

WHY YOU NEED A COACH

Coaches Do Much More Than Provide Lessons, They Facilitate Learning and Long-Lasting Improvement

By Rick Jensen, Ph.D.



The most common complaint I hear from recreational golfers is that their game simply doesn't transfer from the lesson tee or the practice range to the golf course. They might experience some success in a lesson environment, hit a couple of great shots in a row with their coach present—or when trying out the latest swing tip they read in one of the instruction magazines—but when it comes time to deliver on the course, the same old swing flaws resurface. The high, 5-yard draw they thought they had mastered on the lesson tee is back to being a weak, stomach curdling 20-yard slice.

The reason this happens is because the skill they tried to implement was never truly learned in the first place. It was never ingrained in their motor cortex. Golf is a motor skill, it's not an academic skill. Playing better golf involves more than just knowing what the problem is and how to fix it. It requires continuous training and feedback over time—supervised practice, both on the course and off. And it requires making good decisions on the course that have little to do with how big a shoulder turn you're making or whether you're shifting your weight properly.

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This is where good coaching comes into play. The coaches at Golf Channel Academy are experts at walking you through the four steps of mastering a skill—that is, 1) disseminating knowledge (i.e., understanding cause and effect); 2) providing feedback during practice; 3) overseeing your transfer training on the course; and 4) providing additional insights while you play (i.e., learning important decision-making and self-management skills). They will be with you every step of the way to push the development of a skill up all of the required steps, as that is the only way to achieve sustained, lasting improvement.

Think back to when you were a child and were learning how to play a sport such as baseball, basketball, soccer, or gymnastics for the very first time. Or, if you didn't play sports as a kid, consider how your own children developed skills in these sports. Every day after school you were required to attend practice, and during that practice, the coach had you run drills, take extra batting, tumbling, or shooting practice, and scrimmage against one another to simulate real game conditions. During the actual games, your coach was there in the dugout or on the sidelines watching, providing encouragement, and instructing you along the way.

Not in golf. How many of you have actually taken an on-course playing lesson? Better yet, of those of you who have taken lessons, how many times has your teacher actually seen you play? Chances are they've never seen you play, which is absurd considering how most motor skills are learned. Most golfers' methodology for learning to play better golf is broken. Very broken. They think that golf is something they can learn on their own, or they take a lesson or two and then become convinced that they can do the rest. That's not how motor skills are learned. As these other sports point out, you need frequent, structured practice guided by a coach who provides regular feedback, some on-course instruction, and observes you play in competition. Only a coach will enhance the transfer of your game from the range to the course.

A quality golf coach is also going to teach you some things you'd never learn in a lesson, like when to hit your 3-wood versus driver off the tee, how to handle an in-between yardage, or how to overcome your fear of hitting off a tight lie. They go beyond the typical full-swing technical instruction you receive in a one-hour lesson and teach you those things that can improve your scores in a shorter amount of time, such as better course management and proper club selection.

Lastly, a quality coach is going to push you to do things that you wouldn't otherwise do on your own. Not only do they motivate and encourage you, but they hold you accountable in terms of executing your assignments (i.e., drills, practice plans, workout routines, etc.), much like that old coach of yours in high school who expected you at practice every day. If most golfers were left alone to walk themselves through the four steps of mastery, they'd never get off the first step, and chances are they wouldn't get any better.

When you think about it, there are so many reasons why it makes sense to hire a coach to work with you on a regular, long-term basis. Really, it's the first and most important step on the pathway to playing better, more consistent golf.



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