

# UNDERSTANDING Your Pupil's Four BASIC MOTIVES

*Play, Fight, Ego and Status compel people to play golf . . . Here's how the pro can learn to play up to each*

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**N**ow what do you suppose a psychologist has to say about golf? True, you often hear such remarks as, "There's a lot of psychology in golf," and, "What's the psychology behind that shot?", but these are mis-uses of the term.

Very little has been written about the psychology of golf, how to make it more enjoyable for the player, and how to increase his proficiency. I'd like to examine what we do know about it and offer some principles and practices which should prove of value to the teaching golf professional.

A man tackles the much-praised, often-cursed game of golf for a complex set of reasons. Club professionals owe it to their members and to themselves to understand these motivations and use them in setting goals to be reached by their pupils and themselves.

Golf is a highly complex, crazy-quilt form of behavior. It requires considerable skill which must be learned and practiced. It is evident that it's a very com-

pelling activity because of the time and money lavished upon it, the awesome lengths some people will go to play it and the trappings and gear they feverishly acquire to be identified with it. A complex social organization surrounds the sport. It has considerable status value. It is highly competitive but, nevertheless, cooperative. Instructors should be aware of the consequences of the game's characteristics and use this understanding when dealing with golfers.

## Trapped by the Game

First, we should ask why people play golf. People seek a competitive, healthful and prestigious way of engaging in playful activity and taking up leisure time. Indulgence in golf starts this way, but often the means becomes the end and they are trapped by the game.

Play is important to men and animals alike. The play drive, very strong in children, later is subjected to increased social control and is considered less becoming, thus losing its spontaneity. In the adult, the play drive is channeled into various forms of sport and recreation. Golf is one of the many available socially acceptable outlets for this drive.

A golf course sometimes becomes a substitute battlefield by providing an out-

*This article is condensed from a speech made by Andrews at a recent meeting of the Mid-Atlantic PGA. Other articles on teaching will appear in future issues of Golfdom.*

let for competitive behavior and draining off the aggressiveness that normally would result in fighting, if such behavior were socially acceptable.

Most people desire a means of showing themselves superior to their environment, superior to some segment of the population and superior to themselves of yesterday. This striving for individual self-realization is very strong. Many people choose a hobby or sport in which they can demonstrate personal achievement to satisfy their ego. Golf serves admirably for these purposes.

### **Clothing, Equipment, Pageantry**

Another reason for taking up divot digging is a desire for social status or prestige. Some people are particularly susceptible to this need and gravitate toward activities which have a great deal of pageantry, special clothing and equipment, symbolism and even a special vocabulary which sets them apart. Golf satisfies these needs to a greater degree than do most other sports.

These are some of the reasons why a person appears on a golf course to play a round, receive instruction, or just wander through the pro shop, soaking up the game's atmosphere and lore. The pro will be much more skilled in his relations with his golfing public if he understands these basic motives.

Each golfer has a definite mixture of *play*, *fight*, *ego* and *status* motives, but in different amounts. It may be the pro's job to teach a man, or to sell him something in the pro shop, or to otherwise attend to his desires. Whatever the duty, its purpose is to help satisfy a complex set of motives. The pro will do a better job by understanding this relationship to the golfer as the man attempts to satisfy his drives.

### **What Is Strongest Motive?**

• Psychological factors come most directly into play during instruction. At the outset of the first lesson, the pro should talk to his client for a while about his interests and previous experience in the game, and about other members of his family and his friends who play in order to get a picture of the relative strength of the four basic motives. When he knows this he can determine the best way to handle the client by catering to his strongest motive. For example, if play is the dominant drive, the pupil should get a good workout and use plenty of muscle. He should leave the lesson tee tired but glowing. Golf's tricky problems and deci-



Julius Boros (r), who made such a grand comeback in 1963 to win the PGA "playing-pro-of-the-year" award, received Ft. Lauderdale's "gold tee to the city" last fall from Mayor M. R. Young. Boros is the Florida city's leading citizen.

sions should be emphasized. The pupil should be shown how much fun the game can be. Impress him with the fact that it's a "game".

