

**Proving the pro game differs  
from that of the amateur**

# Vossler Returned to ABC's When He Began Teaching

BY JOE DOAN

(Second in a series of teaching articles.)

**A**lthough he had seven years on the circuit behind him (four of them among the top money winners) when he decided to give up the nomad life in 1961 for a home club job, Ernie Vossler embarked on the teaching phase of his new career in a manner that's recommended for novice professionals, but hardly for a veteran campaigner. He concentrated on two things: the art of communication, and the mechanics of the swing as he anticipated he would find them among the members of the club that gave him its head pro post, Quail Creek in Oklahoma City.

Contemplating the swing as it is executed by a handful of golfers who shoot in the 70s, a slightly larger number who manage to play in the 80s, and an overwhelming majority who have to confess to 90s or 100s or higher, is perhaps revolutionary. But, as Vossler explains it, it makes a great deal of sense: "You're like a football coach," he says. "You work with the material at hand. My job wasn't to teach a club made up of professionals. I had amateurs to work with and so I had to learn to understand the swing as the amateur understands it."

## Make Complete Analysis

Vossler's last year as a circuit regular was in 1961. He had assurance that the job at Quail Creek, which was to open the following year, was his. So, he began to attune his thinking to that of the club player. He huddled frequently with Jay Hebert and Dave Marr, both of whom continue to follow the tournament trail, but definitely are teachers at heart. The



Ernie Vossler

*... you can't cross the line*

three of them completely analyzed the swing from the way it is perfectly exemplified by Gene Littler, or perhaps Hebert himself, to the way it is chopped up by the guy who shoots 120.

This diligent trio even went so far as to collect sequence photos, when and where they could, of the awkward and the damned and mentally superimpose them on the finished products that are to be found in the gallery of the professional tournament players. After studying hundreds of photos, Vossler and his fellow analysts reached the conclusion that poor or average players play no better than they do because they never grasp the idea of delaying the hands or, if they do, they aren't physically capable of getting in position to hold the hit.

## Most Obvious Symptom

This isn't the sum and substance of the reason for inept or, at best, mediocre swinging on the part of the plodding club player. It is only the most conspicuous symptom. "Casting, letting fly with the hands, crossing the line on the down-

swing, all these things," says Vossler, "are merely the climax of a poor start, poor balance and the consequent inability of the great majority of players to restrain themselves long enough to get their hips around to lead the hands into the downswing.

"Actually," Ernie continues, "there are a few pros who are making a living on the circuit who lead with their hands from the top. All of them must have the ability to cock their wrists in the downswing (a very difficult thing to do) or they wouldn't be getting away with it. As long as they hit several hundred balls every day, they are able to live with their sin. But take their clubs away from them for a month and you'll see how long it takes them to get back in the groove."

### Can't Cross Line

In teaching, Vossler forgets about the ultimate fault of most golfers and tries to keep the swing in logical sequence. That means he concentrates on four fundamentals — the grip, stance, balance and weight transfer, in that order, and constantly repeats the need for taking the club straight back and then swinging it straight down in the foreswing. "You can't cross or go outside the line in the downswing or you're in trouble," is his favorite way of telling his pupils what he wants them to avoid when the club is swung forward.

"What I'm really trying to do," the Quail Creek pro explains, "is to get the player to get under the ball rather than come into it from the outside. I helped Johnny Pott shake this habit several years ago. He had something of a baseball swing that was the result of his bringing the club outside from the top. I got him to think in terms of cutting the shot and eventually he took the bend out of the big hook he ordinarily hit."

