

The Kent Golfer

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Develop A More Relaxed Swing

Over the last few issues I have been discussing the 6 key basics of a good golf swing – Turning, Weight Shift, Rhythm, Balance, Coordination and Relaxation. This time I want to talk to you about the last of these essential attributes - RELAXATION.

In this sequence of articles I hope to have encouraged you to believe that you possess all of these basics requirements to playing a more satisfying and consistent game and that it may well have been an excess of misconceptions such as keeping your head still, your left arm straight (right arm for a left-hander), or your feet glued to the ground in your backswing, that has been holding you back. Undoubtedly, much golf tuition is based on what the tour players do and the average golfer can easily get sucked into this traditional way of thinking whereby you must grip the club in a certain way, swing the club in a specific plane and achieve the same positions as the champions. But it's not positions that make champions!

Whilst Positive Impact Golf also enjoys great success with juniors and tour players it is you, the everyday player, who we place at the core of our coaching philosophy. We regularly ask our clients why more golfers don't take lessons, a fact borne out by research which shows that the vast majority of golfers in UK seem to have turned their back on the teaching profession. Their comments make for interesting reading. Over half the people say that this is due to the fear of having to work hard on their game whilst getting worse for at least a short period of time. One golfer made a succinct comment about golf lessons representing 'the fear of the drill!'

Imagine the situation, you're not playing well so start to think about doing something about it but face the prospect of more embarrassment by hitting more bad shots for a while in integrating new techniques into your game with the hope of playing better later. Many golfers can't cope with this alternative so just go on accepting their shortcomings instead of taking positive action.

But it really doesn't have to be like this. Listen to what Gerry said several weeks after a Positive Impact Golf 3-Day Residential course:

I ask myself "What happened on the course which could have changed my golf in such a significant way?" and feel that it was the stress you placed on allowing the natural rhythms of the body, unimpeded with thoughts of technique to produce the swing. I guess to sum up I feel totally relaxed and have no thought that I shall not produce the outcome I am attempting. It's totally amazing.

If you ask me what is the main difference between low handicappers and the rest of the golfing population I would have to say it is the tension I see in their swings. Good players seem so relaxed, as if golf is natural to them. The higher handicap players are rarely relaxed as they are trying to cope with all the advice that they know they're supposed to concentrate on to achieve success. The fact is that this only serves to increase tension and.....

'TENSION STEALS YOUR FEEL AND ROBBS YOU OF YOUR TALENT!'

The golf swing is a throwing movement in which your muscles need to be relaxed, long and elastic. Imagine how you'd throw a ball if you were stiff and tense. Try it now. Grip the ball with white-knuckles, stiffen your arms and shoulders and don't move your legs or head. What does this feel like? Not only would this limit your throwing action, but it would make you look and feel awkward. You'd give the impression of someone who had no talent for throwing a stick. Now, totally relax your grip and your muscles and let your body go with the flow of natural movement. Doesn't this feel better?

The truth is that you can all swing the club better and thus achieve greater consistency in hitting sweet golf shots if only you relax and discard many of the traditional and complex ideas.

Try this simple combination which reflects the state you get into when you hit your best shots:

1. Relax your arms and shoulders by gently shaking them and taking a deep breath before each shot

2. Keep moving in a rhythmical way as you address the ball. Staying static for too long over the ball leads to too much tension and too much time to think
3. Trust yourself to make a good swing *without* all those technical thoughts which are actually getting in your way
4. Take another deep breath after each shot whilst holding your finish position for a few seconds. If there is any tension in your arms and shoulders, let it go

Breathing is an integral part of relaxation and is used in all the martial arts where control and focus are essential to achieving the art of relaxed concentration. Too much or the wrong type of concentration will lead to increased tension. Tiger Woods uses breathing exercises in between shots during tournament rounds. I don't believe he's thinking of which position he wants to achieve in his swing. This 4-point combination will undoubtedly lead to a more relaxed and enjoyable game of golf.

I'm sure you know what tension can do in other parts of your life and the negative effects of stress. Golf should be an anti-stress activity where you relax from the demands of modern life. If you play with too much physical tension you may well find that golf becomes just another form of stress.

Please get in touch if you'd like to learn more about how you can achieve a tension free game or if you have any comments on this article.

Next month's article will discuss the marriage between coaching and clubfitting.

Brian Sparks