

The Teaching Pro Learns the Hard Way

By PETE MORAN

At last some recognition is being given to the golf teacher.

I read a recent article in *Golfing*, "Who's Golf's Greatest Teacher?" That, of course, is a matter of opinion. I have been teaching golf for 35 years, five of which I believe I accepted lesson money under false pretenses. I tried to be nice and patient with those who enlisted my aid, and I think because of this I was considered a good teacher. I could play a good game but I knew little about the teaching fundamentals of golf.

There is a saying, "One must invest in experience before one can hope to receive dividends." How true!

David Forgan's eulogy on golf starts: "Golf is a science, the study of a life time in which you may exhaust the pupil but never the subject." I find that golf pupils' enthusiasm runs hot and cold, mostly cold! Maybe they're exhausted. Pros all over the land hear pupils say, "What's the matter with me? I'm slicing my drives." The average golfers put too much stress on the drives as far as hitting a long ball. They are not happy with a straight hit down the middle that stops at the 180 yard mark. Oh no, they are like the fellow who is angry because he holds only one ticket on a \$200 dollar daily double. "I shudda had two tickets on it," he says to the one who is within hearing distance.

We all know the idea in golf is to get the ball into the cup in the fewest number of strokes but no, they want to murder that tee shot! Is it because they are putting on the show the minute it becomes their turn to hit their drive? I am inclined to believe so.

Build the Base First

I recall playing a match in Florida. The fellow with whom I was playing had an idea he was a long hitter. I wanted to teach him a lesson in golf psychology so I let him tee up his drive and just as he started to waggle his club, I said, "Do you mind if I hit first?" "No," he said as he picked up his ball. I teed up and hit the ball down the fairway. As I stepped back I remarked, "You hit them so far you make me press." Well, he did just as I thought he would, he really powdered the ball because of the audience and my seemingly innocent remark. "Out of bounds" came the cry of the caddie and he then realized that I had purposefully played on his ego.

I have given a lot of golf lessons and I believe in building a good foundation before I expect the pupil to be able to play a good game of golf. I know from experience it is easier to sink a 3-foot putt more often than a 30-foot putt and I know it is easier to start with a No. 7 iron and work up than it is to take one of the hardest-to-use clubs (the driver) for a beginner and expect the pupil to learn the basic fundamentals at the same time trying to hit a straight ball. In learning to operate an automobile, one must learn to start the car smoothly and gradually accelerate the speed as the car rolls along. I believe the golf swing moves in the same tempo!

I feel sorry for some pupils who try to learn to play golf. In the first place, it is not a sissy's game as so many think and in order to be a good or even fair player you must be physically able to walk nine holes and still be able to fight old man fatigue and, at the same time, hit the ball. The first tournament I won (I got a \$200 check—my big thrill!) I actually trained for it by doing road work and watched my diet carefully. Some of my pupils are all tuckered out after hitting a dozen balls.

The good golfers fix their clubs so they "feel" good. The fellow just starting to play gets a set of clubs from the clerk in some department store who thinks Sam Snead is a jockey who rode at Hialeah. They know absolutely nothing about the game of golf and little about selecting clubs. The result is Mr. Freshman Golfer looks around for a pro to give him a lesson with his new set of window weights. The pro looks the clubs over. "What do you think of them?" he asks the pro. The new golfer waits for the jury to give the verdict and he burns up when the pro finally says, "You've been taken!" "Oh! the pro is sore because I didn't get my clubs from him," thinks our friend. He is not sore, he feels sorry for the pupil. The pro spends a bad half hour, knowing his job is hopeless.

Know-It-All A Nuisance

One of the big headaches the pro has to contend with is Mr. Know-it-all who reads an article by someone who makes sarcastic remarks about the teaching methods the pro employs. Mr. Know-it-all secretly thinks he knows more about golf than the pro and prods the pro into a debate about the golf swing, etc., taking up the pro's

time and making himself the pro's problem child.

The tournament player has one game to worry about, his own! But the club pro, all season long gets "What makes me slice my drives?" or "What causes me to shank?" Who is the best teacher, the top star who wins the tournaments or the teaching pro who is like the country doctor, treating all types of cases, or the doctor who is a specialist (this is supposed to represent the good playing pro) who demands top fees for his advice? I saw two of the better known playing pros trying to correct a brother player whose shots had suddenly turned sour. They finally gave him up before they became infected.

