

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GOLF SWING
AND HOW I TEACH THEM

By

RON RAYNER

Head Professional, Summit Golf & Country Club
11901 Yonge Street
Richmond Hill, Ontario

THESIS

Presented to the Canadian Professional Golfer's
Association in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for

MASTER PROFESSIONAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
Fundamentals of the Golf Swing	1-11
Approach to Beginning Golfers	11-14
Approach to Intermediate Golfers	15-16
Approach to Advanced Golfers and General Comments	16-19

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GOLF SWING

by RON RAYNER

I will begin by stating that it is difficult to write something new about the golf swing. My theories and ideas have been gathered and tried over many years, and I have experienced successful results with these methods.

One of the most difficult things to do, I have found, is to keep the instruction simple. I believe that this is one of the important keys to good teaching: KEEP IT SIMPLE AND CLEAR! However, keeping it simple is not always easy to do because the pupil will not always let you. They make it difficult for themselves by over analyzing what you, the instructor, are saying, or by adding little moves of their own which they have read about or heard about. The fact that what they are doing on their own may have little or no bearing on their particular problem does not seem to cross their minds. A point that I am attempting to make here, is that if it is difficult to keep it simple during a personal lesson with someone, it is even more difficult to write about the swing in a simple manner. When you are face to face with a pupil you have the tremendous advantage of demonstrating what you are saying, and explaining as you move. A few seconds of visual help could take many sentences to put on

paper, and writing could also lose something of the content or emphasis of the message. With the aforementioned in mind, I shall put some of my thoughts on the golf swing on paper, keeping it simple and clear if possible.

The swing is broken down into four basic parts for teaching and explaining purposes. The pupil must keep in mind, however, that all the parts of the swing are inter-related and have to be performed as one smooth swing with all the parts tied together. The four basic segments I refer to are Grip, Stance and Set-up, the Backswing and the Downswing.

I will begin with the Grip because the first thing that you do is hold the club in your hands, so you must learn how to hold a golf club properly. Many people find that the learning of the correct grip is boring, and they are too anxious to get to the actual hitting of the ball. The importance of a good grip is hard to over-emphasize, because the way you grip the club has a direct bearing on all the other parts of the swing. When the club is in the hands correctly, the other parts of the swing can be performed much more easily and with less chance for errors. Conversely, when the grip is incorrect, this can, and usually does, cause other faults later on in the swing and results in bad shots.

Your hands are the only part of your body that touch the club. Your hands form the union between yourself and the club, and therefore, you must put your hands on the club in a way that

will enable you to exercise maximum control, and also in a way that will enable you to swing the club with the necessary freedom.

Incidentally, the description in this writing will all be related to right handed players. When gripping the club, we are attempting to put both hands on the club as one single unit for maximum control. Most right handed swingers are stronger in the right side of their bodies. To overcome the natural strength of the right hand and side, you place the shaft of the club in a strong physical position in your left hand and a weak position in the right hand. In this fashion you can balance the power in the two hands and form one unit that will work together in the swing.

We want the left hand to be in a strong position on the club, so put the left hand on the club first. With the back of your left hand facing the target, place the club so that the shaft is pressed under the muscle pad in the palm of your hand just above the little finger. Leave a little bit of the butt of your shaft sticking out of your hand to insure that all of your hand is on the club. The shaft should lie across the top joint of the forefinger. Now, close your back three fingers first, and then your thumb and forefinger and your club should be placed correctly in the left hand. The majority of the pressure in the left hand is in the back three fingers and the palm pad. Just a medium pressure is necessary. This will enable you to keep control of the club at the top of your backswing and

to strengthen the left arm through the whole swing. Too tight a grip will tighten up your arm and shoulders, and restrict a free flowing swing. Now that the left hand is on the club, we are ready to place the right hand on.

Again, with the palm of the right hand facing the target, bring the fingers up to meet the shaft. The little finger of the right hand overlaps the forefinger of the left hand. This helps to form that one unit in the grip by tying the two hands together. The shaft should be lying across the fingers, not the palm. Now just fold the fingers lightly around the shaft. The thumb and forefinger should be exerting their pressure on the sides of the shaft, rather than an up and down pressure.

