

Golfers, Train in Context



BY MICHAEL HEBRON, PGA MASTER PROFESSIONAL

IN "GOLD MEDAL WORKOUTS:" a story in *Newsweek's* December 17, 2001 issue, its author, Sharon Beley, points out U.S. Olympic hopefuls target just the right muscles when they are training for Gold Medals. Past Olympians share the same goals, but they would hardly recognize today's modern training techniques. Olympic coaches now realize athletes do not have to train more to improve, just smarter and more specifically, and golfers should be finding ways to do the same.

The U.S. Olympic Committee has found the best way to boost performance is by working the muscles and **practicing the motions** that are going to be used in competition.

Peter Davis, head of the sports science division of the U.S. Olympic Committee stated in Beley's story: "We have greatly increased our knowledge about what's happening at the cellular and molecular level in an athlete's body. We now design training so athletes can have more effective workouts and avoid going down dead-end streets."

James Walker, from the USCO's training site in Utah, states, "We have learned that effective training replicates the same patterns of nerve firings and muscle movements that athletes should use in their events." Golfers who want to enhance their approach to training should note that the U.S. Olympic Committee has found the best way to boost performance is by working the muscles and practicing the motions that are going to be used in competition. This is called sports-specific training, or training in context.

Unfortunately, there are golfers who are using drills and what are referred to as teaching aids that do not fire their nerves and muscles in patterns that are specific to

efficient golf swing motions for the variety of shots required on a golf course. The drills and teaching aids that golfers are told to use often miss the mark when it comes to an authentic representation of how golfers should be training for playing golf. Hitting balls on a range isn't golf-it's warming up.

It is human nature to become frustrated when golfers do not see improvement and are then drawn to drills and teaching aids, feeling the suggestions to use them can only help. But most drills and teaching aids are not training golfers for firing their neurons and muscles in patterns that replicate an efficient application of force for the variety of shots they will have to learn to play during a round of golf. "You have to stimulate the neuromuscular system to fire the specific pattern of motion you are training for competition." - James Walker.

There are a few sports motions that are more or less the same all the time. One example is a foul shot in basketball. Standing on the foul line, shooting shot after shot does have learning/training value. Basketball coaches will even introduce some distractions as players practice their foul shots, trying to create game like conditions. But golfers are never facing the same conditions during a round of golf.

Good golfers have learned to adjust their

swing for the shot they are about to play in the games ever-changing conditions. Every shot in golf has a desired ball flight that is unique. That reality requires golfers to acquire the skills of adjusting golf club's shaft, head, and club face through impact for a desired ball flight. These are skills that most teaching aids and repetitious drills will not enhance. When training, golfers should create game-like golf course conditions by fre-

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quently changing the kind of shots they are practicing.

Sports specific training, when it comes to golf, means shot specific training, or training in context. Most drills and teaching aids are aimed at fixing; they are not geared for pro-active learning. It is an unfortunate reality that drills and teaching aids do not enhance a golfer's problem solving; decision making skills and therefore are not an authentic representation of playing golf in ever changing conditions.

It has been said that some approaches to helping children learn to read are so overloaded with "flash cards" that reading is being left out of reading classes. Likewise it seems to me that "golf" is left out of some approaches for learning golf. Drills and teaching aids that are not firing a golfer's nerves and muscles in patterns that are replicat-

ing motions specific for playing golf should be avoided. Do not leave "golf" out of your training sessions for learning golf.

I suggest using learning developing approaches (filled with game like conditions) when you are training, and avoid fixing teaching approaches that require fol-

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lowing "how to" directions. It bears repeating that golf is a game that *is* played in ever-changing conditions and research from cognitive science suggests that golf training should reflect this reality.

Note: After a skill is learned, repeating it a number of times has value. But doing drills is less useful for learning a skill than random training with non-specific, just in the ballpark guidelines. Because teaching aids are not used when we are playing golf, their value for learning to play golf on a golf course should be evaluated for their real long term value. Most teaching aids and drills are not providing golfers with sports specific, in context learning opportunities. 0

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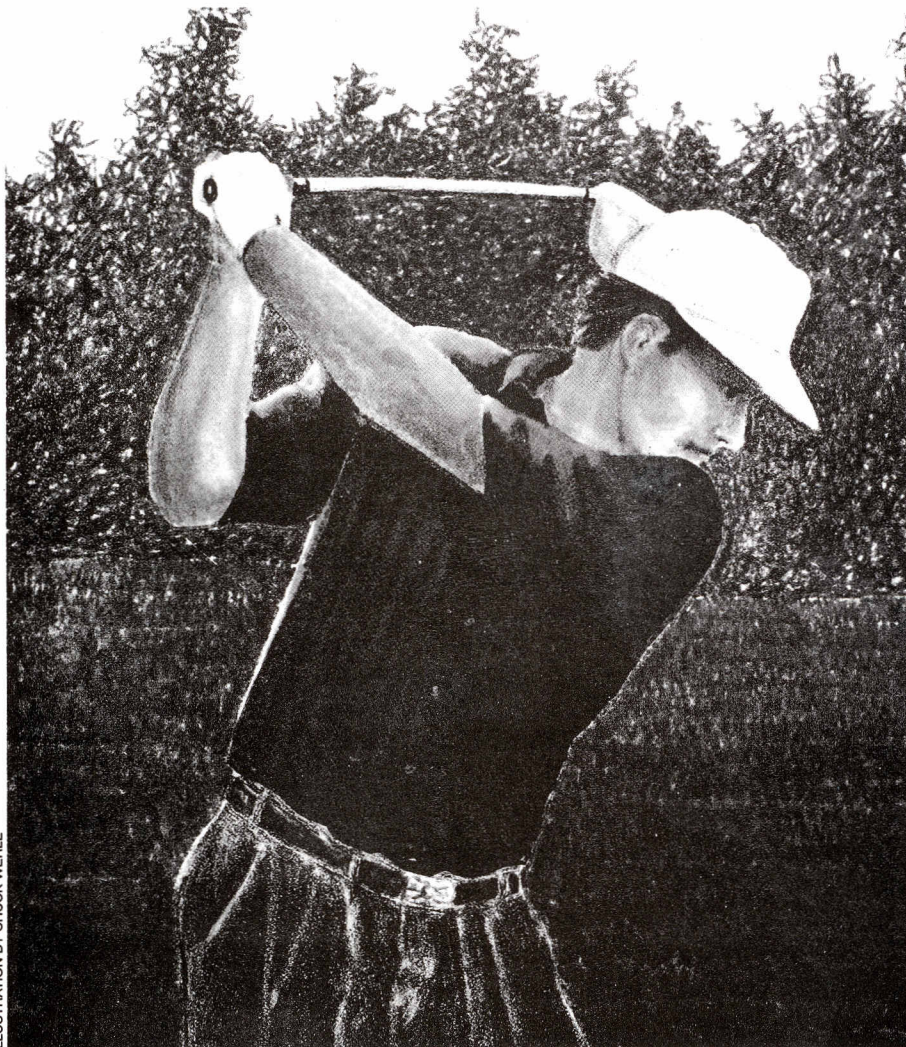


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