

TEACHING METHODS

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THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

The era of modern golf, which produced such memorable superstars as Henry Cotton, the immortal Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen, Ben Hogan and more recently Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Lee Trevino and Jack Nicklaus, has attracted so many thousands of would be amateur and professional golfers that the rise in popularity of the game has exceeded the highest expectations of its most optimistic prophets. Golf courses are springing up in North America at an unprecedented rate and the demand for teaching instruction from qualified professionals is sought by young and old alike. Unlike the early professionals who lived during and prior to the Harry Vardon era, the modern golf professional not only devotes his full time to this sport but studies and analyses it in minute detail, having access to volumes of periodicals and articles written by renowned experts. The improved media, and in particular television which has done so much to popularise the game, has also added another dimension in the teaching of golf by the use of relatively inexpensive closed circuit television. The advances in modern metal technology have resulted in the design and manufacture of more sophisticated, durable and reliable golf clubs. Moreover, the discovery of synthetic

materials has made it possible to mold and to produce better and more durable golf balls that can be impelled greater distances and under the control of skilled golfers, can be delivered to the target more accurately.

Coincidental with the aforementioned improved media and new equipment, technology and manufacturing techniques, the methods of teaching golf have been subjected to detailed examination and experimentation. Each phase and movement has been assiduously studied and analysed, and golf professionals and skilled amateurs alike have produced individual theories on the best, and in the opinion of some, the only correct method to teach golf.

I propose to document my method of teaching golf; to compare it to the methods advocated by well known professional instructors; to examine each of its fundamental components; and to develop lesson plans to demonstrate and illustrate the teaching techniques I have found to be most successful.

During my thirty years as a golf professional instructor I have evolved a method of teaching that is the product of various ingredients. It combines many of the proven techniques of universally renowned instructors; it utilises disciplines successfully applied by some of my own teachers and contemporaries; and it employs skills and resources acquired by personal observation and experimentation. Ben Hogan is reputed to have said "We never come anywhere near

reaching perfection - there is always something left to improve".¹ This profound statement is equally true for golf instructors and I am constantly searching for new skills to improve my teaching techniques.

¹ Dick Aultman & Ken Bowden - The Method of Golf Masters
Coward, McCann & Goeghegan, Inc., New York 1975.

Chapter 2

Student - Instructor Orientation

There is a tremendous diversity in the physical characteristics, attitudes and abilities of prospective golfers. Very few are endowed with the suppleness, coordination and tempo of Sam Snead or possess the fierce determination, stamina and devotion of Gary Player or have the physical strength, timing and mental concentration of Jack Nicklaus. Surely the first challenge facing the golf instructor is to evaluate the pupils physical limitations, to assess their motivation and attitudes and then to mentally visualise the variations required in teaching the pupils to achieve acceptable results.

More often than not the instructor first encounters his pupils well after they have decided to take up the game of golf. By this time they have undoubtedly developed uncontrollable hooks or slices and have adopted many of the bad habits of their friends who freely offer them questionable advice. In their unsuccessful attempts to emulate the swing of their favorite television touring professional, their game deteriorates to a dismal and disheartening experience. Frustration replaces enthusiasm, discouragement destroys their initial confidence and as a

last resort they take their problems to the golf professional. I identify this group as novice golfers who are normally attracted to golf as a form of outdoor recreation or as an enjoyable diversion from the pressures of business in an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere.

The majority of the other pupils to whom I provide instruction are made up of the sons and daughters of the senior club members who occasionally realise the value of proper and timely instruction; the low handicap golfers who develop problems; and a few young serious golfers who aspire to the ranks of the golf professionals. These latter two groups are the golfers of tomorrow and the inspiration, encouragement, and motivation provided to them by their instructors influence their future attitudes and continued participation in this ancient and noble game.

Gene Sarazen, in his book entitled The Golf Clinic, emphasises the importance of immediately making his pupils feel truly at ease, while explaining to them the lesson plan, the goals they can expect to achieve and the enjoyment they will experience as their game improves. I have found that pupils who are ill at ease tend to become taut, develop mental blocks and fail to comprehend or to assimilate the lesson. If this continues the pupils quickly become self-conscious and cannot adequately respond to instructions. Moreover they begin to lose confidence in the instructor. While this apparent unco-operative attitude is more likely

to develop among novice pupils, the unwitting instructor will soon find that his more experienced pupils are reacting similarly. I endorse and employ Gene Sarazan's method of making pupils feel relaxed and at ease. In fact, until I am confident the pupil exhibits characteristics which I recognise as indicating a relaxed attitude, I will continue to concentrate on reaching this state of mind before proceeding with further instructions.

How many professional instructors are there who prescribe a method of teaching golf that commences with the novice pupils receiving their first lessons on the putting green? I know several instructors personally who advocate this technique and I believe most instructors would agree to this approach. However, the instructor has an obligation to accommodate the pupils who invariably insist on first learning how to hit the long ball in spite of the professional's advice to the contrary. Thus begins the lessons.

Chapter 3

Method Analysis - Swing

I believe that the simple technique I employ in teaching the fundamentals of the full swing permits my student to progress rapidly, to achieve satisfactory results and to develop confidence in themselves and in their instructor.

