

TEACHING METHOD

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INTRODUCTION

Methods of teaching are attempts at applying some of the fundamentals propounded by theorists of the learning process. This is the field of endeavour of social scientists. Therefore, there will be no pretention here, to present a new method of teaching, but to propose an approach which has proven effective and which complies with the basic principles of learning.

The contemporary literature stresses that because of individual differences, the approach should be appropriate to a given pupil's characteristics. After twenty-three years of teaching all types of pupils (male, female, beginners, intermediates and champions), the author is strongly convinced of that necessity.

There has been a stage of trial and error with attempts to apply the principles proposed at seminars attended in various parts of the continent, where some of the best teaching Professionals have expounded their views. Then a definite approach has evolved and it has proven satisfactory enough to present to the C. P. G. A.

Hopefully, this dissertation, presented without presumption, will be judged worthwhile.

CHAPTER I

ROLE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSIONAL

"Who is the man they call Teaching Pro? Is he, as some would suggest, a saviour, or merely a soother, surgeon or super salesman?"
(1:26-28)

He may be all of the above, since his goal is to help a pupil to develop his potential as a golfer, whatever is needed to accomplish the task.

Consequently, before instructions start, an interview is necessary in order to gather information that will affect the strategy to be applied.

During this first interview, the pupil's age, sex, physical make-up, and occupation are noted; a preliminary assessment is made of his aim and self-concept as a golfer; his planned frequency of play and willingness to practice is established; and a summary evaluation of his demonstrated ability is conducted.

The whole plan of action is then explained, so that the pupil is aware, during the lessons, of where the various steps taken are leading to. This is very pertinent, as it is recognized as an enhancing factor in the process of learning.

Finally, it is important that the pupil becomes convinced that the instruction he is about to receive is sound and that, no matter what he might hear or read, the lessons will be most beneficial and lead to improvement.

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Before deciding what the lessons consist of, some aspects of teaching particularly pertinent to the Golf Teaching Professional need to be reviewed.

Progress takes place at a rate dependent on both the teacher's ability to teach and the pupil's capacity to learn. It goes without saying that one must be adapted to the other; and the teaching skills are what will favour the adjustments. As Jerry Heard says: "A teacher should go with what a guy has, not try to confuse him" and he adds "The average golfer needs time to absorb instruction, and the simpler the better." (1:26-28)

The same idea is evidenced in this quote in The Search for the Perfect Swing. "At many points in the swing, there may be a difference between what actually happens and what the player feels he is doing. At all these points the first-class teacher has several ways of suggesting the right feeling to the pupil, and probably has a pretty good idea about which ways are likely to be most successful with any individual pupil." (2:126)

So, a skillful teacher, through experimentation and observation, has accumulated tricks of the trade which he picks and chooses to apply as the case calls for them. The approach used is similar to the procedure of a physician, who diagnoses and then used his knowledge and expertise acquired over a number of years to apply the appropriate adjustments. Along with the diagnosis is the assess-

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ment of the capabilities of the pupil to make the necessary changes to produce improvements, or the possibility of compromises that would enable the player to progress.

Furthermore, it should always be kept in mind that teaching is more than imparting information. An individual feels better satisfied, when he is made a participant. A few well chosen questions can turn a one way flow into a dialogue, which in turn elicit enthusiasm and acceptance of the instructions.

CHAPTER II

LESSON PLAY - DISTANCE SWING

The procedure used with a novice follows a definite pattern when the basic swing is introduced. The approach is to explain and demonstrate what is expected of him, and then put him through a series of simple steps which will lead to total performance.

Depending on the pupil's progress the lessons (approximately 1/2 hour each) are summarized and concluded when the pupil is experiencing success, thus taking advantage of the reinforcing factor which is so important in the learning process.

