

My Time with Manuel

By Bill Newkirk

About the author Bill Newkirk:

Bill's "My Time With Manuel" is a treasure to read, especially for all those who have had their own time with Manuel de la Torre. As you read Bill's recollections you may appreciate why it was important to share these stories with us.

Bill's influence, like Manuel's, extended to helping other golf professionals teach golf. He gave me my first lesson, introducing me to the "swing the club" concept. Then he convinced me to call Manuel for a lesson. I nervously made that call at 9:00 and scheduled a lesson. Bill would observe my lessons with Manuel and quiz me on what Manuel taught me and why it worked. He became very good at making me think by asking probing questions. We all know where he learned that skill. Bill passed along his knowledge of how to teach golf. His ability to make teaching simple and fun got me started and made me better. He was such a positive influence on all those who were fortunate to know him. We miss him.

About two years after Bill passed away I found boxes of golf memorabilia held by his wife Patti in their home. We were very surprised to find, at the bottom of one of those boxes, an envelope full of Manuel de la Torre newspaper and magazine articles and a handwritten manuscript. We knew he had been working on a book of recollections with Manuel, but even Patti didn't know he'd completed a draft of "My Time with Manuel". With apologies to my dear friend Bill for some minor edits here and there I am glad to share "My Time With Manuel" with you.

David Comeau

Forward

In my time with Manuel at the range, Perkins restaurant in Glendale, in the car or at his home, we had terrific conversations on a very wide range of topics. It was really enjoyable getting to know Manuel's interests and views through our conversations concerning world events. But during any of these conversations, out of nowhere, there would be a question or comment getting us back to the subject of teaching golf. For his whole and wonderful life in golf Manuel's true passion was teaching golf. That is why he has written so much on the game. "My time with Manuel" is simply a reflection of the notes, recordings, remembrances of all the enjoyable time we spent together talking about something we both truly love. Having said all that, Manuel's wonderfully written book, "Understanding the Golf Swing" is the standard we refer to as the bible. A book that we cannot refer back to enough.

Bill Newkirk

Beginnings at Milwaukee Country Club

In 1950, while Manuel was working as an assistant to his father at LakeShore Country Club in Glencoe, IL a Dunlop salesman mentioned that the head professional job at Milwaukee Country Club would be opening up as long time head pro Red Leonard had announced his retirement. Manuel's father encouraged him to apply. Manuel and Joan, who had never been to Milwaukee, drove there to hand deliver his application. As they drove through the beautiful tree-lined entrance with the stately clubhouse and perfectly manicured grounds, they looked at each other and smiled. Manuel said to Joan, "I'll never get this job, this is way over our heads." Joan agreed and they headed back to Glencoe.

On January 3, 1951, after Manuel qualified for the Los Angeles Open at Riviera he got a call on the pay phone in the men's locker room. The job was his if he wanted it and of course he said yes. Manuel asked if he should drop out of the tournament and head back to prepare for the season ahead. The response was to go play and play well in the L.A Open. I asked Manuel when he first played the golf course that spring and what was his impression? Manuel said, "in spring, I didn't play the course until August. They didn't hire me to play golf, they hired me to run the shop and teach the members." Because of his upbringing, Manuel always saw himself as an employee of the club. He mentioned that when the club was doing well, that meant job security for all who worked there, himself included. The one thing that Manuel repeated to me the most during the time I knew him was how very fortunate he was to be the head professional at MCC, a place he truly loved.

