

Meehan Gives Youngsters Tips on Art of Instruction

Veteran Bloomington, Illinois Pro Says It Takes Five Years to Master Swing Analysis

SEVERAL years ago a young assistant pro who was breaking in under Tommy Meehan, the Bloomington (Ill.) CC headmaster, came to Meehan at the end of the season with a quite obvious note of discouragement in his mien.

"Tommy," he said, "I don't know if I should continue in this game or not. I've been giving golf lessons now for the last four or five months and I'm not sure that I'm much of a teacher. In fact, I sometimes think I don't know the first thing about teaching."

Somewhat surprised at this outpouring, Meehan tried to think of something to say that would at least temporarily restore the young man's confidence. But before he had a chance to speak, the assistant continued:

Happens So Fast

"I'll let you in on a secret. I can stand all day and watch people swing but I'm not sure that I'm seeing a thing. Every-

thing happens so fast. Sometimes I think I spot defects and I tell the pupil what I know to correct them. But then I get to wondering. Maybe I don't see what I think I do and maybe what I tell the person who is taking the lesson hurts his swing more than it helps."

"I wouldn't worry about it too much, Jack," Meehan broke in in a reassuring way. "You're doing all right. Nobody around here has complained about the way you teach."

"Well, I don't know, Tommy. Maybe they are just being kind."

Meehan, who has been in the pro end of the game for more than three decades and at Bloomington for seven years, never had run into a golf teacher, assistant or otherwise, who discussed his supposed shortcomings quite as frankly as this young man, but what the latter blurted out didn't come as a total surprise.

"Teaching golf," Meehan says, "isn't

What Tommy Meehan Says About The Cut Putt

I believe that there are some unintentional "cut-putters" still around, although most golfers today use the orthodox, or standard method of putting. The player who does not keep his putter squared to the straight, imaginary line from ball to cup, finds that when he takes the putter back outside the line in order to stroke the ball, he crosses to the inside line, which makes him a "cut putter."

When the stymie was the rule in match play, the player who had the cut putt finesse and know how, benefited by this method of putting.

Now for an explanation of how the cut putt behaves on the green. The cut putt has a clockwise spin on the

ball as it approaches the cup. If the ball is stroked too strongly and rims the lip of the cup, the spin could take the ball out and cause a missed putt. The cut putter should, or must, putt for the left lip of the cup, allowing for a spin to the right. I believe there is much less tension on a cut putter. He seems more relaxed, is not so apt to freeze, nor does he tend to stand over the ball too long.

Believe me, I do not advocate the cut putt, but personally, I am stuck with it. I will go along with 98 per cent of the top golfers and agree that the orthodox putting stroke is best. It does require the power of concentration, the imaginary line to the cup, taking the putter blade back square to the line and stroking through. —

something that is learned overnight. It takes a good pro at least five years to learn how to look at a swing and see everything that is to be seen. Prescribing a correction for a defect isn't nearly as tough as diagnosing what is wrong."

This is something that Meehan thinks every veteran pro should impress on the young man starting out as a teacher.

"Practically every youngster who starts his pro career as an instructor," Meehan says "is a pretty fair golfer. It's only natural that he thinks of himself as being capable of teaching the game. But it isn't long before perhaps four out of five of these young fellows become discouraged to varying degrees, especially in their first year or two. It's because they come to realize that teaching golf isn't an easy matter. It's the old story of 'It looks easy from the outside.'

Doesn't Come Easy

"That should be made clear to these young fellows before they ever step out on the lesson tee," the Bloomington veteran continues. "A degree in 'golf education' doesn't come any easier than other educational degrees. It takes time, patience, study and observation. Even more important it takes the knack of learning to analyze what is seen in the flashing of a person going through the involved motions of the swing. That is something that can't be looked up in a book. Some people in the golf teaching profession never acquire the knack of seeing the complete swing. Others may master this, but are weak in analysis or in prescribing the right cures for the defects they discover.

"If it is any consolation to young assistants who have doubts about their teaching ability," Meehan continues, "I've been around for more than 30 years and I'm still finding out things about the swing and how to analyze it that I didn't know existed before. I think any veteran pro will admit the same thing if he is honest.

"If there's any message I'd like to get across in this article," Meehan declares, "it is to tell the young teacher not to get discouraged even if he feels inadequate. He can help himself by attending clinics, talking to experienced pros and making a thorough study of the swing. But he should keep in mind that one summer doesn't make or break a golf teacher."