### Brings in Short Game

It was previously stated that Vossler concentrates on four fundamentals when he gives a lesson. Actually, he would amend this to include a fifth — a brief discussion of putting and chipping at the end of the instruction period. "Usually, I talk about these things for only a few minutes," says Vossler, "but I like to get them in. My purpose in doing so is to impress the golfer with their importance, and get him to thinking about how to save strokes by developing a little cunning on and around the greens. If I'm giving an hour long lesson, which I prefer to

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## Ever Changing Swing

Since he has become a teaching pro, Ernie Vossler has made a more thorough study of the swing than he ever did while playing the tour. Below is a partial summary of his thoughts (as of today) on the swing. It is subject to change because as Ernie says, "The more I think about the swing the more I see it in a different light."

Good swingers make movements to the left — poor ones to the right — Everyone must learn to move the left side first on the downswing. (It's really an unnatural movement) . . . Timing is the correct sequence of movements.

Shortening the backswing tends to decrease the margin of error\* . . . The left hand must never stop . . . Speed times the weight of the club equals distance.

Slicers never permit the right hand to cross over the top . . . Take off is most important in backswing.

Once the forward action has begun, induce no restrictions . . . If you don't already have a pause at the top of your backswing, beg, borrow, or steal one\* . . . (It's a great asset, if natural)

An extended left arm is one of the requisites of good form . . . An exaggeration in the swing only leads to trouble.

Don't try to overpower the wind; if you do, chances are you'll be overpowered . . . Many of today's tour players use supination on short approach shots.

A clear picture of alignment gives confidence in putting . . . Keep head, hips, and knees still when putting . . . A stroke lost on the green is lost forever.

\*—Vossler concedes these are controversial points.

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do, I demonstrate chip and pitch and run shots and then ask the pupil to practice a few of them. I also try to help him smooth out his putting stroke if he is having trouble with it."

Vossler takes great pains in having his pupils learn to grip the club properly, refusing to proceed with a lesson until he is sure that this fundamental is completely understood and can be properly applied. In teaching the grip, the Quail Creek pro insists on only one thing — that the palms be kept parallel. It is his contention that

the back of the left hand doesn't necessarily have to face the target, but can be off line a slight degree to either the left or right and still produce a respectable shot if the hands are parallel.

### Can't Teach the Feel

As for the stance, Vossler doesn't spend too much time on it other than to show the pupil how to get lined up to the target, and get the feet in position to execute a fluid pivot. Balance and weight transfer, though, are something else. "I'm still trying to figure out how to get these things across," Ernie confesses. "It is something he has to feel. You can stand back and tell him when he's swaying or lurching and the result of the shot usually shows if he has led with his hands instead of his hips.

"The same thing applies," Vossler continues, "in determining if the pupil spins his body or merely sways into the ball in the downswing. You can point out what he's doing wrong, demonstrate the correct way of executing the motion, but still you can't put the proper feel into his swing with words and demonstrations. He has to get this for himself.

"Maybe," Ernie observes, "this is because pros are weak in communicating, or we don't have the right words in our vocabularies to express the thoughts we're trying to convey."

### More Philosophy

Here are other thoughts and ideas Vossler contributes to the teaching of golf:

A person who can do the twist usually doesn't have much trouble in making the backswing and generally in shifting his weight. Quite a few players immediately grasp the overall idea of the swing when it is explained in terms of a dance such as the twist;

It's too bad we don't have more time to give playing lessons. You can show the ordinary club player how to save one stroke for every three or four holes by playing with him;

If the day ever comes when you don't get at least a small kick out of seeing improvement in a person you've taught, you should turn all the teaching over to your assistant;

### They're Optimistic

Nine out of ten members are pretty good pupils. Most are optimistic enough to think they can improve their games, and the majority has sufficient patience to do so if the pro emphasizes that the



Bob Drum, former Pittsburgh sports writer and now a golf promotion director, holds "blank" check for \$125,000 for the Whitemarsh Open to be played in Philadelphia, July 2-5. Prizes will total \$125,000. The event was saved when millionaire Philadelphian, John P. Crisconi, came up with \$100,000 to pay off the debts of Golf Associates, Inc., sponsors of the tournament. Drum is tourney director.

swing has to be built on a step-by-step plan;

One out of ten pupils is looking for a miracle drug — usually he is the fellow who shoots below 85 and wants to hop into the 70s;

The Graph-Check camera beats 10,000 words. Every pro who is serious about teaching should own one. (This is not a commercial);

### Expression Is Important

We should learn more about expressing ourselves. A fellow who thoroughly understands the swing but can't explain it to his members may as well forget his knowledge. I've read a few good books on the art of communication and hope to read quite a few more. Talking to teachers in other fields and learning about the instruction methods they use may open your eyes to many things you should know.

