

Relaxation in the Golf Swing

Stiffening the Whole Body in the Swing, and
Lack of Relaxation, Spoil Many a Golfer

By Walter Hagen

Golfers Magazine, April 1922

As we go on and on in golf and get deeper into the game it becomes a very serious proposition. The beginner in taking his first course of lessons little realizes what he is doing. Lucky is the man that starts right and does not later have to reconstruct his game.

It has been said that it takes six years to make a golfer. Three years to learn the game and then another three to unlearn all that you have learned in the first three years. You might be a golfer when you arrive at this stage, but I am inclined to believe that you are just starting.

Too many of us start out trying to pick up the game without the aid of an instructor. As a result we form bad habits that sometimes take a long time to correct. Others start out with an instructor who teaches them a style of play unfitted for them. All professionals are different, just as all doctors differ in diagnosing a case, or lawyers disagree on a point of law.

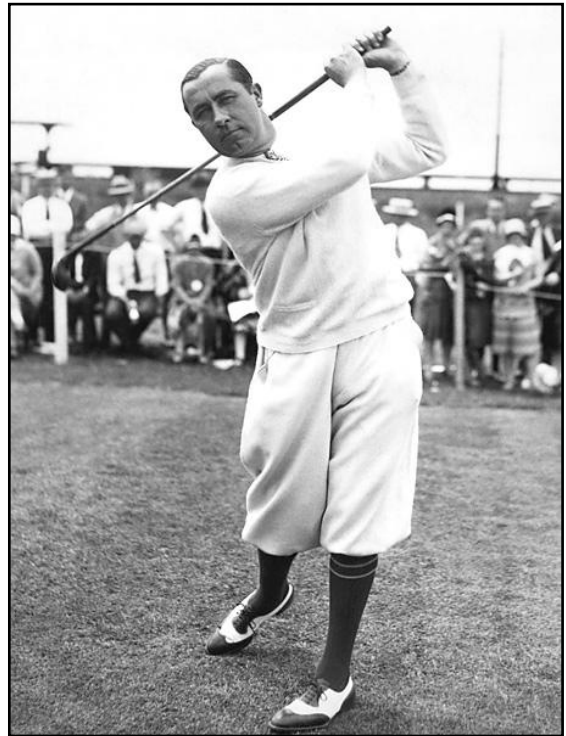
Professionals all have the same fundamentals, but here is where most of us stop and branch out along different ways. If it so happens that you get hold of the wrong instructor and find that your game is not developing, take a few lessons from another teacher. No pro should feel badly at losing a pupil under these circumstances. He probably has done all he can for you and has lost interest in your case. Perhaps it is your fault and you have lost interest in your instructor. A change of scenery will do you a world of good.

If you find yourself slipping and your game going back, try this change. If you haven't the opportunity to do this, take careful notice of the few very useful pointers that I am going to give my readers in this article.

First of all, I want to make a statement that if heeded will start you on the right road to success. Stiffening the whole body in the swing, and lack of relaxation spoil many a golfer. This is particularly so of older men, but the young do not always escape.

Many players have complained to me that they can go out on a practice tee and hit one good ball after another, then come in and start a round on the links and miss half of their drives when face to face with an opponent. This is because of the fact that they relax easily while on the practice ground and hit the ball with a freer swing.

One is inclined to be a little more careful playing in a match or a medal round and the mind refuses to let the muscles have full play just as they did while hitting the ball in practice. Duffers are not the only ones that make this mistake. I have seen just such a thing happen in championship golf where the contest is close.



A player with a fairly safe lead figures that he cannot afford to take any chances and begins to play safe. This is about the worst thing that he could do. Unconsciously he permits the body to stiffen and the swing is thrown out of its rhythm. Bad shots follow each other in rapid succession. The player thinks it is hard luck, but it is nothing more than what I have described. It is not always a case of losing one's nerve.

A player with a lead of several holes finds the lead hard to hold on to when he begins to play for a half instead of a win. The man behind is going out after everything and as a result he is hitting his shots straighter and more firmly with a relaxed, carefree swing.

Some golfers play a brilliant round after they find themselves hopelessly out of the tournament. Some start with a brilliant round then fade away when they begin to play careful golf.

If you find yourself driving poorly in a round there are a few things that might help you get back in your stride. One thing that I would suggest is to see that your feet are fairly well apart and that you are settled well back on your heels. It is exceedingly hard to press with your feet far apart. The temptation to sway back and forth is very great with the feet close together. The chances are that the mistake of getting the body into the shot too quickly will result from this stance.

Nearly every golfer knows that there are two styles of swings, the flat and the upright. There is more of a pivoting process with the flat swing than with the upright and there is always a great danger of turning too quickly on the ball and hooking it badly. It is difficult to keep the ball straight down the course unless your timing is perfect.

If one pivots, it is very necessary to keep the right elbow in close to the body. The straight left arm in the back swing is often talked about, but it can only be done when one uses the flat swing. It is physically impossible to keep a straight left arm in an upright swing.

If you are getting no distance in your shots, see to it that your grip on the club is tight. This often is the cause of bad playing. Knowing *when* to tighten the grip is important as many will begin their back swing with a death grip on the club as a result the whole body stiffens with it.