

# "Scientific Approach" Can Improve Instruction Results

By **DAVID M. LILLY**

Pres., Toro Mfg. Co.  
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**U**NDER personal instruction, there are actually two facets—the practice tee lesson and the playing lesson. These can be called, “How to hit the ball and How to play the game”. When you start talking about how to hit the ball, you, of course, open up a very controversial subject. The controversy has been going on for many, many years, and is very much akin to the controversy that used to go on in golf course maintenance.

Twenty-five years ago, every golf course superintendent was secretive about his own methods, at times he was resentful of the slightest suggestion from others, and, quite often, he was inclined to knock the new ideas. However, today superintendents welcome new ideas and the opportunities to test them collectively and with state agricultural colleges and other turf research operations. This is not mere hearsay either, because I have had the personal satisfaction of watching this “scientific attitude” actually at work at our own company’s research and development center. Certainly, we do not get all of the visitors and inquiries from the whole country, but if those we get are a representative sample, I can say with confidence that the “scientific attitude” is spreading like wildfire throughout the United States and Canada.

From this scientific approach, there has been developed a large number of basic principles for golf course maintenance. In addition, there are thousands of ideas now undergoing scientific analysis.

## **Don't Knock; Investigate**

However, with the exception of a few instances, there has been little of this “scientific attitude” spreading in golf instruction. One main reason is that too many pros knock the teaching of other pros.

When a pro comes up with an innovation in instruction, another pro should at least see what it is, and not disregard it because it doesn't sound like something he'd agree with. You all know the people who have taken lessons from most of the

great teachers and from pros of lesser fame, but have shown no benefit. These guys are bewildered because new teachers began by consciously or subconsciously knocking preceding instructors.

Psychologically, the pros take the focus away from the student and put it on the unsuccessful instructors, leaving the student hopelessly confused. On the practice tee the most obvious thing to teach the average pupil is the fundamentals of golf. I think the PGA has made a tremendous advancement in finding out what some of the fundamentals are, and their movie, in my book, is one of the greatest advances in the teaching game that I have ever seen.

As you know, this movie stresses five known fundamentals:

1. The address.
2. The preliminary waggle.
3. One piece swing, controlled by the left side.
4. Delayed wrist action.
5. The pivot, and how the legs support it.

But these are only the beginning—there are other fundamentals. For example, we are talking about five fundamentals here—one of which is the one piece swing. To me, there is a fundamental which has not yet been defined, and that is the swing itself, of which these other four fundamentals are a part. To my knowledge, there has not yet been a definition of the whole swing itself, and it is the fundamental that we should be trying to find.

We don't hit the ball with a preliminary waggle, a pivot or a delayed wrist action—we hit it with the club in motion—and that club and its motion are part of the whole swing. This is just one of the fundamentals that comes to mind that has yet to be defined, and let's find them by a scientific approach and not by bickering in public and knocking the work of those that are attempting to find the fundamentals.

So much for hitting the ball. Now as to playing the game. I feel that most 100

shooters could play in the 80's if they only knew how to play their own game. It's been my experience that in general, pros have not given enough stress to teaching a man how to play golf. To date, most pros have spent their time teaching their pupils how to hit the ball, with little attention given to how to get around in the least number of strokes. Any weekend you can see hackers attempting to use brassies out of the rough, wedges for simple pitch shots, and No. 1 irons, which they shouldn't even have in their bag, all because they were told, or have read somewhere or have seen the pros rifle the No. 1 iron 220 yards out of the rough or slap a brassie 240 yards out of a trap.

The playing lesson, where the pro teaches the dub how to play the dub's game (not the pro's) offers to the average player more opportunity to learn how to enjoy his own game than any other method. This method of teaching has not, in my mind, received the emphasis that it should, particularly when you consider how it will increase the members enjoyment.

### 3-Hole Playing Lessons

When I speak of a playing lesson I do not mean an 18 hole lesson, as it is obviously impossible for a teaching pro to find the time to give an 18 hole lesson.

Three holes are sufficient to work with a player, and in 3 holes of actual playing an observant can do wonders with the average golfer in teaching him what to do and what not to do. Just one example, you all have seen the 90 shooter skull a wedge over a green when all he had to do was use his three iron and dribble the ball on the green. These 3 hole playing lessons do not have to be confined to one player at a time, but on occasion you can take three of your pupils out for a 3 hole lesson.

The second point I mentioned previously was "printed instruction". Generally speaking, printed material is good. You can read it, and re-read it if you don't understand it, and use it as reference material whenever necessary. For golf instruction, it gives the pupil an opportunity to get some practice and basic understanding at home or elsewhere by himself. He can check the fundamentals he's been taught.

Unfortunately, some of the things the pupil reads are not too good. In your printed instructions, repeat and repeat and repeat the fundamentals. The process of instructing golf pupils is like the proc-

ess of selling and advertising. Years ago Bruce Barton, one of the giants among advertising men, said, "So the very first simple thing that I would say to you is that this business of advertising is a very constant business, that the fact that you told your story yesterday should not lead you into the delusion of supposing that you have ever told it."