When beginning the lesson play with a novice, the pupil is given a club to hold horizontal to the ground, with the hands 12" apart. They are made to assume a stance with their feet the width of their shoulders apart, knees slightly bent, their body bent at the waist, while keeping their backs straight. If the pupil experiences difficulty, the position is demonstrated while mention is made that the feeling is the same as when sitting on a spectator sport stick. (3:55) The instructor faces the pupil holding a club the same way and requests the pupil to follow his movements. Holding his arms relatively straight, he turns first his left shoulder under his chin then his right shoulder. This exercise is repeated numerous time, and it is pointed out that the head is held relatively still, while the knees are turned toward each

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other as the weight is shifted back and forth. The lifting of the heels as the weight shifts should be only to the extent necessary to allow a full shoulder turn.

The Vardon overlapping grip is adopted; this is with the V formed by the thumbs and forefingers pointing towards the right shoulder. (4:40) To obtain the proper grip the instructor places the pupil's hands on the club in the required position while explaining the details and check points. The club is then taken away and handed back for the pupil to assume the proper grip without assistance, except for needed adjustments. With the club gripped properly, the pupil is instructed to assume the aforementioned stance, keeping the left arm relatively straight and swing back and forth as in the exercise. At this point, he is made aware of this body movement being that of the golf swing. The importance of keeping a firm grip throughout the swing is stressed. It is further pointed out that at the top of the back swing his wrists should become cocked, allowing the club to reach a horizontal position.

The necessity of maintaining one's balance throughout the swing is explained: from the stance where the weight is evenly distributed on each foot, it shifts to the right foot on the back swing and to the left foot on the forward swing. The swing should finish with the stomach facing the target.

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If and when a further adjustment to the grip is necessary, the strength of the pupil's hands is taken into account. As Paul Runyan points out during his instruction, most pupils should have the V's formed by the thumb and forefingers pointing at the right shoulder, but further comments that "strong players, those with exceptional hand action, may point the V's between the right shoulder and the right cheek." (5:V-XIV)

Once the pupil has received this outline of the swing, it is necessary to go over the lesson step by step to allow the pupil to understand clearly what he is expected to do. Finally, during a summary of the lesson, the pupil is asked to take the proper grip, assume the proper stance, and take a swing. A final check is made before proceeding to the next step. No ball hitting has taken place at this stage.

In preparation for the introduction of ball hitting into the swing lesson, an explanation of what should happen when he hits the ball is given in relation to the desirable line of flight.

The pupil is made to swing back and forth shifting his weight from foot to foot while the instructor takes a position 15' in front of him on his line of flight, making him aware of this position. Once the student understands, the instructor moves two steps to the right of this line and asks for a swing

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towards him with a change of stance. This is how the "inside-out" swing is introduced. Unless it is a pupil who might become confused easily, the instructor then moves two steps to the left of the line of flight and has the pupil swing towards him again, and explains that to swing on such a line is "outside-in" and will cause the ball to slice and lose distance. We now return to the "inside-out" swing and stress that this is the line of swing for good shots. It is anticipated he will now recognize the fact, when he swings off line or on line. The importance of holding his head opposite a point behind the ball is noted. At this point it is also brought to the attention of the pupil, the proper hand action with the right hand crossing over the left at contact.

The pupil is now asked to swing the club back and forth non-stop while allowing the hands to move naturally. Emphasis is put on the necessity of making a complete shoulder turn while keeping the head relatively still and while shifting his weight to the back foot on the backswing and to the front foot on the forward swing. It is brought to his attention that the forward motion is initiated with the transfer of the weight to the front foot with everything following from the ground up. At this point, so that the pupil will understand the necessity of this sequence, a demonstration of a baseball pitcher throwing

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a ball in slow motion illustrates that, before the hand holding the ball starts its forward motion, the front foot is firmly planted; the same applies to a bowler bowling the ball. The golf swing in slow motion also reveals the same motion. On occasions the pupil is asked to throw a ball and it is pointed out to him that he plants the front foot automatically and that he should let it happen when he swings a golf club.

The swinging is then resumed and as it becomes apparent that the pupil is at ease and feels confident, he is offered a ball to be teed up. He is told that he is to swing as before, but that the ball will happen to be in the path of the swing. The ball is then placed opposite the heel of the front foot. More practice swings are executed by the pupil and he then steps forward to repeat the swing at the ball.