The thumb of your left hand should fit comfortably into the palm of your right. Although the grip may feel awkward at first, it is surprising how quickly it will begin to feel comfortable on the club. Pay attention when you are practicing your grip and take that little extra time to learn it correctly. It will pay big dividends through your golfing career. Remember, palm and fingers in the left hand, and all fingers in the right.

The next part of the golf swing is the stance and set up to the ball. Many fine teachers believe that this is the most important segment of the golf swing. I do not disagree with this concept, but would probably say that without a proper set up and also a correct grip, it is very difficult to actually set the swing in motion correctly and easily.

Set up and stance do several things for the golfer. When done in the right way, the golfer will be standing the proper distance from the ball, have good balance on the feet, and have a good posture that will enable the swing to work. Also, and very important, the face of the club will be aiming at the target you have chosen, and the body will be aligned properly to the target as well. Golf is a target game, and if you cannot develop the habit of good aim, you will have just added another problem which you do not need.

To determine the correct distance to stand from the ball, set the club face behind the ball so that the ball is in the centre of the face. The ball is positioned opposite the left heel with woods and just inside the heel for normal iron shots. A line drawn from the ball to your heel should be at right angles to the line that your feet are aiming at. Your left arm should be extended slightly, (NOT STIFF OR RIGID), and hanging down from the shoulder. With the feet shoulder width apart, the weight should be right over your insteps, not too much on the heels and definitely not up on the toes. Flex the knees slightly, keep the back fairly straight, and bend slightly from the waist. You should now be in a fairly good position to commence swinging the club.

There are a few points to add to the set up after you have mastered the basics. The golfer can set himself up in front of a mirror at home and check these points out himself.

This way he can see the correct positions visually, and also get the feel of these correct positions. Your left eye should be opposite or behind the ball. This helps to insure that your head is behind the ball at address. The hands should be slightly ahead of the ball, and the left arm should be extended with the right arm in a soft, folded position. Your left shoulder will be higher than the right, and the feet, hips and shoulders should all be in a parallel line pointing at the target area.

One area of the swing that is often passed over quickly in many articles, or talks, is...balance. To me, good balance is absolutely one of the most important parts in the swing. If your balance is poor in the set up it will most likely be poor in the back swing and down swing, and at the moment when the club strikes the ball. If the balance is bad at impact, the golfer will not be able to deliver the maximum power to the shot, and will likely hit the ball somewhere other than the centre of the club face, causing the shot to be directed off the intended line of flight. If you observe many of the other sports you will notice that good balance usually results in maximum performance. Throwing a baseball or football, playing tennis or skiing, can all be done without good balance, but if you watch the experts you will find that the majority of the time, when the balance is good, the results are good. The same thing holds true in golf.

Very few of the best players have poor balance, and if you will observe, very few poor players have good balance.

The golfer is now in a position ready to start the back swing. In preparation for this swing, many fine players have developed a waggle with the hands or a slight forward press with the knees prior to starting the club back. There is nothing against this, and in fact it is done in order that the players do not get too tense or freeze before beginning the back swing. A little experimentation and help from the teacher will help to establish the best way to do this.

The back swing itself is initiated with the left shoulder and arm. The left shoulder should move around and under the chin so that the chest and shoulders are turning away from the target. At this point the left arm will begin to move with the shoulders and will help by pushing the club back away from the ball. The right arm remains folded and passive. The hands should also remain strictly passive, and at no time should they be pulling or lifting the club up. Their functions at this point is to join the body and the club together. If the turn is executed correctly, the club, hands and arms will move away from the ball together and in one piece. If you can develop this one piece action, your swing will have fewer moving parts and will therefore have less things to go wrong with it. Work hard on starting the back swing slowly and smoothly with no conscious hand action, and an extended, but not rigidly stiff, left arm.

