PRONATION: THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF GOLF

The Essex County Country Club Professional Explains His Theory by Excerpts from His Book "Golf Simplified"

By DAVID HUNTER

WHEN I was a boy, I had a wonderful opportunity to learn the game of golf. My father, "Charley" Hunter, was then in charge of the links at Prestwick, Scotland, one of the very best courses in existence, so I learned to play under ideal conditions. My father remained in charge right up to his recent death (on January 24, 1921), and at that time was the oldest professional in the world. Later on, when I began to think about taking up the teaching of golf as a profession my father told me that there was one thing to which little attention had been given, and which above all others would help me in teaching. That one thing was the pronating!—or, the proper turning of the wrists and forearms at the beginning of the swing.

During the last twenty-five years I have included that theory in my method of teaching. As a result of a special study of this idea my teaching now consists of absolutely nothing but this one idea. I have proved to my entire satisfaction that it not only is it the most important point but that it is practically all there is to the game of golf. I have experimented with beginners and with players of years' standing, with young boys, elderly men, and with women, and without exception I have found this a cure-all for their troubles. It is a very simple little thing, and one which, if given a little thought, will, I think, be a real help to golfers. This I have explained very fully in my book "Golf Simplified," but in this article I would deal briefly with the correct grip, stance and swing—or in other words the correct way to play golf—as dependent upon this fundamental principle, "pronation."

Before trying to swing a club, hold your open left hand in the position which represents its position when holding a club, then swing it slowly and naturally to the right shoulder. From there swing it slowly and comfortably forward, past the original position, until it is in line with the left shoulder. You will note that as the arm swings to the extreme right, the wrist automatically turns over. You do not have to think of turning it; it turns naturally. The same principle applies to the golf swing. It is so natural that it seems unnecessary to learn it at all. Inasmuch as the whole secret of success in golf—if indeed it can be called a secret—depends on the swing, the student would do well to take plenty of time to it and give it his most careful study. At first no ball should be used and the clubhead should not be raised higher than horizontal. If this is done correctly, the movement will be found to correspond exactly with the experiment just made with the open hand. Begin by taking a wooden club, place the clubhead on the ground, take your grip and stance, keep the hands well down—not pushed out and very slowly move the clubhead backward. This is done by slightly turning (not bending) the left wrist and at the same moment allowing the left forearm to move slowly backward. Be careful to let the first movement be made with the left, and not the right hand. Care should also be taken to keep both feet and heels firmly on the ground.

Nothing should move except the arms, and simultaneously with the backward movement the wrists and forearms should turn, so that when the club is horizontal, the clubhead points straight upward. It is most important that the turning of the wrists and forearms (this is called pronating) should begin exactly simultaneously with the first movement of the clubhead. Neither the wrists nor the arms should move before the other; they must both begin moving at exactly the same moment. It is vitally important that the wrist should not bend (or break). Before going further, let me again impress on the reader the extreme importance of these two points—the two most important in the entire golf decalogue: first, the proper pronating, or turning of the wrists and forearms away from the ball; and second, the keep-
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ing of the wrists perfectly straight and never allowing it to break. Get clearly into your mind the difference between turning the wrist and breaking it. The one is vital, the other fatal. After having taken the club back properly so that when horizontal the head points straight upward, take it slowly down, past the original position until it is again horizontal, in front again, if correctly done, the clubhead will point upward.

I would recommend doing this over and over again, until it comes quite naturally, being sure all the time that when in a horizontal position the clubhead points upward, also that both feet and heels remain firmly on the ground and that nothing moves except hands, wrists and arms. After continuing for a time, swing slowly and easily backward and forward and not letting the club go higher than horizontal. Try to let the hands and club a little higher, being careful meanwhile to keep both feet and heels firmly on the ground and not to allow body or head to move. It will be found that you cannot do this without moving something. Then you must allow the left knee to bend inward. This will necessitate raising the left heel, and allowing the left foot to rest on the inside of the ball of the foot. See that the knee bends inward and not forward. Above all, let this entire movement be as natural and comfortable as possible. There must be nothing forced or uncomfortable about the swing. When you get to the top of the back swing be careful that the grip of the left hand is not loosened, but, while keeping the fingers tightly closed on the handle, allow the wrist just enough flexibility to "give" a little bit. The weight of the clubhead will do this if you will only allow it, and by allowing it you will avoid an unnatural stiffness of the wrist which is always a disadvantage. At first it may seem a little difficult to keep a firm finger grip without making the wrist absolutely rigid, but with a little practice it will become quite natural. At the top of the back swing the club should be horizontal, with the head pointing straight down.

In the case of wooden clubs, the player should keep in mind the fact that the ball should be swept away rather than hit. Having this in mind, let the club swing down, sweeping the ball with it as it goes. It is a recognized fact in connection with the golf swing that the club will come down in the same arc in which it is taken back. Therefore no thought need be given the down stroke at all, but for the same reason it is doubly important to be very careful with the back swing. Do not think of how the club is coming down nor of the follow through, but only of sweeping the ball away. If the back swing has been properly made, all of these things will take care of themselves. With regard to the follow through, do not try to force it, nor to check it. Just be natural and it will take care of itself.

Let me here emphasize the extreme simplicity of this method of teaching as compared with the usual method in which as much attention is paid to the down swing and follow through, etc., as to the back swing; whereas I claim that if the back swing is properly made, no thought need be given the others. If this is true—and I have proved it to my entire satisfaction—just think how much easier the game would be to learn and how much less trouble it will be to correct any faults which may develop. After the swing has been made completely it is advisable to

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make, say, half a dozen complete swings, then start as though to make another, but stop this time when the club is horizontal; see whether the feet are on the ground with the weight on the heels, and whether the clubhead points straight up. If so, you are correct; if not, something is wrong and you had better start all over again. All this should be done for some time before a ball is used at all. Note very carefully that the first movement is with the hands, wrists, and arms only, and that the left is the controlling hand, being careful that the wrist turns, but does not break.

If the reader has read any other books on this subject he cannot fail to be impressed with the extreme simplicity of the method herein described, and I think that the reasonableness of my deductions. Last winter at the largest indoor golf school in New York I watched over a dozen other professionals and not only their methods of teaching, but also their various, styles of play. Some use the open, some the square, stance; some use the flat, some a medium and others an upright, swing. They had various methods of gripping the club, but whatever their method of doing these various things, they all—without an exception—had the same way of starting the club back from the ball, although the effects were different, owing to different characteristics and physical make-up. The start of the back swing was always the same: the back movement and the turning of the wrists and forearms always started simultaneously and there was no jerkiness even though some of them had a very quick swing.

The simplicity of this principle and rule in golf is its chief charm. It is applicable to all styles of play and applies to all the shots in your bag. Analyze everything from the back swing. Never work to improve "effects," always go back to the "cause." Briefly my theory—which is now no longer a theory, but a fact, proved demonstratable through years of experience—may be summed up as follows: With grip and stance properly adjusted, be sure you start your clubhead back from the ball correctly. Do not jerk, start slowly, let the backward movement and the turn of the wrists and forearms start at exactly the same moment. Keep the control in the left hand. Pronate properly and finally when you go off your game, do not try to correct the "effect," but go back to first principles and thereby remove the "cause."