



Teaching the Tournament Player

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Improving the playing skills of the average club golfer requires changes in everything from grip, to stance, to ball position, to you name it. The player with high scores probably needs assistance with every area of how he or she plays. If that weren't the case, their scores would be lower.



The better player has a different set of issues, with narrower parameters of where there can be improvement. Working to improve this player's results can mean taking the player from posting a score of 70-72 on the weekend to potentially a 64 or 65. The better player usually has good fundamentals, an appreciation of the mechanics of the golf swing, and a personal history of learning about the game, whether from instructors, coaches, or reading instructional articles and books. The better player also practices regularly, has a commitment to always improving, and knows that getting to a higher level of play will be a more efficient process with the help of a good instructor.

The challenge for the instructor working with a better player is identifying where subtle changes will result in significant scoring improvement. The start of that process of improvement is observation by the instructor. While every element of the better player's fundamentals and swing will be under review just as with a club player, the better player will probably need smaller adjustments in technique. Learning about a better player's overall game demands patience from an

instructor in order to accurately appreciate what can be changed and how to best achieve that transition. It also requires you to travel to their office and watch them perform inside the ropes. The range of improvement for the better player may be as small as one shot per round. At the highest levels of competitive play, whether professional or amateur, that is the difference between making cuts, staying in contention, and eventually winning tournaments.

Working with the highly skilled Tour player or amateur also requires a great deal of communication and trust. The student has to believe that the teacher has both the knowledge and the sense of urgency to move the player's game to that next level. The better player does not have the time or inclination to get worse before they play better. The teacher must identify the most strategic area to focus on first and move to another area of his or her game when the circumstances permit. This is where I've learned a big difference between teaching the average club player and the Tour player. As soon as the Tour player feels comfortable they will provide the teacher with some direction on what they would like to work on next. They will offer clues by talking in terms of feel and describing ball flight patterns and solid contact. With most every club player it is the responsibility of the teacher to gauge the student's progress and set the lesson agenda.

One reward of working with the better player is that the motivation to improve is high. Three lessons and out is not the drill for the better player, because that player

knows that true game improvement takes a long time to achieve. Enduring repetitive drills for long periods of time discourages the poor player who wants quick change. These same drills for the better player can be satisfying because it means there definitely will be better results if the right process is performed.

The more effectively an instructor can isolate each element of the golf swing and analyze how a golfer performs, then the sooner recommendations can be made and drills identified that will improve play. If the better player must work harder than the average player to be able to compete effectively, it is also true that the instructor of the better player must devote more time and attention in understanding where improvement can be made. The reward for that effort is seeing a player lift a trophy into the sunlight at the end of a tournament.

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