Golf My Way
THE INSTRUCTIONAL CLASSIC, REVISED AND UPDATED
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WITH KEN BOWDEN
Illustrations by Jim McQueen

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Contents

Foreword by Jack Grout 7

Introduction 11

PART ONE · BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

1. On Methods: Mine and Others 15

2. It Helps to Know Where—and How—you Want to Go 23

3. Why I Always Played the Fade—and Now Sometimes Play the Draw 27

4. Some Plane Truth 34

5. The Motive Force: Leverage = Centrifugal Force = Cubhead Speed = Distance 41

6. Golf's One Unarguable, Universal Fundamental 46

7. My Equipment—and Yours 52

PART TWO · DOWN THE FAIRWAY

1. The Grip: Not a Knotty Problem 67

2. Setting Up: Ninety Percent of Good Shot-Making 77

GOING TO THE MOVIES · AIM AND ALIGNMENT · BALL POSITION · ADDRESS POSTURE · MENTAL AND MUSCULAR CONDITION

3. The Full-Shot Swing: Starting Back 101

4. The Full-Shot Swing: To the Top 122

5. The Full-Shot Swing: To Impact 146
6. The Full-Shot Swing: Following Through
7. Tempo + Rhythm = Timing
8. Power
   OFF THE TEE • INTO THE GREEN
9. "Trouble"
   SOME SPECIAL SHOTS • ODD ANGLES • ROUGH STUFF
10. Conditioning—or Confessions of a Long-Time Jock
11. Practice: How Much I Do and How I Do It

PART THREE • AROUND AND ON THE GREEN

207  1. Wedge Play and Other Pitches
216  2. Chipping: A Multifaceted Art
223  3. Sand: Skimming Is the Trick
233  4. Putting: That Other Game
      BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES • THE CONFIDENCE FACTORS •
      THE CLUB • THE GRIP • THE SETUP • THE STROKE •
      PRACTICE

PART FOUR • REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

255  1. How Time Changed My Game
      POWER • THE POWER CLUBS • THE ACCURACY CLUBS • BALLS •
      POWER LOSS ANTIDOTE #1 • POWER LOSS ANTIDOTE #2 •
      LIFESTYLE FACTORS • VISION • EXERCISE • PRACTICE •
      DIMINISHED INTENSITY

270  2. Beyond Shot-Making
      LOVE GOLF, BUT NOT TOO MUCH • ADORE COMPETING •
      RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT YOUR TRUE OPPONENTS •
      CARE FOR YOUR BODY • KEEP LEARNING GOLF •
      WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A TEACHER • HOW MUCH INSTRUCTION? •
      GET YOUR TOOLS RIGHT • DEVELOP MOTIVATION • PRIORITIZE •
      ENJOY LIFE IN THE ROUND • BE POSITIVE, BE PREPARED •
      UPGRADE YOUR SELF- AND COURSE MANAGEMENT •
      LOVE THAT PRESSURE

286  3. Tournament Golf, Then and Now
      EQUIPMENT IMPROVEMENT • ON PLAYER PAMPERING •
      THE FITNESS FACTOR • TEACHERS AND TEACHING •
      COMPETITIVE DEPTH • THE MEDIA •
      PRO GOLF'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE

295  Enjoy the Greatest Game of All

297  Career Highlights
The Grip: Not a Knotty Problem

I have never tied myself in knots concerning the way I hold the club. As I said earlier, the function of my hands and wrists during the swing is simply that of a hinge. I do not hit the ball with my hands, but through them, using them—unconsciously—to translate body leverage into clubhead speed.

Thus I am concerned with only four factors in gripping the club:

1. That my hands are placed on the club so that more often than not they will naturally—unconsciously—deliver its face square to the target at impact.
2. That my hands will accept the shock of impact without slipping on the club.
3. That my hands are linked to the club in a way that allows the wrists to hinge efficiently at certain points in the swing.
4. That the pressure of my hands on the club makes possible factors 1, 2, and 3.