Meehan's Observations

In the 30 odd years that the Bloomington pro has been operating golf shops and conducting winter schools, he has given at least 50,000 lessons. Here are some of



Tommy Meehan

... young pros, take heart

his observations on the art of teaching:

- Most pros fall into definite teaching patterns in which they put special emphasis on certain parts of the swing. This is due either to the way in which they were brought up by the pro who taught them how to teach, or it is the result of their experiences in learning how to properly hit a golf ball. Every pro has what he considers key actions or motions in his swing — whether they are good footwork, good

(Continued on page 108)

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Tips for Young Pros

(Continued from page 58)

hand action or strong shoulder action. It's natural that he tries to build his pupils' swings around what he considers to be most important in his own.

- There are those who will argue that by putting special emphasis on one or two phases of the swing other equally important parts are neglected. This argument is countered by the old axiom that if everything is emphasized, then nothing is emphasized. I am inclined to go along with the latter idea.

Footwork, Hand Action

- I concentrate most on footwork and hand action. Footwork is the first thing I study when I look at a golfer's swing. I stress trying to get good rhythm in the swing through the action of the feet. I teach my golfers, young and old, to get that left heel off the ground on the backswing to save wear and tear on the back muscles. To promote smooth footwork, I teach my pupils to roll inward on the ball of the left foot going back, and to duplicate this action with the right foot coming down.

- The fault of most golfers in their hand action is that they try to hit too quick. This is the result of too much left hand emphasis. I try to correct this by constantly reminding my pupils that they have a right hand for whipping the clubhead through. I preach keeping the palm of the right hand square to the flight line, and resistance to allowing it to turn inward or outward until after the ball is hit.

Thorough Understanding

- I don't contend that the things I emphasize are necessarily to be recommended to all teaching pros. I only say that, from my experiences, they seem to be the most effective approaches to teaching people how to hit a ball properly. The most important thing is to understand thoroughly the things you are trying to teach and to constantly try to improve your teaching methods.

- Everbody talks about how vital the short game is to good scoring. Are you able to convince your pupils that you should spend more time teaching them to pitch, chip and putt than in having them stand back and hit long irons and woods? Are your short game teaching methods as well organized as those used in teaching the long game? If you are a young pro who is

having trouble learning to look at and analyze the swing, has it ever occurred to you that you can grasp the entire concept more readily through the short swing than the long one?

• On the green, I teach my players to take the putter straight back, then jab with the idea of putting the ball in the cup with the right hand. As a premium, I always throw in some hints about reading a green. I tell my pupils to be most concerned with the slope and condition of the green within five or six feet of the hole. That is the critical area.

Women Try Harder

• On the teaching fairway I find that women try harder, take more pains in trying to absorb what is being taught them, and are more inclined to take their time. Most men, by the way, don't take enough time in preparing to hit the ball. The biggest drawback to women golfers is that they just can't hit the ball hard enough.

• If a fellow is taking a series of lessons from me, I prefer that he doesn't play in any matches in which gambling is involved while the series is in progress. Gambling undoes much that a pro teaches because when there is money on the line,

regardless of how little or how much, the golfer forgets everything he has learned and reverts to his old bad habits in a mad effort to win it. One reason women make good students is that they don't gamble very much.

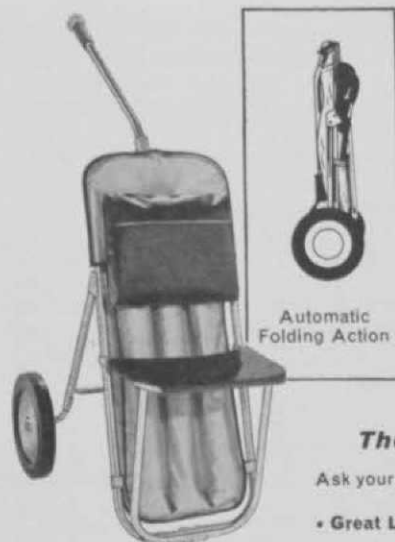
Five in Group

• I was never strong on group lessons until last year. I started giving them in June and found them to be a very successful way of teaching. (So, you see, an old dog can learn new tricks.) What makes group lessons effective is the element of competition involved. Also, people learn much from the errors and demonstrations of others. I never give lessons to more than five people at a time.

• Getting back to the short game, I think pros can add an important weapon to any player's arsenal by teaching him the cut shot. This is one of the forgotten arts that should be revived by golf teachers. The cut stroke in putting is something to think about, too (see box). If nothing else, it cuts down on tension.

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