Some instructors begin the first lesson by having the pupil swing the club with gay abandon, observing and evaluating their physical characteristics and style, while offering subtle, but persuasive advice to achieve only slight but perceptive changes. Once the instructor is satisfied that the pupil is able to comprehend, assimilate and adjust to simple instructions, the techniques of the swing are then explained and demonstrated. The disciples of Jack Nicklaus advocate the approach in teaching the golf swing. In fact, Jack Grout in his book Let Me Teach You Golf As I Taught Jack Nicklaus affirms that each person possess a natural and individual rhythm that can be developed and the good points used in building a good golf swing. I use this method with my younger players and I encourage them to swing the club very fast, because distance is so important a factor in today's game. Golf courses are now 7000 yards and more, so long tee shots are a must if

the pupil aspires to be a tournament player. With new adult golfers however, I am opposed to this method of introducing the lesson for the full swing. Before allowing the student to swing a golf club, it is imperative that they understand what constitutes a golf swing. This is accomplished by explaining that a golf swing is a brisk (controlled) circular motion, that should result in the club head reaching a speed of about 80 miles per hour for ladies and 100 m.p.h. for the average male. My reasons for the two approaches are as follows. The young player can stay motivated and interested by merely hitting the ball a long way, and does not seem to worry too much if it is hooking or slicing. If it is five yards longer than that of his chum, he will keep working on his golf swing and at the same time develop a strong swing that moves the ball a long way. The adult, on the other hand, does not take too kindly to having his ball going all over the countryside and will usually be happier to develop a swing that strikes the ball a little shorter and much straighter than the younger pupil. He is also conditioned to learn mentally, therefore he must understand the reasons behind a theory before his mind will order his muscles to do their required job.

The theory of our perfect golf swing will be taught and explained in the terms of a controlled brisk circular motion. The only prime requisites for describing a circle

are a centre and a radius. Centering of a golf swing by some instructors was taught, in the terminology of "Keep your head down". I thoroughly dislike any reference to this old cliché, not only is this impossible to accomplish,¹ but concentration on this practically paralyzes the pupil to the point that a smooth fluid muscular movement, that is so necessary for a good repetitive golf swing, is impossible to coax from him. A better center would be the upper part of the backbone in about the neck position. Mention of this almost immediately relieves tension and rigidity in the neck muscles, allowing the pupil to more freely turn his shoulders and make a longer and more consistent circular motion. Centering, termed by the axiom "Keep your head down", has been taught by golf instructors since day one, so it must follow that it is a prime requisite in a good golf swing. The first reference to using the backbone or back of neck, as a centering point was by Alex Morrison, in his book Keys to Better Golf. Since then, more and more instructors are getting away from the 'head down' concept.

The radius of the circular golf swing is explained to the pupil as being an extended left arm, and he is informed that it must be at full extension up until well after ball contact. A good radius or good left arm extension, has done much to modernise the golf swing and has made it easier to repeat. By studying photographs of Harry

two people in the world will swing the same even if they are taught exactly alike.

The method of standardized golf instruction published and endorsed by the American P. G. A. has great merit. It has been thoroughly researched, tested, compared, photographed and evaluated by many of the best teachers and players in their country.

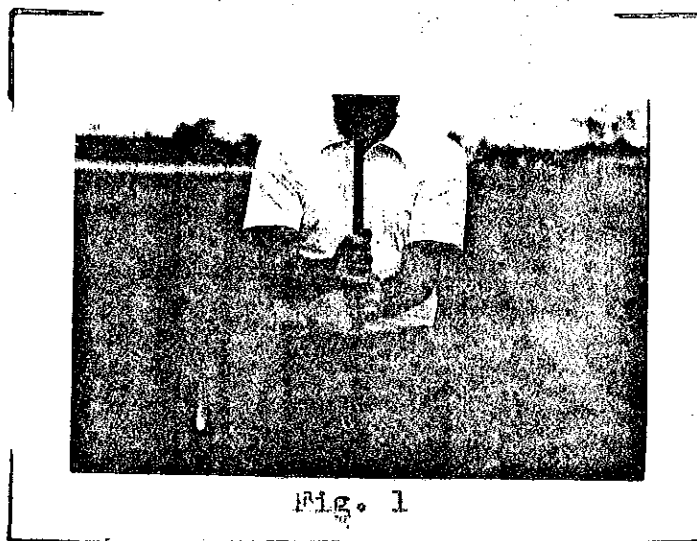
I feel that I was very fortunate indeed to be included in the start of this program, in the early 1950's at Duneden, Fla., where bi-weekly seminars were conducted by good teaching professionals such as Don Fichesher, Eddie Williams, Willie Ogg, Frank Walsh and, of course, Irving Schloss, who spent most of his life researching the golf swing, and who pioneered motion photography to analyse the techniques of the games masters. It is through the efforts of dedicated men such as these that made available their present teaching manual and enabled men like Bill Strausbough, Bert Yancey, Jim Fleck, Dick Plummer, Bob Toski, Don Smith and others, to pass along this knowledge and technique to their fellow professionals.

¹ Alistar Cochran and John Stobbs - Search for the Perfect Swing - Page 35.

Chapter 4

The Grip

For instructional purposes the golf swing must be broken down into basic segments. The first of which is the grip. The Vardon, or overlapping grip, is taught in most cases (Fig. 1) but other adaptations may be useful. For a person who has short fingers, the interlock grip (Fig. 2) may be more comfortable and easier to use, while a person with very weak hands may find it easier to move the golf club with full finger or baseball grip (Fig. 3).