I can deal with the first point—clubface alignment—very simply. I imagine that someone is holding a club up for me so that its sole is correctly grounded and its face is square to my target. I bend over and move my hands forward without altering the alignment they were in as they hung freely at the end of my arms when I stood erect. I then lay them against the grip, fingers open. By offering my hands to the club thus, the back of my left hand and the palm of my right hand will pretty much face the target. Thereafter all I do is
While all good golfers' grips differ slightly, all conform to a few simple fundamental principles that, incidentally, have hardly changed in a century of play. Variations in size and strength of hands, flexibility of wrists, type of body action employed, preferred shot trajectory, etc., cause each player to develop his own most effective hold on the club within the framework of proven gripping fundamentals. The weekend golfer should do likewise.

Here is how the club sits in my hands, and how my grip finally assembles.
TAKE YOUR GRIP WITH CLUB SOLED

When practicing, make a habit of assembling your grip with the club correctly soled and aimed, not while you’re waving it around in the air. Firm up the left hand first, with the back of this hand aimed squarely toward the target. Then add the right hand softly enough not to jiggle the clubface out of alignment. Just before you wrap the club into the fingers of your right hand, check that its palm is aimed in the same direction as the back of the left hand—preferably toward the target but, if not, wherever the left hand is facing. If the two don’t match, your hands must work in opposition to each other.

wrap the left hand and then the right hand around the club without changing this alignment. The wrapping takes place in such a way that the club lies across both the palm and fingers of the left hand, but predominantly across the roots of the fingers of the right hand. To make the hands as much of a single unit as possible, I also twist a couple of fingers around each other, but we’ll get into that later.

That’s it for positioning the hands. I believe they function best, in terms of squaring the clubface at impact, when they work instinctively during the swing—when they behave reflexively rather than through conscious direction. Instinctively, in hitting just about anything open-handed, your palms will face your target at impact regardless of whatever angles they may pass through as you swing them back and forward. Thus, by setting the palms parallel to the clubface as you set up to swing, you favor both the laws of nature and the laws of reason in achieving a square clubface at impact. To me, it’s that simple.

Another factor that’s always encouraged me to hold the club with my palms parallel to the clubface—a better way of saying “square to the target”—is the solid resistance to the forces of impact that this type of grip provides. When a club meets a ball at 100 mph or more, some powerful forces are exerted on the hands—especially the leading hand—that can easily cause slippage. Probably the strongest part of the hand is its butt. In fact, I think it was to enable this powerful part of the leading hand to take the blow that olden-day golfers first developed the so-called four-knuckle grip, and is why youngsters
OVERLAP, INTERLOCK, OR TEN-FINGER?

In an experimental mood many years ago I tried both the overlapping and the full-finger grips. I played more than fifty rounds using the overlap, but my hands always felt as though they were coming apart, especially in the impact zone. I gave up the ten-finger grip after much less experiment, because I was never able to make even one full swing with it in which I didn’t feel as though my hands were working in different directions. A handful of fine players such as Bob Rosburg and the distinguished British professional, Dai Rees, have used this grip successfully, but it’s still not for me.

The overlapping grip—little finger of right hand wrapped around forefinger of left hand—is by far the most popular grip among good golfers, so I guess it should be your first choice. But if it doesn’t do as good a “unitizing” job as you’d like, try the interlocking grip. It has served me pretty well.

THE PRESSURE POINTS

I try to hold the club firmly with all my fingers, but there is obviously a stronger sensation of pressure in some than others. In my left hand the last two fingers do a very positive job of hanging onto the club, while wedging it against my palm. In my right hand the thumb and forefinger once seemed to do most of the work, but today I rather think the two middle fingers have adopted the strongest role. But I really do try to avoid relaxing any of my fingers on full shots. I have insufficient strength in my hands and fingers to allow any shirking.
MAINTAIN CONSTANT PRESSURE

I think it's important to try to keep grip pressure constant throughout the swing, even into the follow-through. If you get into the habit of loosening your hands after impact, there's a real danger the habit will creep backward until you're loosening them before impact.

