THE ORKNEY LIBRARY
WITHDRAWN
Gary Player
Positive Golf

Understanding and Applying the Fundamentals of the Game

CASSELL • LONDON
CONTENTS

Preface v

1. Lessons I've Learned 1

2. Conditioning Yourself for Better Golf 7

3. Think Your Way to Lower Scores 15

4. Better Golf through Sound Practice 24

5. Proper Grip for Consistent Shots 31

6. How to Stand for Accuracy and Distance 39

7. How to Start Your Swing 47

8. How to Make a Proper Backswing Turn 56

9. Proper Position at the Top of the Swing 65

10. Putting Your Feet to Work 73

11. How Timing and Rhythm Affect Your Shots 80

12. Developing Touch around the Green 88

13. Keys to Successful Putting 97

14. The Right Equipment for You 107

15. Golf Is My Life 111
The grip is the foundation of your swing. It affects directly the position of your clubhead both throughout your swing and, more important, during impact. Without a proper grip, no golfer can expect to hit accurate shots with even a fair degree of consistency. I learned this the hard way.

When I first started golf I hooked terribly because of a bad grip—my left hand was turned so far over to the right on the club that I could see four knuckles as I looked down at it at address. My right hand was also turned to the right under the club.

In England one year I watched Dai Rees. His left hand was positioned way over to the left. That's when I decided to change my own grip. But I went to the other extreme. I exaggerated positioning my left hand to the left until I could see no knuckles at all on this hand at address.

This “weak” grip made my backswing very flat. Although I played by gripping the club in this fashion for several years, I eventually had to change because it was such a weak position. I found that I could not reach the par-5 holes at Augusta National in two shots, and therefore left myself little chance of winning the Masters. Furthermore, this grip was putting so much pressure on my back that it hurt; since changing to my present grip I have had no more back trouble. This points up how important the grip really is.
There are several styles of gripping the club. Art Wall and Bob Rosburg, for example, use the “baseball” or “full-finger” grip. Jack Nicklaus uses the interlocking style.

Most of the pros—I’d say 99 per cent—use the Vardon overlap grip. I like the overlap grip because it’s so compact. It unifies the hands in a minimum amount of space on the club, yet provides the firmness most golfers need for club control.

Use whichever grip seems most comfortable and beneficial to you. Just remember that the proper grip ties your hands closely together and keeps them working as a unit to achieve maximum power and club control.

How the grip affects your swing

To hit accurate shots your clubface must be pointing directly at the target during impact. This is called a “square” clubface position.

To combine accuracy with maximum power, you need not only a square clubface at impact but also a similar hand alignment. The back of your left hand and palm of your right should be facing more or less toward the target. The ideal impact position is one in which the clubface looks at the target and the palms of each hand face one another in alignment with the clubface. Obviously, the best way to reach this impact position is to duplicate it at address—grip with palms facing each other and in alignment with a square clubface.

If you grip with your hands turned to the right on the shaft in what is called a “strong” grip, you cannot return to your ideal hand position at impact without turning

When proper grip at address returns the hands to the proper impact position, the clubface remains square to the line of flight. When strong or weak grips return hands to the proper impact position, the clubface will be turned left (closed) or right (open).
From the time I was very young, I realized how hard my father worked for a living in the gold mines, drilling all day long 10,000 feet underground. Because of his example, I grew up knowing you cannot be a success in life if you don’t work hard.

This lesson certainly applies in golf. I came into my chosen profession realizing the value of a stroke. I did not want to waste a single swing, knowing that one shot might make my future or break it. This is a very important attitude, one that all the truly great players possess. They couldn’t be great if they didn’t have it.

Lesser golfers never learn the full value of a stroke. I believe you only learn it by working hard and appreciating the value of hard work. There are a lot of fellows who have been given everything all their lives . . . or perhaps they have the gift of too much natural ability.

“What the hell, what’s a shot?” you hear them say. They are mistaken—each shot is important.

This is why I’ve always been extremely conscientious—almost a fanatic—about practicing. Some people say that, except for maybe Ben Hogan, I’ve practiced longer and harder than any other golfer today. I think they are probably right.

As a boy growing up in Johannesburg, I remember practicing about as hard as a human being could. Playing truant from school, I would go out with my clubs in the morning and hit balls all day long until six in the
evening—with only an hour for lunch and maybe a half-hour nap on days when it was very warm. The whole day was golf.