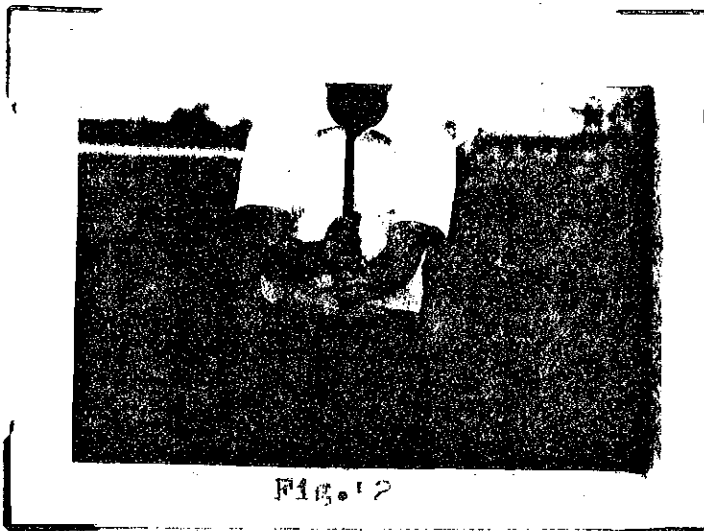


Fig. 12

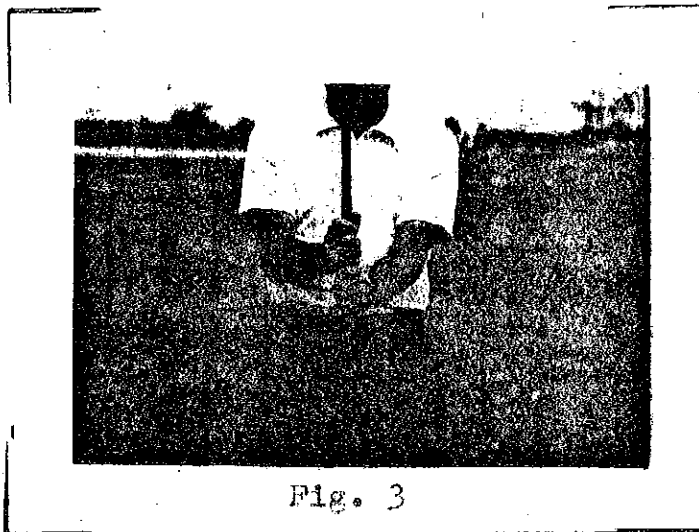


Fig. 3

Most contemporary tournament golfers place the left hand on the club in a position where the V formed by the forefinger and thumb point straight up to the chin; a position that is referred to as a weak position. The right hand is placed palm facing the left, which once again has the V of the right hand pointing to the chin. I prefer however, to start my pupils with a much stronger grip.

The club is placed through the left palm at the base of the fingers (Fig. 4) in such a way that the fleshy pad of the palm is on top of the grip when the hand is closed and the V formed by the thumb and forefinger points toward the right shoulder (Fig. 5). The right hand is placed directly opposite the left, so that the V once again points towards the right shoulder (Fig. 6). The advantage of this stronger gripping position for the new pupil is that it will help him rotate the face of the club back to the ball with more ease than the grip recommended for the good player. As the pupil becomes more proficient in squaring the club face to the ball, the grip can be gradually adjusted to the weaker position that is so favoured by the better player (Fig. 7).

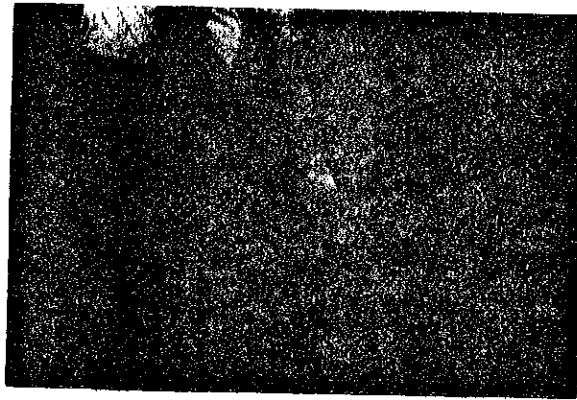


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Chapter 5

The Stance and Address

To achieve balance and stability during the swing, the pupil of average height is taught to place the feet approximately shoulder width apart and slightly wider for the tall pupil. The left foot is placed with the toes slightly open, with the right foot straight (perpendicular to the line of flight of the ball). The right foot in this straight position restricts the hip turn on the back swing and stores more muscular torque for the downswing, while the open left foot provides more steadiness on the follow through side. The ball is positioned at a point directly in line with the inside of the left heel (Fig. 8).

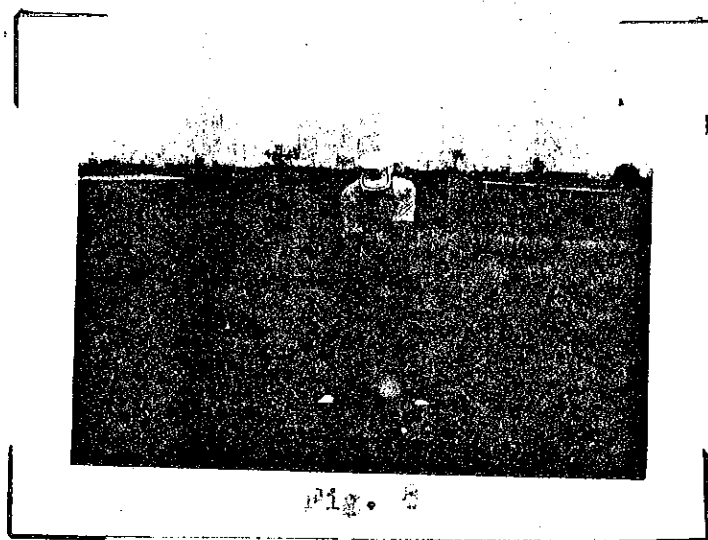


Fig. 8

Body Posture

The position of the body over the ball is the most important element in the build up of a consistently repetitive golf swing, as this is the base that forms the plane of the swing. The plane of a golf swing is best described in Ben Hogan's book, The Modern Fundamentals of Golf, where Ben is shown swinging, beneath a tilted sheet of glass that extends from across his shoulders down to the ball. The idea, of course, would be to swing backwards and forwards and through just barely rubbing the inside of the sheet of glass.