Sam Snead

Manuel has always said that Sam Snead was his favorite golfer. He loved his simple fluid swing and really enjoyed playing with him. Despite what others have said, Sam was very courteous and a complete gentleman in Manuel's presence. They were paired together in the final round of the 1950 Tucson Open. Tied for the lead going into the 10th hole, Sam hit his tee shot well left towards the trees and maintenance barn. It was possibly out of bounds. Manuel, who hit every fairway on the front 9 said he was uncharacteristically thinking don't go left. Manuel drove it into the right rough and the ball partially embedded in a bunker eventually making a double bogey. Meanwhile, Sam's drive bounced out of the trees and into the fairway. After a fine approach shot holed the putt. Sam walked off with a birdie. On the next whole, a par 3, Sam's tee shot air mailed the green. When they got up to the green, Sam's ball was lying on the fringe. Later on the following hole he noticed his wife Joan, who was following him in the gallery, was crying. He asked what was wrong. Joan was worried that Manuel would be penalized since Sam's tee shot on the previous hole had hit her and bounced back just off the green. Chandler Harper ended up winning the tournament with Sam taking 2nd place and Manuel tying for 3rd. Manuel had two comments relating to that tourney. His first comment was that you never

know what will happen in a round of golf. Secondly, looking back he realized how green he was at the time. Instead of thinking don't think left on number 10, he should have simply picked a target down the fairway and made his swing. He admitted it took him some time to realize this.

Manuel tells the story of how Sam could be taken advantage of. A stranger bet Sam \$200 that he could out drive him during the course of the round. Sam accepted and after sixteen holes, the bet seemed safe. On the 17th hole, a par 3, Sam hit first putting his shot on the green. His opponent took out his driver, hitting the ball way over the green and then demanding Sam pay up. Manuel believed that incidents like this made Sam quite leary, especially around strangers.

Manuel also recounts a time during the week of the Milwaukee Open. Manuel was about to begin his practice round at Merrill Hills when Sam came up to Manuel and asked if he could play a practice round with him. So they played together and had a good time. Manuel says imagine Sam Snead asking if I would mind him playing with me.

Caribbean Tour

Manuel really enjoyed his time on the Caribbean Tour. He loved the different cultures, geography and golf courses. He especially loved Colombia with its diverse landscapes, the Andes Mountains and beautiful golf courses. He was an assistant director of the tour for 15 years. In addition to those duties, he would also put on golf clinics. At times he would give two clinics a day, one in English and one in Spanish.

I was fortunate enough to be told a few stories about players during that time on the Caribbean Tour. He shared a few with me: Manuel and I were talking about players he played with and Roberto Di Vincenzo's name came up. I mentioned to him that although I only saw a little bit of him on TV and didn't know much about his career, it seemed as though he was a fine strong ball striker, I thought he was a very average putter. He gave that stern look on his face and said "Roberto won more professional golf tournaments than any man that has ever lived and you can't accomplish that without putting well. Roberto was an excellent putter." Enough said. Manuel and Roberto became very good friends. He called Roberto " the heart and soul of the Caribbean Tour" and gave this example; Mr. Lu, the diminutive Taiwanese golfer, famous for his hats, was playing in 1972 Panama Open. After playing an excellent first round, he was informed that he was to be penalized two strokes for slow play. Mr. Lu was quite upset with the ruling and after threatening to drop out of the tournament many of the players, including Manuel, tried to talk Mr. Lu into staying in the tournament, with no success. Finally, Roberto was called in to talk with Mr. Lu. He changed his mind, accepting the penalty and continued in the tournament. I asked Manuel what happened then. He said, "Damned (the only time I ever heard Manuel

swear) if he didn't win the tournament." I finally asked if Mr. Lu was indeed a slow player and he replied, " he was very slow."

For several years the Puerto Rican Open was held very near a casino with many of the players staying there, Manuel included. Although Manuel was not a gambler, allowed himself \$20 a day, laughing that he usually wasn't there very long. One evening at the BlackJack table with his minimal bet in front of him, from behind a hundred dollar bill was placed on top of his. Manuel had 16, with the dealer having a 9 up. Manuel hits and busts, oh well. The next year the same thing, a \$100 bill put on top of his bid. This time Manuel has 19, but the dealer has 20. The man standing behind him and betting the \$100 was none other than AL Besselink, "Bessie" as he was called. Although complete opposites, they became good friends.

