CHAPTER 7

Developing Your Own Golf Stroke

The Golf Swing Is Subject to the Laws of Physics

After a round of golf in my church league, I suggested to my opponent of the day that I would like to coach him for a few minutes behind the clubhouse. He accepted. I showed him what would happen to his nine-iron shots if at the beginning of his downswing he would pull on his left arm with his left shoulder in the direction he wanted the ball to go. He was soon hitting beautiful shots. Some weeks later, having caught up with his foursome on the tee because of a lost-ball delay, I watched him produce a beautiful, yes tremendous, drive, far and in the middle of the fairway. I asked him to supply me with the name of his driving coach. He replied, “I am using the same swing for driving that you showed me to use on my nine-iron shots.” The simple suggestion I gave him developed out of my study of the physics of the golf swing. He had made the significant discovery that if you can swing one club, you can swing them all.

The discussion presented so far has mostly involved theoretical aspects of the swing of a golf club. The question remains whether the general understanding coming from applying the laws of dynamics to the swing of a club can be used in the design of a practical swing, one a golfer can use to make golf a more enjoyable game.

It is doubtful that anyone can be told in complete detail, item by item, what must be done to produce a serviceable golf swing. A person can learn only by doing. But this does not mean that the doing should be done in a haphazard fashion. The theoretical understanding of the golf swing puts limits on what should be attempted in the doing, but it does not specify exactly what should be done. If the theoretical understanding did establish exactly what should be done, we should all be swinging like automatons. The theoretical understanding indicates the techniques that should be used, but within the general area of the correct technique, we may each develop our own style of swing. The differences expressed so dogmatically in the various books of golf instruction undoubtedly concern differences in style rather than differences in fundamental technique. The suggestions offered here should help the golfer to explore variations in style within the general area of the correct technique. The correct technique is essentially determined

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by the laws of physics and the limitations of the human body. Let us face the fact that our bodies are all different, and for this reason alone the style of the stroke that each of us may develop will differ from the style of other golfers. It appears that a great deal of golf instruction is of the nature of teaching a particular style rather than helping a golfer to develop a technically correct style of his own.

Learning to handle a golf club properly is very much like learning to play a musical instrument or learning to ride a bicycle. You may be able to say what you are supposed to do but be completely incapable of doing it. The skill of an activity of this kind comes only after some change in a person’s nervous system. Some say that a skill develops only as a learned movement is stored as muscle memory. It is doubtful that anyone knows exactly what happens to us when we learn something, either a manipulative skill or otherwise. We develop a skill by getting the “feel for it.” The most rapid approach to skill in golf is very consciously to develop a feeling for things that should be done. We shall look at ways of doing this.

**Putting the Swing Together**

My intention is to have you experience and feel the swing of a golf club as a dynamic event. Here, as well as on the practice tee, ideas have to be communicated by using words, and this implies that we have to cut the swing up into parts in order to discuss it properly. Dismembering the swing is a very artificial but probably necessary process. The real problem comes when the learner tries to put the various parts of the swing together into a dynamic whole. It appears that the best way to do this is to develop the feeling for the individual parts of the swing and to rely on remembering these feelings as the complete swing is being assembled.

**The Grip**

At the beginning of a golf stroke a golfer first grasps the club in his two hands in what is called the “grip.” Most golf instruction starts with an elaborate discussion of the grip. The grip is indeed an important aspect of the golf stroke, but we shall postpone discussing it until later. Some expert golfers hold the club one way, others hold it another way. If you wish to follow along with a club in your hands, you may use your present grip without worrying about what your own grip will ultimately become. I suggest that you should first develop your swing, the one that feels right for you and is repeatable, powerful, and precise, and then find how you must grasp the club so that as you come through