The feet should be shoulder width apart, the ball positioned opposite the inside of the left heel, toes in a line parallel to the intended line of flight (Fig. 9), both knees slightly bent, and weight equally distributed towards

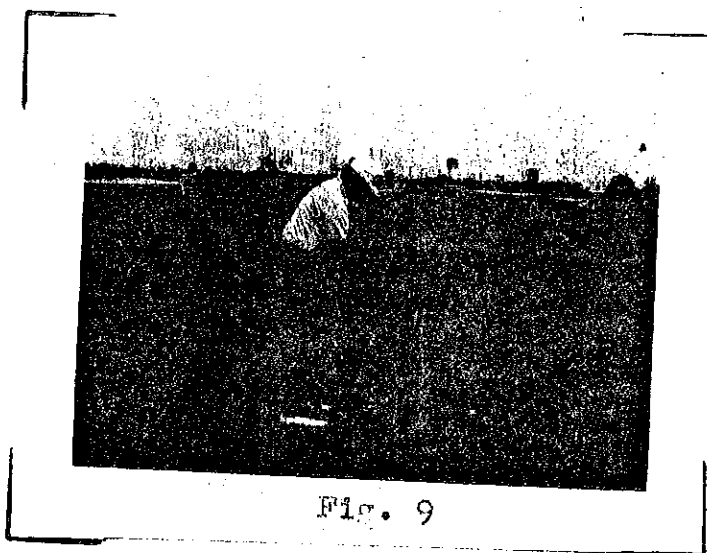
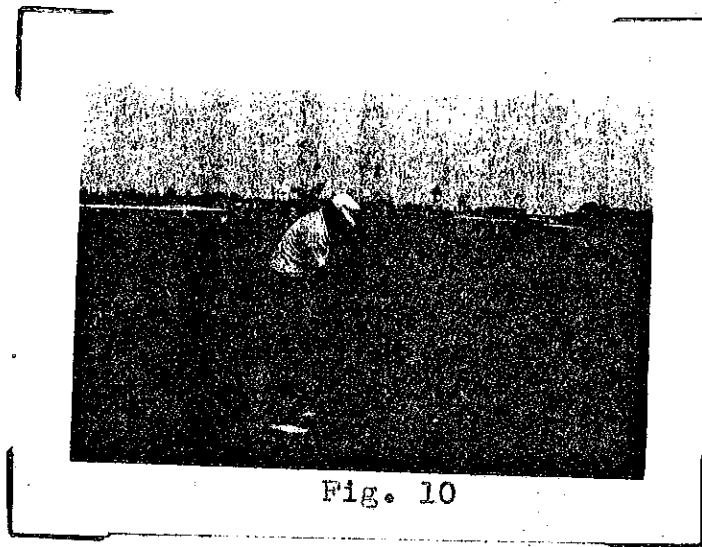


Fig. 9

the inside of the feet favoring the ball of the foot and towards the heel. The waist should be bent with the derriere protruding slightly, adopting a position similar to that of sitting on a high stool with the arms hanging comfortably from the shoulders, which is neither pulled in close to the body nor stretched away from it. The ball should be addressed at the centre of the club face when this position is attained (Fig. 10).



The grip, stance, body posture, or set up, as it is commonly referred to by golf instructors, is taught the same way by all teachers of the game. The only variations may apply when a pupil has difficulty in getting into good positions during the swing, in which case a minor adjustment in stance or posture may assist him. An example would be: A difficulty in backward shoulder turn or pivot, which may be corrected by drawing the right foot back away from the intended line of flight, or adopting a slightly

closed stance that may help increase the pivot.

The Swing Motion

It is in the swing motion that many theories and methods are presented by golf instructors and yet, after much research and reading, I have come to the conclusion that they all really say much the same thing, even though they may use different terminology to achieve the desired result. Bob Toski's Touch System, Dante's Four Magic Moves to Winning Golf, Eddie Merrin's Swing the Handle, Ben Hogan's Modern Fundamentals of Golf, Jim Fleck's Square to Square, Jack Nicklaus' Golf My Way, all lead to the same finished product which is to bring the face of the club squarely back and through the ball. In fact all of them agree that this is impossible to do time and time again, so a left to right or a right to left shot should be practised because this can be repeated with some degree of regularity. I am convinced that the American P. G. A. method of teaching comes closest to an ideal fundamental teaching technique.

Chapter 6

Evolution of the Golf Swing

The evaluation of the modern golf swing can give us all an insight into at least three methods of teaching a swing motion, and, as no single method is perfect, a good teacher will adopt parts of these three methods to fit a golf swing to his particular pupil.

The first of these methods that may be used, is referred to as the Classical Swing, which was developed and applied most successfully from 1910 to 1920. Harry Vardon is often identified as the golfer who exemplified the classical swing of this era. This is considered to be the starting point for today's most frequently taught method and it features; (a) both hands firmly on the club, (b) left arm almost straight, (c) a wrist cock, (d) slightly open stance, (e) ball forward, (f) some body rotation, (g) first sign of good centering, (h) more upright plane and (j) a smooth tempo, but slashing hands resulting in a quick turnover after impact.

Bobby Jones era from 1920 to 1930 produced more refinements to the classical swing which included; (a) more resistance of the legs in backswing, (b) less looseness in the body than Vardon, (c) ball played still farther forward,

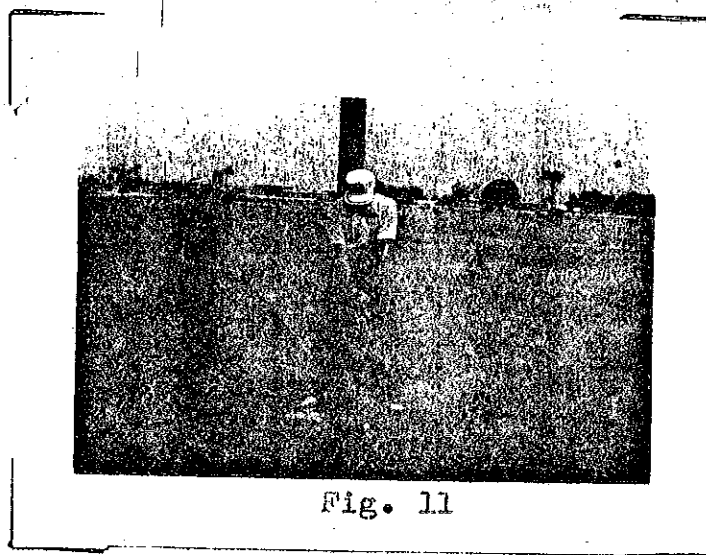
(d) more upright plane, (e) some left side influence on the backswing, and (f) better centering i.e., less shifting of the weight to right side on backswing. This refined swing still requires a slow tempo and a slashing and turn over of the hands early in the follow through. These motions were probably necessary with the whippy and twisty wood shafts then in use, and Bobby Jones was able, with a unique right hand throw at the bottom of the swing, to release the club much later than most of his contemporaries and thus achieve greater accuracy. Towards the end of Jones' career, the steel shaft made its appearance and because of the success he had with the flowing classical style golf swing, it took some time for players and teachers to realize that some other technique might be more suitable for the stiffer and more torque resistant steel shaft.