As you keep turning under and around the weight will begin moving slightly to the right side, the hips will begin turning in the same direction as the shoulders, and the weight will move to the inside of the left foot with the left knee pointing behind the ball. It should in fact be cocked slightly to the target. When done properly and at the correct speed, these things all happen like a chain reaction and your swing is finally in motion. The more you turn your shoulders you will find that you are actually turning the top part of the body against the bottom, creating the proper tension to help you return to the ball on your down swing.

The shoulders turn on the back swing until your back is facing your target and a line drawn down from your shoulders is pointing at the ball. The head should be basically in the same position as it was at your address position, although it may rotate slightly, but should not move away from the ball in a sideways motion. The left arm should still be extended and the arms and hands will be high and the wrists will be in a cocked position. Now you are ready to swing down and through the ball.

The down swing is initiated by the lower body. Most poor swings are started down by being too anxious to hit with the shoulders, hands and arms first. Start down by moving the knees towards the target. When you do this you will be starting the correct chain reaction to return your club to the ball. The weight moves to the outside of the left foot, and will give you a good solid left side to swing against. As the knees move

towards the target, the left hip should clear out of the way. The shoulders and upper body will start uncoiling as a reaction to your leg and foot work, and the arms should swing down and through the ball. As you continue turning the left side out of the way, your arms can swing freely and fast through the ball and the wrists will uncock and release as a result of these other reactions. This final release at the ball at the last moment is where the club head is travelling very fast, resulting in a solid hit and good distance. If you have continued to move your left side out of the way, you will now be facing the target with your chest and shoulders, and your weight will be all on the left side and almost none on the right. As you are moving down into the ball, you should have the feeling that you are active and light on your feet. The head should still be back of the ball but will have rotated as you turned through, and the hands and arms will be high. You should have excellent balance at this point in your follow through.

Almost all good players appear to have a pause at the top of their back swing. Some poorer players attempt to get this pause, and throw out the rhythm of the swing. The pause is a result of an unhurried back swing, and is simply the end of the back swing just before you start the lower body into a down swing.

I would like to make one more very important point here. I realize that not everyone has the same co-ordination and

physical ability to play the game of golf, but I believe that most players would do better if they could forget about hitting the ball hard. Try and develop a smooth tempo and rhythm with a fluid, free moving swing, and you will discover that good hits will be the result. Do not try and overpower the ball!

The fundamentals of the golf swing that I have tried to explain, I believe to be sound. The swing and grip may vary slightly from player to player, according to the size of a person's hands and their physical makeup, but the basics will still apply to all.

In conclusion I would like to put more concisely a few key things to check on in the swing.

GRIP: Palms should be facing one another. Pressure in back three fingers and palm in left hand, and grip lightly in the fingers only with right hand. Total grip should be reasonably firm but not tight.

ADDRESS AND SET-UP: Body and club face lined up to target. Knees slightly flexed, back straight, head behind ball and hands ahead. Good balance.

BACK SWING: Start slowly and with a one piece action. Coil top against bottom. Turn away from target and no sideways movement. Maintain good balance.

DOWN SWING: Started with lower body; hips clear and arms swinging down and through to target. Keep body turning until front of body is facing the target and weight is off the right side and on the left side. Maintain good balance and footwork throughout and swing the club freely while moving.

I suggest that the golfer practice each part separately until they are familiar with them and then try and co-ordinate all the parts into one smooth flowing swing with good pace and rhythm.

To develop good tempo it is much better and easier to start your practice with a short club, like a seven or eight iron. The shorter club is easier to control and the tendency to swing too hard is lessened.

My final advice to any golfer reading this article or any other, who is serious about improving their golf swing, would be to develop a consistent pattern of short but frequent practice sessions. Along with this practice, plan to visit a qualified Golf Professional periodically to ensure that your interpretations and execution of the swing are being practiced correctly.

As stated in the preceding pages, I believe that the fundamentals I have written about are sound, and if every golfer could stay with these principles that they would build a decent golf swing that would not vary to great degrees from day to day.

However, when it gets down to teaching these fundamentals the teacher must remember that the pupil may not understand these points, or in fact may never have heard of them. It is up to the teacher to communicate these ideas as simply and as clearly as possible. The pupil has to have a clear mental understanding of what you expect of them, before they can begin to physically perform in an acceptable way.

