

How Pros Teach

Methods Vary But Aims Are The Same

IN describing what he thinks is the most helpful teaching device or idea he has used in trying to transmit the touch or feel to his pupils, Bill Markham of Saginaw (Mich.) CC says that he has stressed the action that initiates the downswing; on the other hand, Reggie Myles, another Michigan headmaster, who presides at the Walnut Hills club in East Lansing, puts greatest emphasis on the backswing; meanwhile, Bud Williamson of the Country Club of Lincoln, Neb., drills his charges in attaining proper balance; Howie Atten, Dubuque (Ia.) G & CC pro, teaches by proceeding in what is widely, but by no means totally accepted, as the orthodox routine, from grip to stance to backswing, etc.; while Joe Cannon of Farmington CC, Charlottesville, Va., concentrates on getting his players to know or sense what they have to do to bring their hands into the ball.

Look for Guaranteed Method

So, you have five different men giving as many different versions of what approach the game should be taught from. If a dozen were queried, perhaps there would be a dozen different answers. Probably the same thing would be true for 20.

Since the teaching of golf is more art than science the day probably never will



come when there is anything like unanimity among pros as to what procedure should be followed in teaching it. The endless quest for the guaranteed method of showing the athletic as well as the unathletic how to hit a golf ball with a reasonable degree of authority may be the real reason why the pro continues to return to his shop every spring. The adoption of new theories of instruction, their rejection when it is seen that they aren't living up to their promise and the further search for methods that will work is an intriguing part of the pro's business.

But, as Joe Cannon maintains, a pro can carry his theories on teaching too far — to the point where he theorizes himself out of business.

"Every pro," says Cannon, "should make a constant study of teaching, observe the other fellow when he gets a chance, occasionally sit down and try to figure out how he can improve his own methods or procedures, but sooner or later he has to adopt a set formula for teaching. If he goes on and on trying out new theories he's going to reach the point where he is completely confused, his players are going to recognize it and his value as a teacher is going to become greatly diminished. Probably to the extent where the club

starts looking around for another pro."

Joe goes on to say that perhaps teaching will become more standardized when the pro doesn't look to his own methods of getting the lessons across so much as to what he is trying to accomplish. "And that," Cannon says, "really is simple enough. It comes down to the fact that 95 per cent of the golfers want to hit the ball reasonably straight and the other five per cent want to hit it with precision."

Can Hit Sitting Down

That is why the Farmington pro bases all his lessons on the simple expedient of trying to get the golfer to put the club and ball together. To do this, he says, a person must have conception of what the hands are doing to bring them into the ball. Cannon preaches that the golfer, any golfer for that matter, can hit while sitting down because the body should only move slightly from the original position or stance and such movement is nothing more than the result of or is caused by hand action.

Bill Markham, who has some fine players at Saginaw, decided years ago that most golfers run into the greatest difficulty in the downswing and he has made a mission of trying to correct this failing. "The trouble is," Markham points out, "is that when the average golfer starts turning his left hip back to the left, he wants to bring his left shoulder along with it. He doesn't have to and that is the thing I stress. When he commits this fault, the player gets outside the ball and the result is an ugly pull to the left or a bad slice. So, every chance I get," Bill continues, "I stick in my pat line about delaying the left shoulder so that at impact the hips are open and shoulders square to the line."

Establishes Rhythm

In contrast to Markham, Reggie Myles avers that if the golfer can get his backswing started correctly he is reasonably sure of hitting the ball well. The idea is that the backswing establishes the rhythm for the shot with the final result depending on how well this segment of the swing is executed.

"I work hard to get this point across," says Myles. "When I am giving a lesson I concentrate in getting the pupil to take the club back with the face square to the ball. I emphasize that the left hand must remain in control all the way and I very closely check the action of the left knee. These are the only three things I stress until I am positive that the person taking the lesson either has them mastered or

understands why I put so much emphasis on them. Once good rhythm is established in the early part of the swing," Myles continues, "the rest just kind of flows along."

In Bud Williamson's estimation, a player's game never gets any better than his ability to strike and maintain proper balance. And balance, Williamson often repeats, means only body balance. All other things, the movement of the arms, the action of the hands, etc. are secondary to the turning of the body.

"When I am teaching," the Lincoln pro explains, "I place the pupil, whether he is a beginner or an old hand at the game, in what I consider a well balanced position. I keep telling him that the steady head is the one and only thing that will enable him to maintain balance. Then, by questioning and close observation, I determine whether the person feels comfortable. If he doesn't, I keep making adjustments in his position until he feels, and it is apparent, that he is ready to swing with confidence and smoothness."

Teaches By the Book

Probably one of the most methodical instructors in the pro field is Howie Atten, the Dubuque golf professor, who teacher by the book. In this case, it is the "Atten book." Every phase of the swing has been carefully broken down and outlined by Atten and is reproduced on mimeographed sheets which Howie gives to his pupils for study and review after each practice session.

Atten's series has been developed over a period of years. In the session covering the grip, for example, Atten proceeds to teach in exactly the same sequence as shown on the mimeographed sheet given the pupil following the lesson. Atten feels that by tying the actual lesson and the review together, the pupil can better assimilate what has been taught because he always has the paper handy as a kind of jog for his muscle memory. In addition, if the pupil conscientiously reviews what he has learned between instruction sessions he is better prepared to go on to something new at the next lesson.

Golf Writers Tournament

Sixth Golf Writers tournament will be played at The Dunes Golf & Beach Club, Myrtle Beach, S. C., Mar. 30. Ed Campbell, Charleston (S. C.) News & Courier, defending champion, has won the title twice. Other winners have been the late Bob Harlow, Des Sullivan and Jimmy Mann.