Grip slippage is a guaranteed gamewrecker. Among amateurs the most common point of loosening the hands is the top of the backswing. This forces a regripping of the shaft coming down and is almost certain to alter the clubface alignment. A simple way to check the fault is consciously to nestle the left thumb into the right palm at the summit of your swing, before you change directions.

and frailer golfers today still favor a grip in which the hands are turned well to the right on the club. But to swing the club freely and squarely into the ball with the butt of the left hand leading is, for me, a very difficult maneuver—especially in light of the instinctive tendencies of the hands to return square to the target. Yet the golfer still has to call upon strength in some part of his leading hand to absorb the shock of impact if the club is not to slip as he hits the ball. What's the strongest part of the hand after the butt? To me, it's the back of the hand. (To prove this to yourself, just hit something with the back of your fingers, then with the back of the hand itself.) Thus, by having the club very firmly wedged into the palm of my left hand, and by swinging so that the back of my left hand leads into the ball, I minimize the chance of club slippage at impact.

The efficiency of the hinging action of my hands and wrists in transforming leverage into clubhead speed depends on how well they work as a unit. Their working together depends mainly on how closely they can be unified on the club shaft. The baseball player provides a good example of this. When he's going for a home run, distance is all, and he sets his hands as close together on the bat as possible to allow him to generate maximum speed. But when he's called on to bunt, control is everything and distance nothing, so he spreads his hands wide apart on the bat. If you would like to make a little experiment,
you'll find it's easy to control the path of a golf club with your hands spread apart on it, but it's one devil of a job to develop much clubhead speed.

The technique I use to mold my hands together as a unit is called the interlocking grip. It involves twining the little finger of my right hand between the index and largest finger of my left hand as I finally assemble my grip. Apart from a short experimental period many years ago, I've used this interlocking method of welding or “unitizing” my hands on all full shots throughout my career. Although the interlocking grip isn't common among good players (see panel, page 71), I believe it is the best hand-“unitizer” going, especially for golfers with small or weak hands.

My grip varies in one other small way from the grips of many tour players. Again, to “unitize” my hands as much as possible, I snuggle the forefinger of my right hand close against its neighbor, and wrap it firmly around the club—no gaps. Many good golfers set the right forefinger on the club in more of a “triggered” position, causing a gap between the forefinger and the club. I believe that the more space the hands take up on the club, the harder it is for them to work as a unit. If only it were practical, the ideal unitizing grip would place the right hand smack on top of the left. (But on reflection, I'm now not sure this is such a terribly significant thing after all, because for a while after I injured my right forefinger in the summer of 1972, I played perfectly well with it hardly on the club at all!)

The final important factor about the grip to me is pressure—how firmly

**"LONG" THUMB A GOOD BRACE**

Before I modified my left-hand "palm" grip somewhat, I used what the fellows on tour call a "long left thumb." This pushing of the left thumb as far down the shaft as is comfortably possible goes well with a palm grip, especially for the small-handed golfer.

My left thumb is "shorter" now because I hold the club a little more in the fingers of my left hand. Yet I still think a golfer who has trouble hanging onto the club—especially at the top of the backswing—will solidify his grip by laying as much of his left thumb as possible down the shaft.
Historically, big hands have been considered an asset in golf, but small ones haven’t hindered me (these drawings represent my actual hand size). Perhaps that’s because I motivate a golf club primarily with my legs and body, rather than my hands and wrists.
GOLF MY WAY
Jack Nicklaus

GRIP “WEAK” TO STRENGTHEN SWING

The more to the left of the club a golfer sets his hands, the stronger his swing must be to allow him to draw the ball. The more his grip is turned to the right on the club, the easier it will be to move the ball right to left. I explain this hoping to encourage you to play with what is known as a relatively “weak” grip—palms square to the target—in order to force you to develop a strong swing. You will be a better golfer in the long run than if you use a “strong” grip, with your hands turned more to the right. This grip is a crutch that easily camouflages your swing deficiencies and therefore demands no improvement.