Byron Nelson was the first player to dominate the steel shaft era in the late 1930's to late 1940's. He was the first of what we refer to as the modern swingers, in that he used parts of the swing that are in use by our top tournament players today. He used a lateral shift instead of a rotation to obtain distance and accuracy. His right leg was flexed at the top of the backswing, left leg flexed through the impact area and for the first time the lower body moved in front of the club. The result was a more upright backswing, a more compact swing, and the club remained on the intended flight path much longer after

Chapter 7

Backswing

The backswing is initiated by the top three fingers of the left hand in such a way that the clubhead starts back square from the ball. This motion is sometimes described as a slight counter-clockwise rotation of the left wrist (Fig. 11). The backswing is continued with a push back of the left arm at full extension (Fig. 12). This will cause the left shoulder to turn under and behind the chin. As the shoulder moves back, the left knee resists before moving late in the backswing (Fig. 13).



Chapter 8

The Forward Swing

The forward swing is initiated with the lower left side. The knees slide to the left, thus setting in motion the powerful leg and back muscles that were coiled in the backswing (Fig. 15). Both knees remain flexed through the impact position. This enables the clubhead to stay on the swing path longer and the upper body and shoulders to remain in line to the target further into the forward swing.

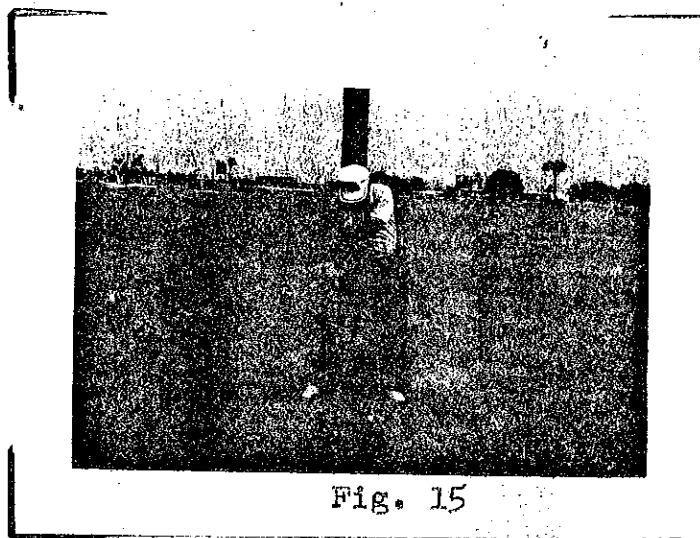
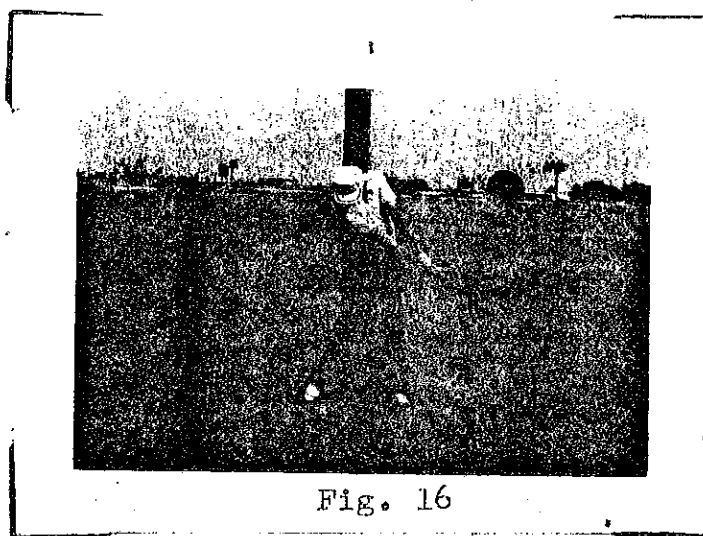


Fig. 15

The sequence of motion will be just the opposite of that on the backswing; the legs lead the forward swing, then hips, shoulders, arms and hands (which remain in the impact position from the early part of the backswing). Rotation of the hands and forearms back into the impact

area to square off the face of the club happens quite automatically through centrifugal force for the advanced pupil, because he will allow it to happen. However the novice, or intermediate player, may need this action explained, so that he will not resist this natural return. The right shoulder moves down and under the chin after the impact area has been passed. The left wrist does not break down even well after impact (Fig. 16). Instead both hands and forearms rotate well after impact on their way to the top of the follow through.



I have always been a firm believer that our muscles automatically respond to commands from the brain. Therefore, I feel that mental programming is very important to proper swing execution. I instruct my pupil never, but never, to hit at the ball, but always do his utmost to make the complete golf swing, assuring him that if he does this correctly the ball will be taken away with this forward

motion. Another way of explaining "Lack of hit" is the old expression 'swing through the ball, never at it'. A wood club with a ball permanently attached to the club face, is an excellent way to teach this concept (Fig. 17). As the pupil swings this club, he realizes that there is nothing to make contact with, just a good circular motion to complete.



