

The Kent Golfer

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Improve Your Coordination

Over the last 3 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 fifth of these essential attributes - COORDINATION.

In the January issue you will remember that I talked to you about Weight Shift and Balance as I believe they are closely linked. In February's issue I talked about the importance of Rhythm and how you can develop a more fluid swing and thus play with more consistency and more enjoyment. Of course, all six basics are inter-related so they must be coordinated into one swinging movement, into one feel. But, the sort of coordination I am talking about here is the art of getting all the different parts of your body to work together at the same time so that you can gain consistent control of the club head and increased control of the golf ball.

Let me start by blowing a strongly held myth. Hand-eye coordination is not a pre-requisite to good golf! No, it isn't that important as the golf ball doesn't move. Obviously, in moving ball sports such as tennis, cricket, soccer and squash it is a great asset but, in golf, the ball doesn't move until you hit it.

Many golfers come to me saying that they are short on natural ability. They think that they are uncoordinated. How do these people live their lives without such basic skills as coordination? I remember Graham, a 54 year-old, 27-handicapper, telling me that he had no rhythm and coordination. He has a business in London which requires him to drive regularly across the capital.

"How do you manage to do this with no rhythm and poor coordination," I asked?

"Oh," he replied, "that's completely different. I'm a good driver and have no problems in the car."

Now, let me tell you how he had come to the dreadful conclusion that he was lacking in basic talents. He had learnt to play with his feet glued to the ground as he swung the club back, the thought process being that he wasn't good enough to hit the ball correctly if he moved too much. He wasn't hitting the ball well and never had done. Nobody had shown confidence in him and he certainly had no confidence in himself. Let's think about this for a moment. How do you coordinate movement when different parts of you are told not to move at all?

Needless to say, he had also been indoctrinated to believe that his head shouldn't move either! Imagine the result. Instead of a smooth, coordinated backswing with everything moving together, he was totally immobile at either end of his body, feet and head. Not only was his coordination blown from the outset of his swing, but this also created huge amounts of tension. As anyone who has read my articles before will have seen, tension is a golfer's number one enemy as it steals your feel and robs you of your talent!

So, there was Graham struggling to swing the club with major parts of his body totally inactive and static. This produced poor coordination and over-exertion of the parts that did move.

Fluid motion is essential in playing consistent golf. When you try to dissect motion into parts you begin to compromise your ability to develop the sort of swing you see when watching really good players. They make it look so simple, and it is simple. All you need to do is move everything together. The only way of achieving this on a regular basis is to think of your body as one unit and resist the trap of thinking of all the different parts.

In golf, we suffer a strange sickness of incessantly breaking our bodies into a multitude of parts. For example, here are a few typical instructions to making the 'correct' backswing:

- keep your **head** still
- turn your **left shoulder** under your **chin** with your **back** to the target
- keep your **left heel** on the ground
- resist with your **right knee**

- Cock your **wrists** at **hip** height
- **hips** turn 45 degrees / **shoulders** 90 degrees
- keep your **right elbow** close to your **body**
- keep your **left arm** straight

How on earth can the average golfer enjoy hitting the ball successfully with so much going on in his or her mind? The old adage of 'paralysis by analysis' springs to mind and the above list represents only a fraction of the number of thoughts that can invade a golfer's mind. Can you imagine running down a flight of stairs whilst trying to instruct the different parts of your anatomy to operate as they should in the same way as you do when you play golf? I doubt that you'd get to the bottom without falling head over heels.

Sam Snead famously said that what he needed to feel in order to hit good shots was to be '*as loose as a goose and have no thoughts in his head!*' Have a go at hitting some shots with no thought. You'll never learn to trust your innate ability if you are always giving yourself instructions and trying to micro-manage every aspect of your swing.

One of the major reasons for the lack of progress in terms of handicap over the last 20 years is an overload of technical advice that is now available to golfers. Please remember that the golf swing is only a throwing movement. It's just like throwing a stick for your dog or throwing a pebble into the sea and, when you do these simple things, you don't need to think about how your body is performing the task.

Let me finish with a quote from William James , Dean of American Psychologists, from an essay he wrote in 1899 entitled 'The Gospel of Relaxation:'

"Modern man is too tense, too concerned for results and too anxious."

He advised a better and easier way:

"When once a decision is reached and execution is the order of the day, dismiss absolutely all responsibility and care for the outcome. Unclamp, in a word, your

intellectual and practical machinery and let it run free. The service it will do you will be twice as good!"

If this was true in 1899, how apt is it in today's frantic world? Relax and let everything move together and you'll achieve remarkable results. In next month's article I'll be talking a closer look at the art of relaxed golf.

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