Most of the time, this is done with a mid-iron; the shorter shaft and the loft of the club enhances the chances of success and thus the experience becomes satisfying and encouraging. This supplies the reinforcement that will motivate learning.

Once the shot is performed with some degree of consistency, other clubs are used. When deemed necessary, the pupil is reminded that his head is held in a position opposite a point behind the ball at address and also at impact. Although the head is held at varied distances behind the ball with clubs of

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different length, it is felt that it may be a source of confusion to bring it to the attention of the pupil at this point. Every-time the pupil uses a difference club, he is urged to practice swing until he feels ease and comfort before hitting the ball.

Generally at this point, this pupil is treated as anyone who already plays golf. Each lesson starts with a number of practice swings followed by a few hits. This allows the instructor to appraise the performance in order to plan the approach for the lesson. Whatever the goal to be achieved (progress or correction), the exercises, the proper stance, the grip and the swing are standard procedure.

CHAPTER III

LESSON PLAY - PENDULUM SWING

"The swing being the thing," it has to be stressed all along and it comes to mind here that the Methods of Teaching presented in the 1972 P. G. A. Home Study Program made a great contribution when it brought to our attention the two distinct swings: the Distance Swing used with the longer clubs, and the Pendulum Swing used for Pitches, Chips and Putts. (6:16)

Even though most lessons have been in relation to the Distance Swing, it must be kept in mind that the average golfer can improve his game greatly by understanding and mastering the Pendulum Swing, which is required for chipping and putting, the two skills that will lower his score more easily.

For this lesson play, before proceeding with the mechanics of the chip shot, the intent of the shot is stressed; the ball should bounce and roll toward the cup as consistently as possible; and an explanation is given that this is best accomplished by the loft being only as high as necessary to reach a spot where the bounce and roll can be reasonably predicted.

Over the years, it has proven successful to first demonstrate the shot while explaining the principles involved: the narrow stance, turned slightly toward the target, the club face square to the intended line, the position of the hands ahead of the club

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head. The pupil, having grasped what he is to attempt and having seen the results, is ready to try with confidence. However, before he does, he is told that for this shot, the stroke is one where the tempo is constant, with no attempt to accelerate the club on the forward motion. The length of the back stroke and the club selection will determine the distance travelled by the ball. "The better professional teacher recognizes that, in order to convey the right feeling, he may have to exaggerate or even say something that is untrue." (2:106)

When it comes to teaching this mechanical aspect we all realize that it is necessary for the club to be accelerating on the forward stroke (as they outline) but if the fact is brought to the pupil's attention they invariably strike the ball with various degrees of acceleration, thus eliminating the necessary feel required to consistently have the ball stop near the hole. On the contrary, if the pupil is told it is a stroke where there is no acceleration, with the length of backstroke determining the length of the shot, the proper feeling will be realized.

The writer firmly agrees with the beliefs put forward by Bob Toski and Dick Aultman when they say, "Most people have better success rolling an object to a target than they do lofting it. Thus most golfers have better success chipping short shots just onto the smooth putting surface and letting the ball bounce and run to

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the hole, than they do lofting it most of the way with a pitch shot. The chip shot is also safer because the less-lofted chipping clubs require a shorter, simpler and less forceful stroke than do the more lofted pitching irons. Ideally you should use the least amount of loft required to land the ball just onto the putting surface without its running far past the hole." (7:50-51)

For the putting lesson, the pupil is reminded, as for other lessons, that he is about to receive sound instruction designed to be beneficial to his golf game. Then, the instruction deals first with the mechanical stroke, as it has been found desirable to separate this portion of the lesson from dealing with the other factors to be considered in putting.

Firstly, the pupil is directed to assume a comfortable position, with the suggestion that this is usually achieved with the feet approximately 12" apart and the weight evenly distributed.

The hands are then placed on the club with the thumbs at the front of the grip thus causing the palms of the hands to face each other, on opposite sides. The eyes should be directly above the ball at address. Then the importance of the shoulders and toes being in line with the intended line of putt is brought to his attention.