I’m adopting this policy with my eldest son, Jackie. I want him to learn to draw the ball before he learns to fade it—as every beginner should. But I want him to learn to draw with his swing, not his grip.

one grasps the club. Here again I’ve wavered over the years. I have always believed that the forward hand leads and directs the swing through the ball, and that the following hand “swings the hinge”—transmits the final burst of speed to the clubhead with a last-minute release of the wrists very similar to that of a baseball pitcher’s.

Seeking predominantly to fade the ball most of my career, I adopted—as I’ve said—very much a palm grip in my left hand. This gave me a distinctly firmer hold on the club in my left hand than in my right. Now, however, as a result of wanting to draw shots more often, my left-hand grip is more in the fingers, and the pressure of both hands on the club is more equal. This allows me to “swing the hinge” with the fingers of my right hand a little faster or earlier whenever I want to curve the ball from right to left.

How firm is the over-all pressure of my grip? How tight, or loose, do I hold the club? Frankly, I play so many types of shots today, demanding so many variances in grip pressure, that it is impossible to generalize. But if I had to name a pattern, I’d say I’m of the firm-gripping rather than the relaxed-gripping school. And I’d guess that this is probably true of most “legs and body” players as opposed to “hands and arms” golfers.
I am sometimes accused of being a slow player. Well, the truth is that I walk very fast up to the ball, make a fairly fast decision about what I want to do when I get there, but then sometimes set up to the shot slowly.

There are some good reasons for my being so methodical about my setup. I think it is the single most important maneuver in golf. It is the only aspect of the swing over which you have 100 percent conscious control. If you set up correctly, there's a good chance you'll hit a reasonable shot, even if you make a mediocre swing. If you set up incorrectly, you'll hit a lousy shot even if you make the greatest swing in the world. Every time I try to deny that law by hurrying my setup, my subconscious rears up and beats me around the ears.

In a casual round of golf with friends I can walk up to the ball, put the club down, draw back, and pop it in no time flat. More often than not I'll hit an adequate shot in the sense that it will land somewhere on the fairway or the green. But I cannot play tournament golf that way. Winning in professional golf's present competitive climate demands precise shot-placement on every single hole of every single tournament. For the modern professional golfer to be consistently successful, careful assessment of, and setup to, every shot must become as habitual as eating dinner.

I feel that hitting specific shots—playing the ball to a certain place in a certain way—is 50 percent mental picture, 40 percent setup, and 10 percent
Hailed as a classic and read everywhere golf is played, *Golf My Way* has sold more than 2 million copies worldwide since it was first published in 1974.

Finally, Jack Nicklaus, golf's leading master, definitively covers the whole of his game through a lifetime of greatness. *Golf My Way* presents an all-inclusive, A-to-Z explanation of how this greatest of champions thinks about and plays the game.

- New introduction, endpiece, and illustrations
- Brand-new chapters discussing the changes in Nicklaus's outlook and techniques
- Reflections on the differences in tournament golf today compared with when Nicklaus joined the PGA tour in 1962
- Advice on the mental elements of improved playing that are not directly related to ball-striking or shot-making

**JACK NICKLAUS** was born in 1940 in Columbus, Ohio, and maintains a home there and in Florida. Widely regarded as the greatest golfer of all time, he has achieved a record twenty major championship victories, consisting of two U.S. Amateurs, six Masters (also a record), four U.S. Opens, three British Opens, and five PGA Championships. The winner of more than 100 professional tournaments around the world, Nicklaus was named Golfer of the Century in 1988.