There was one other curious interaction between the two of them. Manuel told me that Bessie asked him what his secret to meeting women was. Manuel was surprised by the question, nonetheless gave him some advice. The next year Al asked Manuel again and Manuel replied, "did you not listen and take my advice?" Manuel could not understand why Bessie would ask him such a question in the first place since Al knew Manuel was happily married to Joan. Manuel surmised that his Spanish heritage may have had something to do with it.

Trends

Over the years Manuel has seen many trends come and go. Some of these are strong grips, weak grips, big leg drive in the forward swing, reverse "c", both flat and up-right swing planes, taking the club straight back, or even slightly outside on the backswing and than rerouting it coming forward, swinging left quickly after impact on the forward swing, and others. Many of these trends are directly influenced by what the best players on the tour are doing at the time. Manuel has always stayed true to the simple never changing principles of geometry and physics and applied them in his teaching of golf. He believes in holding the club in a balanced manner where the hands are in balance with each other and with the clubface. The club swings back in a circular manner over the back shoulder. In the forward swing the club is swung forward in the same direction as the backswing using the arms in one motion to the target. Rather than forcing body positions, the body simply responds to the motion of the swing finishing erect with the back heel off the ground. Since the de la Torre and Jones families became close, young Manuel would listen in on the discussions of the golf swing between his father and Ernest Jones. Of course, the principles expounded in these discussions would form the basics for Manuel's playing and teaching career.

Teaching Golf in a Positive Manner

The one thing that really stands out when observing Manuel teaching, or having him as your instructor, is how he did it in such a positive way. In all of my time observing him he would have the student focus on doing one positive thing while producing the swing. Often, the shot itself might not have been that good, but as long as you did the one positive thing during your swing that he asked of you, he would say "fine" or "that's correct."

A member of the Milwaukee CC who wintered in Florida, called Manuel and talked to him at length about how difficult their course was. He mentioned all the water, deep bunkers, and that thick bermuda rough. After listening to all this Manuel asked the member if the golf course had any tees, fairways and greens. When a student would mention that the fairways were difficult to hit because they were so narrow, Manuel would point out that on a fairway 30 yards wide. 643 golf balls will fit side by side.

When a student would hit a poor shot and immediately would turn around and ask "What did I do wrong?" Manuel would famously reply "Why do you want to do it again?" While he always wants the student to focus on using the club properly, he also believes that it is very important to know about your "individual tendencies." According to Manuel there are many ways to do it wrong, but just one way to do it right. As both his father and Ernest Jones would say, "if you do it right, it can't be wrong."

When a student would execute their swing in the way Manuel asked, he would not hesitate to say "that's correct." What a great feeling it was to have after this comment from Manuel and the positive reinforcement it ignites. It makes you want to do it over and over. The only better response you could get from Manuel was after an exceptional swing in which Manuel would say "perfect." Well, there is simply no better feeling in golf than that! He wanted his students to play well with confidence and not be concerned with where the ball goes. Play with the belief he says that by swinging the club at the target, the ball will follow in the same direction- at the target. This to him was a much less stressful and therefore more enjoyable way to play golf.

The Modern Pro Game

Of course Manuel's insights on how Professional Golf has changed since he played would be quite interesting and we spoke about it often, many times as we were watching all the tours play on TV. Manuel believes today's players are stronger and more fit due to their workout routines. He marvels at how often they hole out from off the green and how well they putt. He also thinks that especially on the PGA tour, the men do not hit as many fairways off the tee as they should and miss the green too often with only wedge shots left for their approaches. As humble as Manuel was, he did say that he very rarely missed the green with a wedge. He may not have gotten as close to the flag as he wished, but he didn't miss the green entirely.

Manuel has also noticed that there is much more emphasis on distance on the men's Pro Tour. When Manuel played most players drove the ball in the 245 to 260 yard range with a few players reaching 280 to 300 yards. A main way to score, back then was to find the fairway off the tee giving the player a much better chance of hitting his approach close to the flag. It was much more difficult to control the shot from the rough, especially with a longer club. When Manuel watches today's players he senses they are not so much concerned about being in the fairway but closer to the green with a more lofted club whether in the fairway or not. They believe they can get the ball closer to the hole even out of the rough with a shorter, more lofted club. Certainly a different way of thinking than in Manuel's time.