When teaching a beginner, I attempt to put them in a relaxed frame of mind before jumping right into the first lesson. Many pupils, but particularly the beginning student are rather nervous at their first lesson and if you can put them somewhat at ease to start with, they will relax and be more receptive to what you are telling them. Before the actual lesson begins, I try and find out why they want to take lessons, and if they are familiar at all with how the game is played. Have they watched golf on television, does another family member or friend play, etc? If they wish to learn the game because it seems interesting to them, or if they are just taking lessons to please someone else, makes quite a difference I have found. The pupil who is genuinely keen is usually more receptive and easier to teach than one who is there at the request of someone else. I take into consideration the age and physical attributes of the pupil and try and assess what their capabilities might be. I also ask them if they participate or have participated in any other sports, and if they have, I may be able to use a similarity in a familiar sport to them, to relate to some portion of the golf swing. I also try to assess the personality of the pupil. Are they high strung and nervous or a placid mature and relaxed. A pupil's personality traits are often reflected in how they swing a golf club and play golf.

Once I have established these points mentioned and tried to put my pupil more at ease I tell them that I am going to explain the fundamentals of the swing to them completely first,

and then gradually let them try each part a little at a time until they are swinging the club. I do this simply and quickly as possible at first and encourage them to ask questions if they are in doubt about anything I am saying. I demonstrate what I am saying so that they can get a good mental understanding how one part of the swing leads to and is connected to the next.

When I have completed the explanation and demonstration, we are then ready to actually start with the pupil. Beginning with the grip I go through the fundamentals one area at a time until the pupil is finally swinging the club themselves. I am not particularly critical in this initial stage of any one fault, but try to get the feel of swinging a golf club and not get too bogged down with details and lose interest right at the outset. I encourage the pupil at every little success they have so that they will lose some of the fear that most people have that they will not be able to do well. I attempt to encourage as much as possible, even when correcting, so that the pupil will develop a positive attitude.

As soon as I have the pupil taking a complete swing with some resemblance of rhythm and balance, I will tee up a ball and let them swing at it. (I neglected to mention at the beginning, that I start beginners with a shorter iron, like a 5, 6, or 7 as I feel that the shorter club is easier to control and they are not as intimidated as they would be with a long iron or a wood).

The sooner the pupil can swing at a ball and make it go, the better, as this makes them keener and convinces them that maybe it is not too hard after all. The little success of moving the ball off of the tee can be very encouraging for a beginner. At this stage I point out to them that a smooth swing with minimum effort will hit the ball very nicely and tremendous force and effort are really not necessary.

Upon reaching the stage of hitting the ball I evaluate where the most serious faults are and begin working in these areas one at a time until each part is improved. The time it takes to reach this stage will vary from pupil to pupil depending on natural co-ordination, interest, and how much they have worked on the swing themselves.

The first few lessons to reach the stage of hitting the ball, I like to give at a rate of two or possibly three a week. After this stage is reached I prefer longer intervals between lessons so that the pupil can have more time to practice.

I try, after the initial lessons, to only give the pupil a couple of key points to work on or a new thought each lesson, and build from one lesson to the next. At the end of each lesson I summarize what we have discussed and give them maybe one or two key thoughts to remember.

From this point on I usually move to different clubs and then gradually into the different shots, putting and actually playing the game.

The intermediate golfer or medium handicap player usually is approached a little differently than the beginner. This player has already established a swing and a golf game and may in many cases be more difficult to teach than the beginner. Here you may be working to break old faults and habits while establishing correct ones at the same time. Quite often this player will play worse for a time during this changing period and patience and encouragement are necessary here as well.

I use the same basic methods as I do with a beginner as far as enquiring as to the persons motives for taking a lesson and their problems. The basic fundamentals do not change, but you can get started on the improvements much faster, as the pupil has some kind of a swing to start with and is at least hitting the golf ball.

