

What the Pro Should Know about Grips

A Starting Point for Expanding Your Sales

By **WALLY ULRICH**

Sales Manager, Fawick Flexi-Grip Co.

Writing in *Golfdom*, Al Bonk has already advised you that most pro shops need a new look — a selling look. In July (p 38) he stressed the costly oversight of obsolescence, pointing out that you may be losing a lot of business because your customers are not aware that their clubs are not first grade by today's standards. But where and how do you tactfully start to educate them for a change?

The beginning of everything in golf is the grip. So, let's start with it. Featuring grips can be one of the most profitable services in your shop and extremely beneficial to your customers.

Grips have been tremendously improved in recent years. They have the important essentials for making sales. They have new styling, new colors and new feel which improve power and aid in aiming.

Absolute Security

You must be ready to explain the importance of the grip to your customers. Point out that the only contact with their playing equipment is through their hands on the grip. Club and arms should be unified. This requires the absolute security of the connection between the club and the hands. The grip must not slip or turn in the hands, regardless of weather. It should never become hot and sticky, never hard nor cold. There should always be a comfortable feel that will not distract the attention of the player.



Ulrich

They Give Final, Quality Touch to a Set of Clubs

By **AL LAMKIN**

President, Lamkin Leather Co.

It happened to be in a lockerroom the other day when I heard an interesting conversation concerning the word "feel" as it is related to golf clubs.

The gentlemen involved in the conversation apparently were "better than average" golfers. One of them was speaking quite highly of the performance of a new set of clubs he had recently purchased. In the course of the discussion, this person praised highly the "feel" in his new clubs. Although his connotation of the word "feel" might differ from that of other golfers, I was pleased to learn that he felt that not only did the clubhead and shaft prove superior in "feel" to his previous clubs, but that the grip itself was also far superior. To go one step further with this anecdote, naturally I had to find out what type grips this particular golfer had on his clubs. I was pleased to discover that they were leather.



Lamkin

Leads to Improvement

The point that I'm trying to make here is that I firmly believe that the grip actually can be responsible for improving a golfer's game. Since the grip is the part of the club where the golfer's hands are in direct contact with the club itself, it is logical to assume that here is where "feel" originates. Furthermore, the transition of "feel" to the golfer, to his sense of perception, can only be achieved to the highest degree when the golf club grip gives the golfer confidence that the shot he is about to hit is going to be a good one.



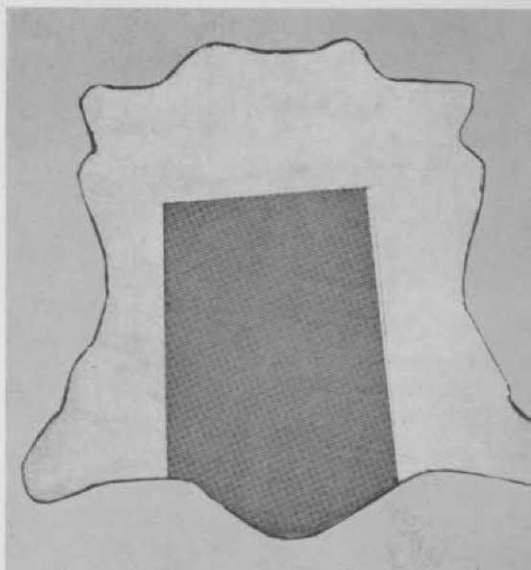
Two steps in re-wrapping clubs with special rubber compound grip. Above, applying listing tape and adhesive on both sides; below, applying solvent to listing and interior of grip, making it easier to slip it over the shaft.



Ulrich *continued*

One of the greatest handicaps for many golfers is their frustration in trying to find the "right feel" in gripping their clubs. This is true of the professional as well as the duffer. I can think of a few professionals who toured the circuit with me and won occasionally, but only with the greatest effort. They never could get the right feel. They "milked" their grip until their hands were wet with perspiration. Often they ended the game in nervous exhaustion. Improved grips of uniform size, shape and feel have helped many golfers such as these.

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Dark area shows section of hide from which prime quality leather grips are cut.

Lamkin *continued*

Leather is a living thing, and as such, is endowed with pores that actually live and breathe. Since it is porous, the grip can absorb any perspiration from the golfer's hands, yet still remain tacky enough to permit a secure, comfortable hold on the club. One of the great qualities of leather is its ability to "bounce back", so to speak . . . to be as good as new after being subjected to moisture and to heat and cold conditions.

All Aren't Acceptable

Let's consider the selection of the leather hides used for grips. Basically, only certain hides are acceptable, and then only certain portions of these are actually used for grips. Their cutting is entrusted only to experienced craftsmen with many years' experience in the leather industry. These people select and hand cut only hides that are uniform in weight, thickness and strength to give us a quality product that conforms to the rigid standards and specifications imposed upon us by club manufacturers.

In recent years, leather in its natural state has been improved upon greatly through the discovery of special tanning processes. Foremost among these improvements is the tackiness put into it — tackiness that in a grip tends to eliminate torque action and slipping. Color ad-

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Ulrich on Grips (Continued from page 39)

Several years ago, I became so convinced of the importance of grip improvements and that the company I'm now with was going in the right direction with its one-piece rubber and cork compound grips, that I joined the firm. Naturally, I am thoroughly sold on grips made of our special rubber compound. However, I must concede that leather grips, too, have improved in recent years.

Win Some Converts

No doubt you can think of a grip "milker" right now who can be cured and his game improved, simply by converting him to new grips. Think how he would appreciate it and of the quick, long term profit you can make simply because he is indebted for the help you've given him.