Often during a first lesson, if average progress is made in the build up of grip, stance, address and backward and forward motion, I ask my pupil to hit the first shot with his eyes closed. Not only is good contact made a high percentage of the time, but quite often, it is the best shot the pupil will strike for the first week or so. If the pupil is fortunate enough to make a good contact on his first shot with his eyes closed, he can readily be made to realize that the swing points covered thus far in his tuition, are indeed correct and faster progress will be the result, because he now believes that a good golf swing does

send the ball down the fairway.

Key Check Points for Correct Forward Motion

- (a) Left wrist firm and straight with arm at top of backswing
- (b) Club aligned with left arm to target
- (c) Club face square to closed at top of backswing
- (d) Very little hip turn (to create maximum torque)
- (e) Right knee flexed and weight inside right foot
- (f) Lower left side starts downswing
- (g) Body moves laterally down target line, legs moving through a sitting position
- (h) Left wrist and arm firm at impact, left knee remaining flexed
- (i) Great extension of left arm through ball to a high finish
- (j) Pupil looking under the ball when it is in flight

Chapter 9

The Short Game

In teaching the short game, which usually involves shots of 50 yards or less, I am once again partial to the method described thoroughly in the P. G. A. teaching manual. The mental concept presented with this method is described very simply as a pendulum swing with a "triangle along a track to a target". It is described as a pendulum swing because it does not bring into play the strong body muscles. In fact, body motion is kept to a minimum as distance is not a factor. The triangle is described as an upside-down one formed by the two arms and a line across the shoulders (Fig's. 18 and 19). The club is just an extension of the triangle. Reference to this triangle is made so that the pupil will be conscious that only this part of the anatomy moves in executing the pendulum swing. The track of course, is the path the club must follow to propel the ball to the target, which is the flag stick (Fig. 20). The pupil can visualize the track and this should remind him that he should keep the club face on target before and after impact. He is encouraged once again to swing through the ball as in the full swing and the ball will be struck because it happens to be on the track.



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

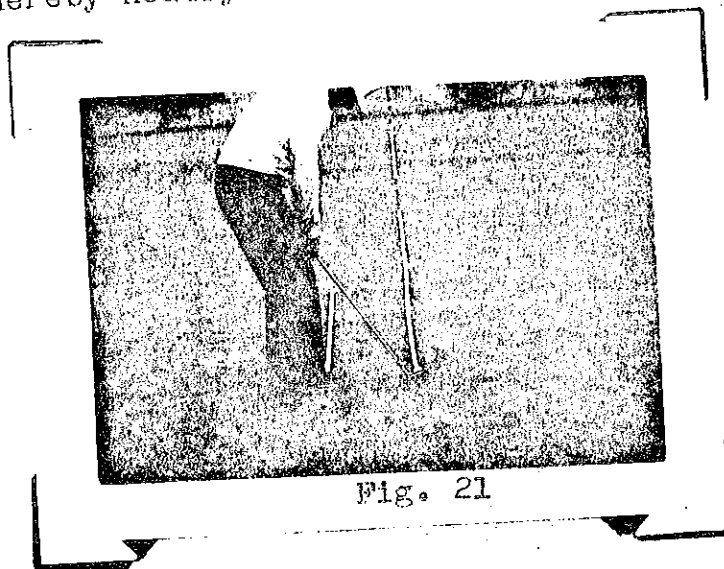


Fig. 20

The short game includes chip shots, where the ball lies from six inches to a few feet off the putting surface, and may be played with any club from a 3 iron to sand iron. The ball is made to travel in the air over the fringe of the green and allowed to run the rest of the way in the manner of a long putt. My pupils are encouraged to choose a club with the least amount of loft necessary to successfully accomplish the objective, as a rolling shot is much easier to control for distance. Also included in the short game instructions are pitch shots and sand shots. These are both usually carried out with the lofted irons.

The set up and alignment for the pendulum swing is much the same as for the full swing. The feet are close together with the left foot toed out slightly to provide better balance and the right foot perpendicular to the line of flight. The stance is slightly open, but the hips and shoulders should be square to the line of play; knees are flexed into more of a sitting position than for the full shot; the back remains straight and the upper body tilted out over the ball; and body weight must favour the left side and stay there throughout the entire stroke (Fig. 21). The grip remains the same, with the hands slightly ahead of the club head and the ball positioned just inside of the left heel. When the weight favours the left foot, and the hands are placed ahead of the club head at the address position, the pupil is more apt to swing down and through

the ball, thereby neatly lofting it to the putting surface.



The backswing is initiated once again by the last three fingers of the left hand! This establishes left side control, and sets the face of the golf club into impact position immediately. The left arm and shoulder take the club back far enough for the ball to reach the target. Any other conscious body motion is discouraged. The pupil is asked to keep his weight on the left foot throughout the backswing (and the forward swing).

The forward swing is initiated with the left arm and shoulder. The rest of the triangle follows. For pitch shots it is also important to keep the knees moving in front of the triangle to keep the club on the flight path. This knee motion is very well described in Byron Nelson's book Shape Your Swing the Modern Way. The pupil is instructed to swing along the track and the ball will once again be struck merely because it is in the path of the club head. There

must be no conscious hitting action with the hands and the left wrist must remain firm and unbroken through the ball and to the end of the follow through.

Sand shots are an important element in the development of the short game even though sand shots may involve either the full or the pendulum swing. They are usually included as part of the short game, since they usually occur near the putting surface.

Sand shots can be played many ways, and can involve the use of any club from the putter to a full swing with a wood. The pupil is advised to always use the most simple shot. If the sand trap is shallow and has no sharp lip and the ball is lying close to the front edge, a simple roll out with a putter is the most effective and rewarding shot. However, most sand traps on recently built golf courses are fairly deep and have sharply cut lips, so the use of a lofted club is imperative.

Most well designed sand irons have a large sole or flange, which makes the leading edge of the club sit about one quarter of an inch above the ground. This design helps to prevent the sharp leading edge from descending deep into the sand; it acts somewhat on the principle of a hydrofoil, and skims through the sand with a shallow bite. The more a sand iron is set back, or the more open the club face, the shallower will be the skimming action through the sand. With a club such as this, it becomes a rather simple matter

to cut and explode the ball on to the putting green or surface.