Depending on the pupils problem and attitude determines how I am going to help him. If he tells me that he has no interest in practicing or really changing his swing but just wants to get his game back to his normal level, I will do the best I can as simply as possible and make whatever changes are necessary to accomplish this. This is what I would call Band Aid teaching and may or may not be successful, but I do not believe in working on a complete swing change or even a partial one if the pupil is really not that keen on it and I am convinced will not work very hard at changing. In this case I do the best I can and hope for the best.

However, if the pupil expresses a desire to work hard at improving and really wants to improve I will attempt to get them to improve on their fundamental faults. Sometimes you have to go right back to the beginning and almost start from scratch.

With this student as well as approaching the basic mechanics as I would the beginner, I emphasize the importance of building a repeating swing that will more or less perform the same way all the time. I work with what they have in their swings and convince them that if they cannot do everything perfectly, that at least do the same things all the time and be consistent with what they are able to do. I attempt to get them to have patience with themselves, to know their capabilities and their weaknesses, and to play within themselves. I point out to them that they should try and build a swing that they can trust, and then when playing on the course to trust it and think of things like the pace of the swing and the target and not to think of the mechanics of the swing while they are trying to play the game.

The advance golfer or low handicap golfer is approached with a slightly different attitude again. This player is a better than average golfer and after a brief discussion of the problems that he needs help in, I will have him hit some balls right off so that I can see what his swing is like and if I agree with his description of the problem. I still begin by checking the basic fundamentals as I do with the other calibre of pupil.

Sometimes the pupil demands closer attention and analyzing of the swing at the outset to determine where the problem lies. This student usually has a better swing and quite often the faults are not as obvious as they are with a higher handicap. In many cases I find results are faster with this type of pupil, because one or two simple suggestions may get them back in the proper position. The cure could be as simple as a slightest grip change or an alteration of the stance. The advanced student can normally make these changes faster and see results more quickly. Also, when talking with this student I find that they comprehend what you are talking about faster, and because they are more knowledgeable about the game, not as much time is spent on having to explain what you have said and what you are trying to get them to do. Usually this pupil can be helped in one or two lessons and more time is spent on their swing tempo and rythm than on basic mechanics of the swing.

This player sometimes is hitting the shots reasonably well, but has come for help with one particular type of shot like pitching or sand play, or playing a low or a high shot. If this is the case I concentrate on that specific problem and really don't have to make any major changes in their swings.

With all of the different types of students I usually find that the first sessions are taken up with teaching them what I

think they should be working on and explaining how the swing should work. The next lessons are really just coaching them in these fundamentals and reminding them of the key points to practice. After the first lessons we usually discuss and agree on what their lessons schedule will be and plan a practice program for them to suit their needs and according to the time they have to devote to their golf game.

After the lesson or lessons on the practice field and depending on their needs and problems I will play a few holes with some or give a playing lesson. In a playing lesson I do not try to tell them how to hit the ball or swing, except possibly a reminder of some point we have been through on the practice field. I use the playing lesson to show them how to play the game. We discuss how to play certain holes, how to play different shots, what clubs to use in different situations, how to read the green and how to think on the golf course and the importance to keep their composure in all situations.

After every type of lesson is over I will give the pupil an evaluation of their progress and a few key thoughts to remember. At all times I try to be encouraging and try not to be too critical of their faults so that their interest and enthusiasm will remain high.

In conclusion I would like to say that my teaching methods have developed over twenty-five years of teaching and I feel that they have been quite successful. I have learned through trial and error, from attending teaching seminars and

and reading many instructional books of qualified teachers and players, and discussing the golf swing with numerous golf professionals. My methods have evolved by using parts of many systems, using what I have found to be useful and discarding those that have not.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. The Square to Square Golf Swing - D. Aultman
2. The Touch System - Bob Toski
3. Ben Hogan's Five Lessons
4. Shape Your Swing The Modern Way - Byron Nelson
5. Swing the Handle-Not the Head - E. Merrins
6. Methods of Teaching - P. G. A. of America
7. Golf Instructors Guide - National Golf Foundation
8. Basic Teaching Manual - P. G. A. of America