The pupil is now instructed to go through a stroke motion

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keeping the blade square and close to the ground throughout. The pendulum principle is constantly stressed at this phase of the instruction. An explanation is given that there should be no sensation of acceleration during the forward stroke, that the distance the ball travels is determined by the length of the back stroke. At this point the pupil's goal is to propel the ball pre-determined distances while maintaining the pendulum principle and keeping the blade square to the line.

When the player has achieved an understanding and feeling of the stroke, the next step is to introduce him to the science of putting. (The necessity of recognizing the lay of the land, and thus the amount of borrow to allow for, etc.)

To start, the pupil is told to first be aware of the general lay of the land. Then, all putts should be approached from a point where the ball lies between him and the hole. From this advantage point, the student is made to recognize that the contour of the terrain may require to allow for a borrow if the putt is to be made. An additional aspect covered by the instructor, besides the possible caricature of the path to the hole, is the weight of the stroke that may be required, whether the ball has to travel upgrade or downgrade, or with or against the grain of the turf.

In summary, the proper stance and alignment, the pendulum

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stroke with the blade of the club square to the intended line of the putt, the considerations to be given to the terrain are reviewed.

On parting, the pupil is reminded of the necessity of continuous practice if he wishes to benefit from the lesson and gain the confidence and skill to reach his potential.

CHAPTER IV

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

Although it would be great for all golfers to possess a classic swing, to expect everyone to accomplish this would be unwise since it would tend to cause many pupils to get discouraged and frustrated, thus eliciting regress, rather than progress. One has to agree with Dave Stockton's approach when he says, "A good teaching Professional doesn't have a pre-determined way to teach everyone, like they used to in the old days with the square to square method. In all my years I have never seen my dad (a teaching Professional) tell anyone the same thing twice."
(1:26-28)

Since the basic theory followed is based on the belief that each individual has his own characteristics, there cannot be a standard way of teaching all pupils. As Billy Casper says, "The teaching Professional's role is to help the student reach his ultimate potential, not make him another Billy Casper." (1:26-28)

Consequently, the lesson plans as described are usually complemented and supplemented by additional instructions that are applicable to an individual pupil. If this means to deviate from the basic plan, it is offered as an alternative which is better suited to the individual in order for him to better progress. No teacher can do a good job without this flexibility

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required by individual differences; and these deviations are often indicated by the results of an evaluating process.

In many instances the pupil will measure the progress on the facts that his score is improving or that he can now beat his friends. The real progress is measured by determining to what degree he understands the adjustment he is attempting, to what degree he is accomplishing these adjustments and to what degree he recognizes the new feel of the improvement.

Although, during the lessons, the teacher can observe both the swing and the results of the numerous shots being made, in order to properly assess the results, it is necessary to keep in touch with the pupil during his following games and to observe his technical progress further. During conversation and proper questions, it can be ascertained to what degree the goals are understood and whether the adequate feeling is experienced.

For example, if a student still has the misconception that, in order to keep the face of the club square at impact, he must move the right hand under the left, he needs to be reminded that in spite of his scoring better, the proper move should allow the right hand to cross over the left.

Such opportunities present themselves every so often and the Professional should make it a point to take advantage of

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these chances to improve the understanding of the pupils in regard to some aspect of their game.

CONCLUSION

The unquestionable acceptance of the teacher and the method by the student has been stressed. This requires good rapport from the start; hence, the recommendation of the initial interview.

Then, the explanation of the whole plan of action is felt to be of great importance, because it shows the goals to be attained, which in turn become a source of motivation to work hard at each step of the process.

The proposed lesson plays are based on the belief that the average student is not necessarily young and strong and prepared to devote the necessary time to practice, all characteristics required by a rigid method, such as, for example, the square to square method expounded by Dick Aultman. (8:)

Two separate series of lesson plays were presented, following the concepts of two distinct types of swings, the Distance Swing and the Pendulum Swing.

The approach propounded is that one should be taught to swing as naturally as possible, because one's athletic and psychological endowment should be of the foremost consideration. Furthermore, the more natural the swing, the longer one will be able to maintain a satisfying level of play. This latter consideration is believed to be very important because most golfers are seeking enjoyment from the game and the purpose should be to permit them to enjoy the game as long as possible.

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