The set up and alignment for a sand shot, are the same as for a full swing. The feet are worked firmly into the sand, stance slightly open, the ball played well forward, and the club face addressing the ball in an open position.

The swing, once again, is the same as the full swing, with one exception. The club should be taken back in an arc, outside the line of flight. This brings the club back across the line from outside to inside and enables the ball to go straight at the target, even though the face is open. The reason for swinging outside in, is that this action gets the ball up quickly and drops it softly on the green with little forward roll, thus decreasing the margin of error to produce a good shot. The error of not taking enough sand or hitting too hard is transferred into achieving more height rather than more distance, thus the shot will still land somewhere on the green.

Employing the above technique, my pupil is exposed to sand shots in the following manner. With my hands I build up a four inch square of sand about one inch high (Fig. 22) and instruct my pupil to swing through this with about a three quarter swing and to follow through at least as far as he took the club back. He repeats this twenty to thirty times, until the mound of sand is neatly disposed of (Fig. 23) and then a ball is placed in the centre of the sand pile.

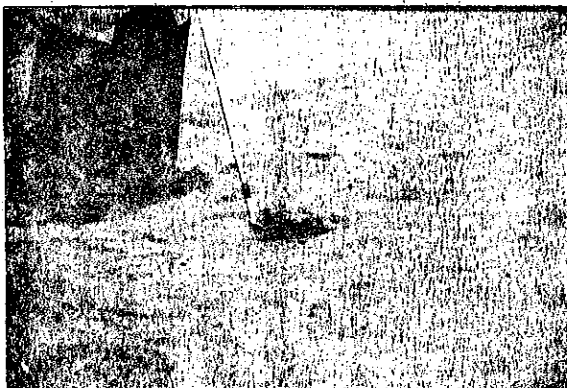


Fig. 22



Fig. 23

In this manner the pupil learns that the club face does not even touch the ball, and that the sand squashed between the club and the ball rather softly, lobs the ball up on to the putting surface.

Nearly all pupils fear the sand shot, but overcome their anxiety when the success ratio improves.

Chapter 19

Putting

Putting is such an individual thing that no one can set down absolute rules for doing it. There are no fundamental truths that tell you to hold a putter just so, or to stand a certain way. Beyond that, however, there are certain things that all good putters do, and they are as follows: (a) keep their bodies still, (b) keep their head still (c) keep the club blade square. The secret to keeping the club face square is to never let the left wrist angle change. The arm, hand, and putter have to go through as one piece (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24

Billy Casper, who is one of the great modern putters, uses a wrist stroke, but he keeps his left hand and wrist firm. He taps the ball employing right hand pressure and the club stops almost at the ball. It's like driving a tack. Because he never lets the wrist break down, he hits the ball with a square blade every time.

The pupil is instructed to bend over far enough so that the arms hang freely with some flex at the elbows and to keep the eyes directly over the target line. (Fig. 25). The putter is swung back and forth in a low arc with combination arm and wrist motion (Fig. 26) but the putter head is not allowed to pass the left hand throughout the stroke. Weight or distance is of far more importance in putting than line or direction, even the novice will hit a ten foot putt on an acceptable line, but the weight will vary greatly. To teach "feel of distance" my pupil is started on his putting instruction one foot from the hole. When these putts are going into the hole with some degree of regularity, he moves farther and farther from the hole. In this manner the pupil begins to realize that the back-swing must become progressively longer for distance putts. Eventually he develops the co-ordination between hand and eye that is so important in the development of the short game. Another excellent way to learn how hard to hit a putt is to make a circle with string on the putting green of about a six foot radius and from various distances putt into



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

this circle. On long putts the pupil is instructed to try to have the putt die or stop near the hole while on short putts of six feet or under, to hit them quite firmly in such a way that if they miss they should stop about eight inches past the hole.

Chapter 11

Intermediate Golfer

Teaching the intermediate pupil, the golfer that scores from 77 to 85, involves mostly correcting slices and hooks; developing his skills in scrambling which involves getting down in two shots a good percentage of the time from approximately 30 yards away from the pin; coaching on sand and trouble shots; and helping him with, what I call, course management. The pupil in this stage of development will undoubtedly have to realize that most times, it is more prudent to chip out on to the fairway and accept a bogey, instead of trying the impossible or nearly impossible shots, to salvage a par. Most of the triple and quadruple bogies come from trying shots that have little or no chance of succeeding. It is very important that the instructor play with his pupil frequently, so that strategy can be discussed and he can observe how the instructor himself, handles difficult situations.

Slices, which are the learning golfer's nightmare, are caused by many different things, but in all cases slices develop because the face of the golf club comes into the ball open, or from the outside in, or both. Both the modern swing and the square to square swing require the club

to reach the top of the backswing, with no cupping or breakdown of the left wrist. The left wrist and forearm must be in a straight line at the top of the backswing. The left arm must rotate backwards about thirty to forty degrees; (that is, the club face opens that amount on the backswing). Most teachers and authors on golf technique claim that this reasserts itself automatically on the downswing, thereby squaring off the club face to the ball. My observations confirm that it certainly does so with the good player, because he has learned this closing motion, and in most cases it is so developed that he must guard against overdoing it to prevent an early hit. However, the novice or the intermediate pupil whose muscles have not yet developed this square return to the ball, must be instructed on how to bring the club face back down, so that it is not open at contact. The only article I have been able to find to substantiate my belief is by Peggy Kirk Bell, in May 1976 Golf Digest, page 122.

Swinging across the intended line of flight also causes slicing, and the most common error is starting the downswing with the right arm or shoulder. This is readily visible to the instructor when standing behind his pupil. The club will turn out of plane laterally in the first twelve inches of travel. When the downswing is started in this manner, the only way contact with the ball can be made is with a strong right handed smash at the ball across the

intended flight path.