I practiced my wedge to start with, hitting a bag of balls into the sand trap. Then I'd go into the bunker and hit the balls out onto the green. I wouldn't leave that bunker until I'd holed five shots. I'd just stay there until I'd done it, even if it took two or three hours.

After the sand shots I'd practice something else, perhaps chipping. Here, too, I had my own private self-imposed goal; I had to chip ten into the hole before I'd quit.

In those days, I carried my own flag. Sticking it into the fairway, I'd hit a bunch of 7-irons to it. Then I'd go on to all the other clubs and, finally, back to putting.

Always when putting, I'd imagine I was about to win one of the major tournaments, saying to myself, “This one's for the U.S. Open, Gary... the British Open,” and so forth. It was a long hard day for a youngster, but I never grew tired of going out to the course. I believed then—and still do—that your wildest dreams come true.

But I knew if I were ever to become a champion professional golfer I would have to work at it, and work at it harder than the next man, for my size and weight were both against me.

To build up my legs, I ran. My older brother Ian always went with me, up and down the dusty gold-mine hills. When I wanted to quit after running only a mile or so, he wouldn't let me. Because of Ian I came to realize that I could keep going when I thought I couldn't. Over the years, I've made a lot of money in golf by not giving up when the going got rough and it looked as if there weren't a chance. I'd rather finish fortieth than fiftieth; I'd rather win $100 than $10. There are a lot of guys who say, "If I can't win the tournament or finish in the first ten I don't care if I'm out of the money." Not so with me.

To build up my arms, I did push-ups—with Ian standing over me counting, not letting me quit. In those days
I did seventy fingertip push-ups, spread throughout a day, trying to build up my thin arms.

Yet, with all this regular exercise—attempting to compensate for my 5-foot-7-inch stature—I still found myself playing a practice round at the Masters in 1960 and unable to reach the par-5’s on my second shot. All the top players were knocking it onto the par-5 greens in two, but I couldn’t.

I spoke to Peter Thomson about it and he said he didn’t think he could ever win the Masters because he was such a short hitter. He just couldn’t get it to the green on the par-5’s either—I decided right then and there to do something about my problem.

I began working with professional body-builders—even hired a trainer for a while—concentrating on the push-ups and knee bends, skipping rope and working out with the weights and other exercises.

A year later, in 1961, I won the Masters. That year a national magazine ran a survey on just where drives had landed. Figures showed my tee shots had landed very close to Arnold Palmer’s! And at Augusta in 1965 I had the best score of the field on the par-5’s—even beating the winner, Jack Nicklaus, by one stroke on these holes that once had been too long for me. I feel I owe this added distance mostly to those body-building exercises.

Although the exercises have been very important to my game, so is the fact that in my early days as a professional in South Africa I gave literally hundreds—maybe thousands—of golf lessons. Teaching forces you to analyze your own techniques, to come to grips with the fundamentals of the game, which means you’re in an excellent position to uncover and solve the problem when some part of your game goes sour.

This fundamental knowledge of the golf swing is very important for any golfer who hopes to succeed, but it is vital for players who earn their living by playing the game. There are some members of the professional tour—Jack Nicklaus comes quickly to my mind—who have this knowledge. When their games go sour, they can
tounament professionals have an opportunity to delve into many business ventures. My of course applicable

(3) Successful tournament professionals have an opportunity

(2) The man in the grey suit is holding a microphone. This is probably the master of ceremonies, or at least the host. The standing audience appears to be paying attention. The large crowd suggests the importance of the event.

(1) The ball boy is close to the cup, ready to return it to the court. He appears to be prepared and focused on the task at hand.
quickly discover and correct the fundamental problems. Yet, many others on the tour—even some of the better players—lack a sound basic knowledge of the golf swing. When these players encounter trouble, it may take them months—even years—to recover their form.

If there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s to play golf your own way, instead of playing like somebody else. But you still have to know the fundamentals. And you still have to try to adjust your game to the facts of life when you’re a small man like myself. When you’re being outdriven by these big men by 20 or 30 yards, you must adjust yourself not to let that worry you, to continue to play your own game—making sure to get in some good putts. Putting, as they say, makes up for a lot of yardage—putting and a good basic understanding of the fundamentals.

If you ask a lot of fairly good golfers what they are thinking about when they hit the ball, they’ll say, “Nothing. I just hit it.” This isn’t right. You must know exactly what you are doing, why it results in a good shot, how it’s happening. Otherwise it’s just luck, and there’ll come a day when you can no longer reproduce your results, a day when you won’t know why, much less how, to unravel that particular snarl.

