

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

The Art Versus The Science of Golf Instruction



After spending some time with Matt Frelich of TrackMan a couple of weeks ago, it got me thinking a lot about all the Facebook chatter about the art and science of golf instruction. After spending a couple of hours with Matt it's apparent that the technology now exists that provides every data point you could ever need to diagnose what is happening during the golf swing. This is exciting stuff, no doubt. Just the difference in what my wife, Cheryl, now has at her disposal in the 20 or so years she's been on the lesson tee is extraordinary.

Another amazing example is that the camera on her iPhone 6 provides the same capabilities as the Hultcher camera I used at GOLF Magazine and Golf Digest to take swing sequences. That one cost \$15,000 and you could barely carry it around in its travel case it was so heavy. The same can be said for force plates, putting stroke analyzers and so forth. When it comes to diagnostics, you're living in the right time and it's probably only going to get better.

But. And I believe it's a big "but." Are golf teachers today really better teachers and coaches because of these amazing technologies? I'm not so sure that more great teaching and coaching is being done today than was 20 or 30 years ago because these diagnostic tools are only the beginning of the chain of events that must occur for a lesson to deliver on all counts. And the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. There is the all important prescription of what to do to make a corrective change. Then there is the way that prescription is communicated. And, finally, there is the last ingredient: Putting all of the above into an enjoyable, low-stress package that allows the golfer to feel comfortable enough to trust your message and stick with it.

Along these lines, this month's newsletter on page 16 includes a new addition to our Proponent Group library which can be found on the members website. This new section includes your favorite books on learning, coaching and developing talent. Most focus on the entire process of learning a skill. Hopefully you've already read many of them.

I sense that the industry has become so enamored by "the numbers" that younger teachers in particular, are not learning the art of teaching. This includes having a huge arsenal of options to prescribe and a variety of ways to communicate each of these options. Martin Hall and Craig Shankland are two of my favorites in this regard. If there was a contest between them to list all of the ways they have fixed a pull-hook, we might be here all night.

And, I believe it is much easier to be Martin Hall and add diagnostic data into his lessons than it is for someone who has focused mostly on the diagnostics to add the art of teaching into their lessons.

"Everything on the science of the game has been written, little on how to learn it." said Percy Boomer in his book "On Learning Golf". That was in 1946. If you haven't read "On Learning Golf", order a copy today. It will mesmerize you with Boomer's ability to describe the sophisticated feels of the swing. The vivid images, terms and phrases he uses will remind you that great teaching is still very much an art form. Often he talks to his fellow teachers and one line in particular stands out to me when he says: "We use our imagination to translate theory into feeling." Even today, you still have to help create swing feels for your students.

Teaching is a communications craft. Always has been. Always will be. With today's incredible diagnostic tools taking the guesswork out, now you should really focus on the rest of the ingredients, rather than ignore them.

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