A hook can also result with this motion, but only if the left elbow collapses just before ball contact. The correction for this error in swing plane must come by coaching proper lower body motion to initiate the forward swing.

Hitting behind the ball, or executing fat shots as they are commonly referred to, are also a common ailment with this class of player.

In almost all cases, the cause is faulty target projection. This pupil is using the ball as his immediate target, resulting in forward motion slowing down or stopping near the bottom of the arc. He must be instructed to swing towards his target, not at the ball. This takes a lot of concentration and practice, particularly when the pupil has been told by his many friends, to keep his head down and keep his eye on the ball. But if he can be conditioned mentally, his muscles will move the swing to its completion.

A brief summary of my teaching program for my intermediate pupils.

- (a) Decrease the slice and hook errors. Try to keep his bad shots on the fairway.
- (b) Continually refer to course management.
- (c) Coach pupils on the short game within thirty yards and trap shots.
- (d) Coach and continually stress target concept.
- (e) Play as often as prudently possible with this pupil.

Chapter 12

Advanced Players

The advanced player, which I class as the golfer who can play 77 or better, presents a unique problem. This pupil has obviously developed a good method for striking the ball, and when he has shot making difficulties he does not always believe his instructors diagnosis. I can cite myself as an example. A few years ago I was slicing and hooking the ball fiercely and played erratic golf for an entire season. I explored, analysed, and changed every part of my set up and swing, with no great improvement. The following winter during a practice session in our winter golf school, one of my low handicap members casually remarked, "Stan, are you ever looping at the top of the backswing". I dismissed this statement from my mind immediately. Looping? Not me!! If there is anything right in my swing it surely is the transition from the backswing to downswing. A week later we took movies of our Golf School members golf swings, and the camera man took one of me from behind. Lo and behold, when the films came back, there was I with a loop that looked like a model railroad track set up. Through this experience, I can appreciate the advanced pupil's reluctance to accept the instructor's

analysis. When an error is repeated for a time, it becomes comfortable and it feels right. For this pupil, the use of video or movie film is a must so that he can see his error and willingly make the necessary corrections.

High priced video equipment can be a very useful tool in golf instructions, but to date, I am very disappointed in the resolving qualities of the lower priced equipment, and therefore prefer the super 8 movie camera. The movie camera must be of good quality, be designed for slow motion sequences and have a variable shutter that will give shutter speeds of at least $1/300$ of a second. This, combined with a projector that has a step advance and the ability to stop single frames, will convince any doubting Thomas that some aspect of his swing need attention.

The most common errors of the advanced golfer are found in (a) grip (b) set up or alignment (c) start of backswing (d) start of downswing i.e. change plane and (e) unconscious early hitting. All these errors are readily corrected if the player believes he is doing wrong.

Some chronic errors in the advanced player's game can be corrected or minimized by proper fitting of golf equipment. The professional who has at his club, repair and custom club making facilities, can be of great help to his low handicap player.

Some examples of how club fitting can change the shot result are as follows: (a) grip size. If a pupil is a

habitual fader, smaller size grips will help him get the club in earlier. If his error is a hooking shot, larger grips will fill his palms better and restrict cocking and uncocking of the wrists. (b) A club that is too upright has a tendency to hook or pull the ball and one that is too flat, to slice or push the shot. (c) A shaft that is too whippy is conducive to hooking and one too stiff, to slicing. (d) Wood clubs can be easily built with up to 4% of hook or slice and can be weighted at the heel to be conducive to hooking, or at the toe to favour a fading shot. These, of course, are mechanical aids, and are not a substitute for a good golf swing. It is the instructors duty to teach a good golf swing as well as to provide equipment that suits the pupil.

The advanced player is, by far, the easiest to teach, and the fastest to correct, because he can feel a slight change in his golf swing pattern immediately. But he is also the most difficult to convince that the error you point out to him is indeed the trouble spot. Reproduce him on film or video and three quarters of the lesson is completed.

All this goes to prove that the mental programming for a successfully executed shot, must be done before and at the start of the backswing. No power on earth can change the result once the forward motion has been started. This also agrees with the P. G. A. panel of teaching experts, when they advise looking for most errors on the backswing windup. Setting up a mental picture for a good golf swing is fine for someone who has an idea of how to swing a golf club, but it does not help the new pupil who has no program to engage. The instructor's problem is to build one in his brain, and this can only come about by constantly making him repeat and sense different positions and motions, such as, straight left arm, proper wrist cock at top of swing, starting forward swing with lower body and moving to a full high finish. Eventually, after much repetition, he begins to feel the swing as a unified movement and can develop a mental program before and during his backswing, that will result in the ball being struck with some degree of regularity.

Conclusion

Learning the golf swing is a very complex and lengthy process, but it can be a very enjoyable one. A pupil who will practice regularly and take coaching instructions at fairly frequent intervals, can become a competent player. The game, if approached in this manner, does not get too frustrating provided the pupil can see a steady improvement in his golfing skills. The individual challenge presented by the game of golf is something that probably no other sport offers. The pupil has only two objectives to conquer: the golf course and most important, himself. He soon finds out that even in an entire season of play, he has not had to play exactly the same shot twice. Every shot has something slightly different to test his mental and physical responses.

Most golf instructors enjoy working with pupils who are keen to learn and will do their utmost to shorten the learning period for them. In fact, some instructors are probably more eager than they should be, and at times are guilty of giving out more information than the pupils can absorb. Slow and steady progress in teaching golf skills can sometimes be the shortest route to advancement of this enjoyable pastime.

As I gain more knowledge and experience in the application of the complex skills of this great game, I attempt to modify and to sophisticate my teaching methods to achieve more rapid and positive results from my pupils. The universal attraction of the game of golf is it's continual challenge to novice and expert alike and the successful golf professional is always conscious of the need to adapt to these changes and challenges.

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