

Naturalness: The Key to Golf

by RALPH HUTCHISON
PROFESSIONAL, SAUCON VALLEY COUNTRY CLUB, BETHLEHEM, PA.

A point I have never forgotten in my years of teaching golf is a comment Macdonald Smith made after winning his fourth Los Angeles Open in 1934. Smith was in his forties at the time but he bested a field which included the best young players of the day. A couple of days later Mac said:

"Hutch, it is just being natural when you hit the ball. I never forgot that on a single shot in the Los Angeles Open."

He went on to explain that Bob Jones, Gene Sarazen, Harry Cooper, Bobby Cruickshank and Ed Dudley were natural players and never allowed an artificial motion in any of their swings.

As a result of this chat, in my teaching, I try first to gain the absolute confidence of my student and to keep him mentally and muscularly relaxed. It is important to keep the student in natural positions.

Different types of persons, according to their physical makeups, will do things differently and even think differently. I try to find the most natural way for each individual to absorb the point I'm stressing with the physical equipment he possesses. At all times I endeavor to keep the content of my teaching so simple that a child could understand.

The individual must understand why and what he can do, and never necessarily try to copy what I do.

It seems to me advisable never to leave a student unsure of what he is striving to do. If at the end of a session the student doesn't understand clearly what we have been working on, I have him return at the earliest opportunity, emphasizing that he shouldn't practice or play until he has a clear idea of what he is trying to do.



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In diagnosing faults, I take enough time to analyze the swing so that I know whether it is a mental or a swinging flaw. I then try to be strong enough to follow through on my diagnosis, since the student often will want to vary from the correct line of thought after his first poor shot.

It is essential that a player form a mental picture of the golf shot before it is actually executed. By that I mean not only where the shot is to be played but how. Thus movies have become very important in golf instruction. The pupil can see himself as others see him. That way, golf to him becomes more natural. And, as Macdonald Smith told me years ago, you have to be natural if you are ever to develop a fine golf swing.