You must tell your pupils over and over and over again what you want them to know until everything you've said becomes an unconscious part of their action. And if I may make one further reference to the words of this master advertising man, he summed up the talk I have referred to like this: "Be genuine, be simple, be brief; talk to people in language they understand; and finally, and most important, be persistent." This applies to the written word as well as any verbal instruction.

### Earning from Tournaments

My third point is the performances before the public in tournaments. While a public appearance seems to be quite distant from the standpoint of golf instruction, it is actually quite significant. It's here that the student of golf gets to see the pro in action. His shots, his swing and his choice of clubs are critically analyzed.

The student goes home with a hat full of knowledge that he can put to good use if you can get to him quickly and show him how to use this knowledge.

However, he also picks up some bad habits. In a city following a PGA tournament, there is a noticeable slowing down of play as the 90 shooters start emulating the 60 shooters. It's true that golf is a game of concentration and relaxation, each shot must be planned and well thought out, but the pro in a tournament doesn't need five minutes to read every green or check the wind.

But, let John Dub follow you around and watch you put on a show, and he'll be doing the same thing his next time out. It really isn't necessary to stretch the time. For example, in last year's PGA, the Harrison-Burke match took only three hours and a quarter, and if they hadn't been held up on several holes, they would have gotten around in under three hours. They managed to score a 66 and a 67 — by far the lowest rounds of the day. Unfortunately, this round was not typical, and the average round of golf has gone from three hours to four hours.

From my point of view, I'd like to see the game speeded up and I should think

the pros would be leading the movement to speed up the game, as golf is the pros' livelihood.

To be quite realistic about this snail's pace a golfer sets, it's actually costing the pros money. The mathematics of this loss are quite simple: Many courses are often overcrowded. The players are your only customers, and if you could figure out a way to get more players over your course, you would get more sales. In other words, if you could get the average time of a round of golf reduced from four hours to three hours, you would be able to handle 25% more players, and thus 25% more sales—plus bringing back to golf people who have quit because it takes too long to play a round.

This, then, is pretty much my viewpoint as an amateur on professional teaching. I believe that the statements I've made are constructive criticisms of the pro teaching today, and if my suggestions were applied to teaching, not only myself and amateurs like myself, would be benefited, but the pro would increase the enjoyment of his membership many, many times.

Perhaps I've been too critical in some cases, but by no means do I want to belittle the job and the progress that professional teaching has made. Actually, golf instruction is much better than the pros themselves generally think it is. Proof of this point is seen in junior golf. Twenty years ago, most of the young golfers were ex-caddies who'd picked up their games without much formal instruction. Now most of the young golfers today have had a fair amount of pro instruction, and scoring in junior tournaments today is much better than when the kids were not pro-trained.

#### 50% Art — 50% Science

While I have stressed a scientific approach, golf instruction is probably 50% art and 50% science—or more accurately, it is science applied to an art. It's a difficult job, and I believe the golf pro has the most difficult of all athletic instruction.

The football, basketball, baseball, track, boxing or swimming coach in college or pro sports, gets a kid who is athletically adept and eager. The football coach has assistants who coach blocking, tackling, kicking, end, line and backfield play. The kids are constantly studying under coaches for at least a couple of hours for five days a week. Then, if the kid doesn't work hard and show signs of improve-

ment, the coach drops him from the squad.

And who does the golf pro get? Usually it's a sedentary pupil, muscle-bound or flabby, who either won't or doesn't know how to practice. More often than not, he's a middle-aged guy who usually exaggerates his athletic prowess in his younger days, and now he's pathetically out of condition. He comes to you and takes a half hour lesson. The next day he comes out to the club like a run-away tornado, pre-settles his indigestion with a couple of small drinks, and tosses in too many groceries.

He gets into his gear and makes a hurried call to his secretary to tell her to do something he's forgotten, and then storms out on the course to play a precision game of golf. He stinks! Naturally he blames the pro who gave him his lesson, and he might reverse the usual procedure followed in other sports, and drop the pro from the squad.

I don't blame the player for dropping the pro from the squad, as the predicament of this man whom I have just described to you can be directly traced to the fact that you have not used another scientific method which is in common usage today in business—that is, the technique of "market research".

The horrible example I just described could have been "researched". If he had been, his day's pleasure would have been doubled simply because his pro had taught him perhaps only one thing—Walk slowly to the first tee.

Millions of dollars are spent every year in industry finding out all that can be found out regarding the customer—what are his likes, and what are his dislikes? What are his problems, and what does he want? Have you ever "market researched" your customers—your members?

Do you know what each one of your members wants from the game of golf? Have you tried to figure out how to give him what he wants? Have you helped him in his approaches to the game so that he can get the maximum enjoyment? I am sure that if you "researched" your customers you would find that each of them has somewhat of a different idea of what he wants from golf. You must understand him, and he must understand you.

You, however, must furnish the leadership in achieving this understanding.