Grip installations are not for special cases. You can sell grips to virtually every golfer with clubs that are more than two years old. You can use grips as a lead to sell new sets of clubs. Golfers are becoming more and more aware of the importance of their grips. When these are right they feel good, they perform well and confidence comes with this good feeling.

Selling Points

It's up to the professional to sell his pupils and members on the importance of good grips. You might dramatize this by a few proved technical facts. Tell them that golf balls mechanically driven 225 yards, miss their mark by 35 feet when the clubhead is turned only one degree. Then, tell them that to drive a ball 200 yards, their clubhead must travel more than 100 miles per hour and exert 180 foot pounds of pressure, the hands absorbing 30 pounds. Facts like these are pretty strong convincers that the connection between the club and the hands must be very secure and proper.

"Chick" Harbert, former PGA champion, always points out that shock absorbing rubber grips preserve the elasticity of the hands, and provide greater sensitivity reaction. He says grips should be used which alleviate hand consciousness — the feeling of necessity for applying pressure to maintain hold of the grip. Chick says the deviation in flight of shots is caused by deviation of hand pressure. Tendency to grip too hard with the left hand, for example, results in a tendency

to push shots. Chick was a very successful pro shop merchandiser prior to moving to Port St. Lucie, where he is now executive director. He sold a lot of grips and clubs, too, for that matter, by stressing the importance of the grip.

Special Treatment

Giving a customer some special attention always helps make a sale. With the variety of grips now available, you can give your prospect the feeling he is being custom fitted with grips you have selected especially for him. Too, this should be done because there are many variations in the hands of golfers. Is the player subject to extreme perspiration, or does he have dry hands? Does he have large or small hands? Does he need heavy or light traction action, a hard or resilient grip? Show him the grips that are best suited for him and he will buy.

I have personally installed grips for many of the professional stars. Mike Souchak uses an entirely different grip than Gary Player. Tommy Bolt wants a little more traction than Doug Ford.

I know some golf professionals who, when teaching, invite the student to "hit a few" with one of their own freshly gripped clubs. Some suggest they take the club along for a round. This usually goes over well. The benefits of a full set of new grips, of uniform size and shape, sell themselves.

Start A Campaign

You are doing your members a disfavor if you allow them to play, unknowingly, with outdated clubs. So, preach the importance of the grip in every lesson. Check the racks and keep records. There is no place in your club for frayed and frizzled, dirty and loose grips. Start a drive to get everyone properly equipped.

Installing grips is one of the fastest and easiest ways of making a profit. When I was playing the tournament tour, many professionals asked me to install new grips for them. Home club professionals in the area often would stop in to learn the procedure. I have installed as many as 300 of our grips in one evening.

Many pros use grip sales as a key to a profitable pro-shop operation. I know of some who more than pay their assistant's entire salary from grip profits, to say nothing of the profits on other sales which were instigated by talking grips. This is to some extent due to the fact so much has been done and is being done in the development of grips. We

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have been bringing out new grips every year — not just for the sake of having something new, but for reasons of improvement. We work two years ahead on new models and create approximately 40 Golf Pride designs for every design that is finally marketed. It has been this work to improve the grips which has been making golf equipment obsolete and opening a new avenue of revenue for you.

Aside from the income potential, great satisfaction is derived by the professional from selling or installing new grips. You are helping a golfer play better. When that happens, almost immediately you sense a new "customer interest" in your shop and merchandise. That is why you're in business!

Wally Ulrich, Fawick Flexi-Grip Co. sales manager, played the tournament circuit for several years and is a co-holder of the lowest score ever recorded in a PGA co-sponsored event. It was a 60 that he shot at Virginia Beach. National intercollegiate champion in 1943, Ulrich has won the Canadian Centennial and Kansas City Opens and holds several course records throughout the country.

Lamkin on Grips

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vancements also have been achieved with leather grips, so that today a variety of outstanding fadeproof colors and color combinations are available to harmonize with the color patterns of clubs. And, it seems very likely that additional improvements will be forthcoming in the future.

Serve A Purpose

The perforation and embossing patterns on the grip serve an extremely useful purpose. They provide the golfer with additional hand traction so as to guard against the possibility of the club turning or slipping in his hands during a swing. These patterns, I might point out, are based on precise engineering formulas and equations that combat the slipping motion of the golfer's hands.

This same line of reasoning also applies to the edge-skiving and edge-folding processes used in grip designs. They are manufacturing steps designed to prevent hand-slippage, yet give a firm and secure grip.

Another advantage of leather grips, as I see it, is the fact that they can be applied upon the club with uniform tension, thus giving every club the same

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"feel". This condition, by the way, is regulated by the club manufacturer, but it is one that is worthy of mention since it does mean a great deal to satisfactory club performance.

You'll recall I mentioned earlier the development of the special tanning processes used to give leather grips greater "tackiness". This also aids in prolonging grip life. It is also relatively simple to clean leather grips, for by merely washing the grips with a mild soap and water solution, the original tackiness can be restored.

What has been written here encompasses what I think every pro and his assistants should know about the characteristics of golf grips. This is if he is not only going to stay ahead of his members or customers, but provide them with a service to which they are entitled.

Al Lamkin, president of the firm that bears his name, has long been in the leather goods business. Back around 1920 he started producing leather grips at the request of a club manufacturer and what was a sideline in those early days has turned into a full time business. Three sons are associated with him in the operation of his company.

Bill Gahlberg, formerly a sales rep for a golf equipment manufacturing firm, heads a group of pros that has bought Tubac Valley CC in Tubac, Ariz. Four Chicago area and five Michigan section pros and Mike Souhak and Lionel Hebert are part owners of the club. Jack Bell is the winter pro.

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