The truth is that nobody has enough natural ability to become a real champion. You’ve got to know the fundamentals of the game to get up there and stay up there. You can’t ever let yourself become bloody well self-satisfied with your game. Developing your game—whether you are a Sunday golfer or a pro on the tour—is a process of continual correction and, I feel, the development of a sound, sustained program of physical conditioning.

In short, I feel that to play golf to the best of your ability you should (1) understand the fundamentals of the game and (2) prepare yourself physically and mentally. In the instruction chapters that follow I will explain these fundamentals and tell how to condition yourself so that you can execute them properly.
Caddie Ernest Nipper helped bolster my confidence during the Masters.
CARDS

2

1. 155
2. 150

115

ROUGH DAY

FOR OB ON
RIGHT

200 YDS

HIT AT
WATER AND
HOOK IT.

TELEPHONE

POLE

125 130

BUNKER KNEE

ELEVATED
GREEN

153

180

175

165

HIT BALL HIGH
THICK BRUSH TREE

WE

10

CARD

DITCH ON LEFT
220

Look ball off lee on this hole.

175

165

150

WE

16 190

CARD

ALL CARRY

HOLE MUST HIT
HIGH SHOT

LEFT

SHOT

THIS GREEN

THICKER EDGE

DON'T GO OVER

ON RIGHT

THEY

12

17

CARD

115

150

145

185

195

190

185

165

THICK BRUSH TREE

180
While the lead bounced back and forth after that, Nagle and I eventually tied with 282, and the next day I won the play-off 71 to 74. That completed my Grand Slam of Golf.

Winning these four tournaments, plus becoming the first foreign golfer to be the leading money-winner on the U.S. tournament circuit (in 1961) and posting the lowest American scoring average for a year (also in 1961) rang down the curtain on my major golfing goals. This doesn’t mean that I won’t keep playing and trying to win anything I enter, but I won’t be competing so often in the future.

Actually, I want to delve more deeply into youth work in my native South Africa, and continue an even closer association with my farming interests there. I would like to leave tournament golf when I’m forty, but before I quit I hope to fulfill my very last golf goal—to break 60 in an international event on a championship course.

These are the diagrams and notes I made during practice rounds at Bellerive before the 1965 U.S. Open. Every hole was considered except 13 and 16, both par-3’s. The numbers of the holes are circled. The numbers on the greens indicate various distances from the object in the fairway, such as a sand trap, a tree, or a water sprinkler near which I expected my drives to finish. Armed with this information, I knew exactly what club I should use for every approach.
GARY PLAYER'S autobiography
GRAND SLAM GOLF

This is Gary Player's remarkable personal account of the making of a master golfer, the astonishing success story of the "little man" of golf who, from modest beginnings back home in South Africa, succeeded by a total dedication to the physical and mental demands of the game in reaching the very heights of professional golf.

What makes a top professional golfer tick? What is the tiny margin of special skill which distinguishes a winner from the runner-up? No man has yet attempted to analyse this special quality of success until now; and for this reason GRAND SLAM GOLF is one of the unique books by a man unique in the field of competitive sport.

"I have been absolutely absorbed by Player's book. Splendid stuff."—HENRY LONGBURST, Sunday Times

"One of the finest golf books I have ever read."—MARK WILSON, Evening Standard

"All splendid stuff that no golfer at any level should miss."—DONALD STEEL, Sunday Telegraph

"One of the most interesting and revealing books of recent times."—BEN WRIGHT, Financial Times

With 32 pages of photographs, 21/-

MARK McCORMACK'S
GOLF' 67
World Professional Golf: The Facts and Figures

Golf today is a global game. The aeroplane has linked the continents in one continuous professional circuit; television has brought the great players of every country into millions of homes. Golf 1967 is big entertainment—and big business. Yet until now there has never been an annual record of world professional golf—the facts, the figures, the triumphs and the disasters. In GOLF '67, Mark McCormack, famous manager of golf's Big Three—Palmer, Player and Nicklaus—provides a first-hand commentary on the past year of professional tours across five continents, complete with action pictures and detailed statistical tables. It is a unique and fascinating reference book for golfers everywhere.

Who was the biggest money-spinner on the American circuit? Who won the Dunlop Masters, the Thunderbird Classic, the Yomiuri Open? Who led the qualifiers at Muirfield? And who made the headlines in Melbourne and Manila? Here, in this book, are all the moments of drama and excitement, all the facts and all the figures.

324 pages with 32 pages of photographs, 25/-