyond the training of the average golf professional. The ability to play well naturally helps you understand the subject you are trying to teach but has no bearing whatever on your ability to teach. I know, because I attempted to teach calculus for a year after graduating from college with a very high mark in the subject. But at teaching calculus I was a fizzle. I knew calculus all right, but didn't have the first idea of how to teach it.

I think the young professional is handicapped before he starts because the clinics and books on golf cloud the subject of the fundamentals of the stroke. They tell you that grip, stance, straight left arm, head still, rotary pivot on a fixed axis, etc. are fundamentals. That is so much hog-wash. These things undoubtedly aid many pupils in acquiring the fundamentals but not always, by any means.

The art of teaching golf is particularly difficult because you have to know when to violate the platitudes and well worn phrases and apply the fundamentals to the individual characteristics of each pupil, realizing at the same time, that only about 15% of your pupils have any natural aptitude for the game.

There are only three fundamentals to a golf stroke —

1. It is a swing.
2. It is a swing on balance.
3. It is a swing on balance in the correct plane at impact.

Here are some interesting observations over the past 35 years of the stars of the golfing world who have violated everything but those three fundamentals: Jock Hutchison and Eddie Held grip the club with the left hand on top almost in a locked position and the right hand underneath the shaft. Chick Evans' hands are apart with no overlapping or interlocking. The back of Billy Burke's hands are almost parallel to the line of flight with the thumbs on top of the shaft.

Harry Vardon's left arm was bent like a bow in his back swing. Furgol has a crippled left arm and strokes with his right. Nichols has his right arm cut off

below the shoulder and plays in the low 70's only with his left, playing from a right-handed stance.

Dutch Harrison and Chick Evans swing away on the outside and loop in coming down. Bobby Jones and Bobby Locke swing back inside and loop out coming down. Jim Ferrier picks the clubs almost straight up from the ball and dips coming down to compensate.

Paul Runyan, a mite of 130 pounds, sways his head and body, almost a foot to the right on the back swing, yet he beat Snead 8 & 7 at Shawnee for the 1938 PGA title and finished 6th in last year's Open on the exacting and treacherous Oakland Hills. Walter Hagen followed the club back for about 6 inches with his head.

Snead's left arm is almost straight up in the air above his head at the top of the back swing. Henry Cotton's left arm doesn't get much above his right hip at the top of his.

Abe Mitchell, in his day considered one of the world's longest drivers, had a follow-through that ended at his left hip. Hogan's follow-through wrapped around his neck.

You hear a lot about keeping the bridge of the arms close on the back swing. Porky Oliver's two arms spread like an eagle's wings.

Johnny Fischer's swing is lightning fast. Bob Kepler swings so slow you think he will never get back to the ball.

One might counter that these are the exceptions that prove the rule, Tommy rot. These golfers simply applied their individual characteristics to those three fundamentals and all of them were swinging on balance in the correct plane at impact.

Pro Can't Choose Pupils

A coach in football, baseball, rowing, or any other sport discards all pupils who have no natural aptitude. The golf instructor has no choice. He must take on all who come — fat, thin, short, tall, weak, muscle bound, neurotic and placid, and know when to violate the precepts laid down by the books and clinics, and give them command, the best he can, of the three fundamentals.

To do this requires a real knowledge of

the fundamentals and a hundred different ways of explaining them. It requires patience to the Nth degree. It requires an ability to dig deep into the realms of psychology, with a masterful command of English.

If one aspired to national fame as a golf instructor he might digress, as some do, from those three fundamentals and offer some new quirk or innovation which will at once reach "the end of the rainbow". The gullible dufer greedily swallows this. But your conscience should forbid. In its simplest form it is too difficult a subject as it stands, without introducing Einstein.

Ball Situation Now Nearly Normal — Slot Loss Hurts

Reports of pros at Seniors tournament at Dunedin indicated stocks got nearly normal late last season, after previous year's war scare buying. Pros and salesmen expressed opinion that in about 2/3 of the shops ball stocks were normal last July; in about 2/3 of the remaining shops the excess investment wasn't enough to worry about and the rest of the fellows were overloaded—in some instances with the scare buying having been done on the advice of club officials and with the club holding the bag on the surplus investment.

Salesmen in Florida during January have begun to wonder whether the Florida winter business is going to forecast the year's business in central and northern states. This winter the Florida pro shop business has been mild although winter vacation trend is strong. Salesmen are inclined to believe this is because home club pros farther north have kept a watch on who's going on winter vacations and have sold these players adequate supplies, even 1952 sets of clubs.

Pronounced increase in pro shop Christmas gift selling undoubtedly has had an effect on southern pro shop winter sales. A number of pros have told GOLFDOM that December has become the second or third biggest month in pro shop volume. The smart boys are working the Christmas trade hard.

There has been some talk among pros and salesmen about the possibility of Christmas sales eventually boosting up delivery dates of following years' models or clubs.

In some places, ruling out ball sales through slot machines has been a tough blow to pros. One of the sound pro businessmen tells his experience:

"In 1950 I sold \$16,573.80 worth of balls. This represented 31.3% of my total sales. In 1951 the sales dropped to \$9,112.95 or 21.6% of shop volume.

"The difference of the two years, \$7,460.85, was a drop of 45% from the 1950 ball sales. The war scare buying in August, 1950, partially accounted for the lower figure in 1951, but my analysis shows that taking out the ball slot machines was the main cause of the slump.

"During the time my machine was in operation I never had a month when the machine didn't sell more than 500 balls, and some months as many as 1600. The machine was set to give a ball for every 96 cents. The player got his money's worth.

"The machine averaged about 900 balls a month. I know of some shops that had even greater sales through the slot machines. Just imagine what the state lost in sales tax by outlawing the machines. The federal tax of \$150 per machine also added up to a goodly amount."

Billy Bell Heads Golf Architects' Society

William P. Bell, Pasadena, Calif., was elected pres., American Society of Golf Architects at the organization's 1952 annual meeting held Jan. 14-16 at Bellevue-Biltmore Hotel, Belleaire, Fla.

William Diddle, Indianapolis, Ind., was elected sec.-treas., and William F. Gordon, Doylestown, Pa., vp., by the architects.

In addition to many informative discussions on design and construction from angles of playing interest and tests, construction economy and speed, and ease and economy of maintenance, the architects devoted considerable time to comparing remodeling problems. Among points in this work are remodeling to eliminate arduous climbs, reduce maintenance costs and provide convenient practice areas.

Material shortages and restrictions, use of substitute materials and economical earth-moving equipment and methods received considerable attention.

There was interesting comment on military golf courses at the meeting. The architects brought out that most of the military golf courses were built with funds from Post Exchange profits and slot machines in officers' and enlisted men's clubs and not with public funds. Maintenance of some of the military courses was financed by nominal green fees and sometimes done by labor doing light time for minor military offenses. Overall picture of military golf installations as the architects have studied it shows economy unusual in military operations, extensive utilization by officers and men, and the decided advantage of keeping military personnel keenly interested in a participating outdoor pastime that keeps personnel on the grounds.