You read syndicated articles on golf by name players in your daily newspapers. The public may reason if the reputed writer plays so well he must be able to help my game. The name players can explain a shot should be played a certain way but can any doctor or doctors prescribe a blanket cure for everyone who suddenly becomes ill? I don't think they can, any more than the top playing pro can say to all golfers you must play it this way.

Mr. Necktie Salesman and Mr. Weight

Lifter and so many other types all have to be taught according to their physical conditions. If a person is nervous and does things quickly, try to teach him to slow up his swing tempo and brother, you've got a disgusted pupil.

Remember the good tournament pros practice daily. I've seen them shoot low scores. Where are they when they have the time? On the practice tee, that's right, for at least two or three hours! Can you get a pupil to do that? No, but they can't understand why they don't play better. I wish all of us club pros could measure our members for swings that fit them, and to forget name players' swings. I remember a player asking me one time to show him my swing. I did and when I got through swinging he said, "I didn't see anything, you swung so fast."

A leading pro has an article on putting in a syndicated newspaper article, yet I think this pro putts poorly. Is he a pattern to follow? I can't agree that he is any more than trying to copy his long drives at which he probably excels. There are a lot of singers, yet there are two or three outstanding. If you wanted to sing, do you think you could copy their voice or style to any de-

JUST LIKE BIG GUYS' TOURNAMENTS



Photo Florida State News Bureau

The Sixth Annual All-South Junior Golf Tournament held recently in Tallahassee drew a field of 90 competitors. These were paired in groups of ten years and younger, up to the 17-18-year-old bracket.

The event was handled exactly as the Senior tournaments are, and the youngsters loved it. The boys were called to the tee over the PA system. They were given instruction cards, a book of rules and a ball.

In the picture are: Charles Dubley, of Havana, Fla.; the sponsoring club pro, C. E. (Sonny) Hay; Frank Pepper, announcer, and Jett Monroe, scorekeeper. The under ten group played 9 holes each day; 11 and up, 18.

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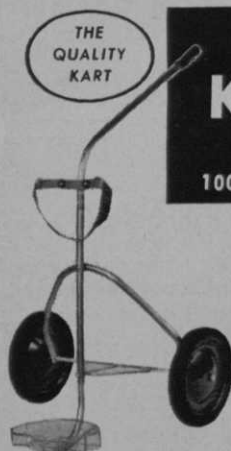
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gree of success or even approach it?

Golf has swept the country in the past few years like a giant forest fire and it has engulfed a lot of beginners who are hungry for advice. I never get anything much for nothing and I don't think the readers of free golf advice expect to sidetrack the local pro for golf lessons that are given free in newspapers. But those lessons may get pupils coming to me.

I had the good fortune to get hold of a pupil who came to me and asked me if I would agree to teach him the game. After three months of teaching and training, he dropped his game from 120 to 80. He thought I was the greatest teacher he had ever had and I knew he was the best pupil I ever had because he let me build a game for him by coming out and practicing the things I thought would help his game. He shanked the ball at times. I said nothing. I wept with him when he had a bad day and if he had a good day at golf, he radiated sunshine. If he played some shots poorly, he wanted to be alone in his misery but he didn't give up and finally he made it. Today he's as cocky as a rooster. Before that he was as meek as a lamb because he couldn't get a game with the boys with the 120 score staring him in the face every time he teed off.

If I get a tip at the race track that wins, I'm looking for the guy who gave it to me. If the horse finished out of the money, I forget my tipster. If a pro can show a pupil how to play a good game, the pupil will stay with him, but, like the tipster, if the pro can't help the pupil the pupil will look for a pro who can.

Once in a while a "natural" comes along and the pro gets the credit for making a good player. For every natural, there are a thousand hackers. Who's the Greatest Teacher? The Pro who helps his customer's game is the answer. But the pupil has to stay with him and give him a fair chance to do the job. If the pupil had double pneumonia, he wouldn't expect the doctor to have him out of the hospital the same day. There are plenty of golfers with double pneumonia swings who think the pro has a magic formula he carries around with him to be used at a moment's notice.

Smith Suggests Improvement in Reporting Score Details

Horton Smith, PGA pres., came up with a good idea to Harry Gage, golf writer for Dallas Morning News.

Smith proposed:

"Instead of measuring a player's game by the number of 1-putt greens, take the footage of all greens where only one putt is needed and establish an average. Then average the length of putts on other greens where more than one putt is needed to get the ball in and compare these two figures.