

Vasco Tells How Architectural Change Has Affected Teaching

Handicap records indicate there has been notable progress made in golf instruction in the past several years. An interesting aspect of this development is in women's golf. Women club members take more lessons than men. The women have more time for instruction. Many observers believe that the standard of women's golf at private clubs has improved faster than that of men's in recent years.

Golf instruction is a difficult art. The accomplished instructor is primarily an artist rather than a scientist. He usually is a man whose aptitude has been recognized, encouraged and developed by an earlier artist in golf instruction.

Johnny Vasco, professional at the Lehigh CC, Allentown, Pa., is a very successful instructor whose schooling came

as an assistant and pupil of two of the old masters of golf teaching: Stewart Maiden and Willie Macfarlane.

Vasco was with Maiden at Rockwood Hall CC, Tarrytown, N.Y., in 1934 and 1935. In 1928 and through the early '30s, Johnny was with Macfarlane at Old Oaks CC, Purchase, N.Y. He says: "The association with these two great teachers has been invaluable to me. I hope that my teaching reflects and extends their ideas. I am sure that my success in getting pupils to understand and respond is due to the guidance I got from these two gifted teachers who taught me how to teach."

In the accompanying article, Vasco compares features of Stewart Maiden's and Willie Macfarlane's teaching and those of today's successful tutors.

By JOHNNY VASCO

Professional, Lehigh CC, Allentown, Pa.

Stewart Maiden stressed the correct grip. There is nothing unusual about this. Every successful instructor knows that the grip is the very first fundamental of golf. Maiden took a great deal of care and time to see that a particular grip was the one best suited to the individual. It could be overlapping, interlocking or the so-called natural grip. The important thing was for the player to place his hands on the club in a way that would let him swing so as to get best results.

The next thing Maiden did was to show the pupil what to do with his feet and legs, explaining the necessity of making the feet and legs working properly to get the body into the shot. He made the pupil understand that he couldn't make a full swing unless the body was moving correctly.

Maiden believed that the left arm should be fully extended and firm at the elbow, causing the muscles of that arm

and of the left shoulder to be contracted. If not, he maintained, those of the right shoulder will be. Contracted muscles go to work when action is started and cause the right shoulder to swing around so the player usually has a tough time keeping his head in position. Therefore, Maiden stressed the importance of keeping the left arm firm and as straight as possible, believing it can prevent a lot of trouble.

As for correcting faults in individuals who have been playing the game for varying periods, it was a case of individual treatment for each player. Maiden's idea to correct individual faults was to ask the pupil to execute a certain movement that would automatically correct his fault. But he did not go into any detailed analysis of the fault or its correction. He said "trying to think about a half dozen things at one time will ruin anybody's golf swing. Keep it simple — one thing at a time". Maiden also told me: "You can tell a pupil the same things that I do, but until you gain respect as a teacher, no one will listen to you".

Willie MacFarlane believed that instructions should vary with the physical makeup and temperament of the individual. He

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Vasco

Change in Teaching

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emphasized the importance of the correct clubs for the pupil. For instance: the nervous man should use light clubs to fit his almost invariably fast swing, while the stolid player without any fast or jerky action in his makeup is, as a rule, far better off with heavy clubs. The tall, thin, man should use a wide stance to counteract the centrifugal force set up by the swinging clubhead. Without a correct stance, one cannot maintain proper balance, and without balance, one has no control over the head of the club. MacFarlane believed that fitted clubs and good balance provided the only correct approach to golf for people of different physical makeups and temperaments. He taught golfers to play within themselves.

Both Maiden and MacFarlane's success lay in their ability to see the fault of the individual and to correct it in a way that gave immediate results.

Courses Influenced Instruction

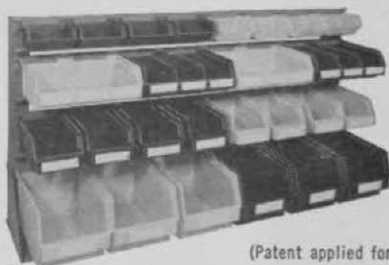
Golf courses of 30 years ago had very narrow fairways. The rough was very long — anywhere from 12 to 16 inches. The greens were small, and since they were usually never watered, were very hard, making it difficult to hold a shot.

Most of the holes were designed to play from left to right, with the openings to the greens from left to right. The golf professional consequently had to teach to develop shots to take advantage of these conditions. The golfer was taught to play his shots with an open stance to produce a cut shot to keep the ball in play.

The golfer in this period didn't have 14 clubs. He had to learn to play many types of shots with fewer clubs. Therefore, hand and wrist action were stressed. Under pressure, the loose hold of the club on contact produced a hook. The backswing started with the hips leading, the hands following. This action was reversed in the downswing.

Today, with our lush fairways, short roughs of about four inches or so and large watered greens, the ball can be played either left to right or right to left and there is no trouble in holding the greens. The Augusta National, however, course is designed to benefit the right to left player. Jack Nicklaus realizing this, changed his game from hitting the ball from left to right to play the Masters course right to left — a la Palmer. Pal-

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An architect's drawing shows a two-story Georgian style addition to the clubhouse at Concord CC, Concordville, Pa. It will increase the present area by 18,000 square feet. Cost of expanding the Delaware Valley clubhouse is estimated at \$360,000.

mer had always done well at Augusta because of hitting the ball right to left. The change in tactics paid off for Nicklaus.

Today's Instruction Plan

Today's golfer is taught to start the backswing with the clubhead, arms and shoulder turn as a unit and to keep control of the arc by extending the left arm up to the top of backswing. The grip remains firm. The right elbow is kept close to the body and is pointing downward.

The golf pupil now is given a mental picture of the spine being a turning axis to which the club and arms are connected by the shoulders. The axis cannot bend, but can turn. It is essential to keep the head steady throughout the swing.

Today's instruction directs that the primary movement of the downswing is the unwinding of the hips. Then the shoulder muscles come into play, pulling the arms and clubhead down into the ball. The pupil is told to keep the left arm straight to control the arc of the swing and to maintain the straight left arm well through the hit. Correct action of feet and legs is explained as necessary in maintaining stability; balance is continuously emphasized because with steady balance, the golfer can consistently perform the same swing with the same rhythm.

Camera Helps

Cameras have become excellent teaching aids. Especially useful is the new sequence camera with 10-second film to show the pupil where his faults lie and how they can be corrected. An "after" picture can show the improvement. Many golfers can apply themselves to greater advantage after viewing themselves.

The PGA Assistants' schools, set up in various sections of the country, are invaluable in promoting proper teaching methods.