• If the strongest motive is fight, the pro will have more trouble with the pupil, who is likely to be argumentative and demanding. With that tipoff, the pro should concentrate on diverting aggressiveness into the game, thus satisfying the motive. Golf skill should be stressed. The pro should help the student drain off his aggressiveness and frustrations by getting him to see his practice tee activity as a release and escape.

### **Help His Ego**

• If the client's main reason for playing is ego, the improvement in his game should be emphasized. The pro should praise the player and make rewarding comparisons between his game and others at the same stage, however fictitious the comparisons may be.

• If the pupil mainly is seeking status, it helps to congratulate him on his attractive apparel and elegant equipment. The pro should talk golf and explain the sport's vocabulary. Let him get "inside the game"; that's where he wants to be. This fellow also needs ethical guidance in the pro shop to see that he doesn't get carried away, making unnecessary purchases he will regret later.

The pro will, of course, find other strong motives among his pupils. The point is that he should recognize that individual differences do exist and treat them individually. He should try to satisfy his client's motives for, if he doesn't, the client

(Continued on page 106)

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## Understanding Motives

(Continued from page 26)

will go elsewhere for his satisfaction.

Physical skill training, another psychological aspect of golf, is an area in which psychologists have long been interested and to which they have devoted a great deal of research. We have found that the major principle of learning a physical skill is that of reinforcement, which says that a satisfying action tends to be repeated and that unsatisfying actions tend to be dropped because they are not reinforced by pleasure or reward.

In learning a complex physical performance, such as a golf swing, the individual parts which produce the most satisfying effect usually are retained; those which do not satisfy are discontinued. Of course I'm referring to the rank beginner, whose skill level over the first few lessons follows this predictable pattern. I'm limiting this discussion to the novice, for the ups and downs of the more proficient golfer require a great deal more research before they can be analyzed.

### Duties During Lesson

The pro has many different duties during a lesson. One is verbal pre-training in which he begins to familiarize the student with the golf vocabulary and focuses attention on the movements the student will be performing and the feeling he will experience from them. Such verbal pre-training pays off in results.

Other important goals are attained during the verbal pre-training session. The pupil is warmly indoctrinated and favor-

able attitudes are shaped and molded. The instructor gains his student's confidence and, at the same time, learns why he is there and which of his motives must be satisfied.

The pro also has to be an agent of selective reinforcement. That is, he must reward correct actions with praise, thus strengthening them. If a novice were given a driver along with several bushels of balls and left to whack away on his own, he might ultimately come up with a fair golf swing. This, of course, is the hard way. The pro, through long practice, is able to sort out the swing's positive characteristics and praise them, thus reinforcing them. Praise operates much better than reproof in this task, for reproof or punishment does not really produce any changes in skill. However, praise must not be laid on indiscriminately or its value will be diluted.

### Applying Reinforcement Principle

The instructor also must diminish his role and importance as the lessons continue. He must wean his student by pointing out certain physical reinforcers which always are available for the pupil to fall back on. Most obvious of these is the ball's flight, its distance and path. A long, straight tee shot is an excellent reinforcer. Another is the awareness of how a good swing feels. The student should be attentive to the moves preceding a good shot just as much as or more than the actions that precede a bad one. When this is overlooked, we aren't letting the principle of reinforcement do its work.

Another of the instructor's duties is to serve as an example for his student to imitate. Learning through imitation is a common and effective method of learning a physical skill, but it must be used wisely. Students seldom are built like pros and the instructor's swing and distance often are demoralizing to a novice who is barely getting a few yards off the tee, and with a wicked slice at that.

In the early stages of instruction, imitation should be limited to parts of the total swing and the student allowed to put them together. Imitating should immediately follow the demonstration. This immediacy helps to reinforce the desired movements and also helps to keep the student vigilant and attentive. The pro must emphasize how the swing should feel to the student. The imitator then has two models: the sight of the instructor's example, plus the description of the feeling accompanying a good swing.

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