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Ernie Vossler started out to be a tennis player, but because his high school golf team needed a fourth, he was shanghaied by the bandleader who doubled as the

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## Flint Munny Operation

*(Continued from page 78)*

ly used and urgently wanted by the golfing public. It developed that these were adequate lounge space, good food service, rest room facilities and social facilities.

A new clubhouse was constructed on the city's 27-hole layout, starting with a lunch counter type of food service with ample table and eating area. The primary aim in food service has been not to provide a wide variety of foods, but simple, frequently requested types of sandwiches and drinks and top quality lunches at reasonable prices. Another primary consideration has been adequate facilities for social functions. These are provided in interesting decor and are immaculately maintained.

Another prime consideration in the planning of the above mentioned clubhouse and the city's other two clubhouses was to include them in the winter sports program. This makes the buildings 12-month facilities. A warming room and food service setup is provided in these buildings for winter sports enthusiasts.

## Vossler Returns to ABC's

*(Continued from page 44)*

golf coach. That was in Ernie's Senior year at Paschal High in Ft. Worth.

By the end of that summer, Vossler was shooting in the 70s. On Labor Day he beat Joe Conrad, who later turned pro and played the circuit, in the final of a Junior tournament, and the following summer he won the Ft. Worth Amateur championship. Thereafter, Vossler claimed more than 25 amateur titles, including the 1954 Texas State.

### Plumber's Apprentice

Meanwhile, Ernie was learning the plumbing business as an apprentice in his father's shop. His success as an amateur convinced him that there was certainly more glamor and possibly more money in working with a clubhead than a Stillson, and so in 1955 the young Texan transferred his journeyman's card from the plumbers' to the golf professionals' union. In June of that year, Vossler played in his first USGA Open at the Olympic Club in San Francisco and fin-

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ished 19th. Following that, he collected money in eight consecutive tournaments before concluding his travels for the 1955 season. As debuts in pro golf go, Ernie's was hard to beat.

In 1956, the Quail Creek pro started at Los Angeles in January and played through to the San Antonio Open in March without earning as much as three-meal-a-day money. He was unsponsored and at home, Mrs. Vossler and four young children were rather hungrily awaiting a tournament dividend check. Ernie was on the verge of wiring his wife and telling her to lay out the plumber's tools. But he hung around San Antonio long enough to finish second in the tournament there and collect \$1,700. Bankruptcy never looked his way again after that. He had a good season in 1956, although he broke a leg in the fall. But by this time Ernie was an established tournament player and between 1957 and 1961, when he quit the tour, Mrs. Vossler received checks just as regularly as though her husband were working in a bank.

## Blower Increases Revenue

*(Continued from page 104)*

common for Len Ainey, the Timber Trails tractor operator, to blow the leaves across four or five fairways. Usually, they are blown into windrows two or three feet high and then mulched.

The blower was first used at Timber Trails in the fall of 1962. After only two passes around the course it gave every fairway and green a hound's tooth but it was too late in the season to bring back the bulk of the golfers. But business did pick up! Last spring, opening day was moved ahead at least two weeks, and effective playing time was extended more than two months beyond the customary mid-September cutoff. On late October weekends in 1963, with near perfect weather prevailing, Timber Trails was getting as many as 250 rounds a day.

### Fee Revenue Increased

The net result is that fee revenue for 1963 was more than \$50,000 higher than in 1962, with practically the entire increase being due to the new method that