Manuel as my Instructor

After that very nervous phone call to set up my lesson with Manuel, the time was here. I had heard so much about him but yet I wasn't really sure what to expect. As I drove up there I was a bit nervous, but told myself three things. First, I was about to meet a man who was very well respected by all so he must be easy enough to talk to. Second, with all of his knowledge I will learn a lot about the game I love and third, since I was struggling with my game with some, for me, unusual problems, I was sure to get back on track with Manuel's instruction.

After a short introduction, Manuel asked if I was familiar at all with his concept and after explaining that I was, we got right to work. I had reserved an hour lesson with him and we worked on two different problems. The first was my alignment. My aim was a bit to the right. I really didn't believe him at first (imagine that), but he would ask me to aim at a target, come over, hold my club and have me go behind and look where it was pointing and sure as heck it was a bit to the right. He made sure my alignment was correct on every swing. It sure felt as though I was aiming to the left.

I had been hitting some pull fades which was unusual for me. He quickly got to the root of the problem. My club was going straight back on my backswing and since I did not reroute the club coming forward my swing would be left of the target with the face open to that direction. He both showed and explained that the swing was to be swung in a circular direction. He put a tee down about 16 inches straight back from the target line and told me to see the club going to the inside and missing the tee. It felt odd and sometimes I did it correctly but about half the time I would hit the tee. He said that when I hit the tee I was using my arms to start swinging the club back rather than using both hands. By using both hands it became easier to swing the club on the circle and miss that tee. The lesson ended and I thanked him, told him that I would really work on these two things and get back to him. I was excited on the way home and after spending one hour with Manuel, I felt quite comfortable and knew why he was so admired both as a gentleman and instructor.

Several weeks later I had my second lesson with Manuel and another interesting experience. We got right to work and immediately worked on the direction of my

swing. He was very complimentary and that it had improved in both directions noting that he could see that I had really worked on that problem, however my alignment was still not correct. On this issue he was pretty tough, saying I was not paying enough attention to it. I gave him my explanation that when I was younger my grip turned quite a bit more to the right with both hands and I hooked the ball a lot then causing me to aim to the right to allow for it. I had recently changed to a neutral grip to get rid of my hook, but still felt comfortable aiming to the right. Manuel wasn't having any of this. He said quite forcefully that what happened in the past did not matter, it's what's going on right now that matters. The rest of the lesson went well with Manuel being complementary on correct alignments and good swings. I recall on the way home Manuel sure could be quite straightforward, but I knew he only wanted to see improvement in these two areas.

In my early years with Manuel I only saw him three or four times a year but the lessons were always very positive. The lessons were usually in the fall when he had more time which was really great. I would ask plenty of questions which he liked and his answers were always very thorough and simply explained. On the other side as anyone who has spent time with Manuel on the lesson tee knows you have to be ready for questions he would ask when you least expected them. It was always rewarding when you gave the correct answer but when you didn't Manuel's explanation was always so simple that you would ask yourself why didn't I think of that? Even though my lessons with him were infrequent during these few years, with his permission I would come and watch him teach when I had the chance. He would talk over the phone and discuss the lessons and I believe that this really helped move our friendship forward.

A very important part of being a good instructor is being a great psychologist and Manuel certainly was that. In the first instant he relieved my stress when I really needed it and in the second instance he gave me the kick in the pants that was necessary to get me back on track. Manuel always wanted his students to become well-rounded players. He emphasized practicing and being able to play any type of shot that you may encounter during a round of golf.

The really great thing about using the Manuel system is that to play all the various shots: the low, high, intentional slice and hooks, The gravity, shot sand shots and others you use the same basic swing. The change that is made is in the set up. There are no changes in the grip or swing.

In the latter years when Manuel had more time, we really were able to try many different things you wouldn't be able to do in a half hour lesson. He would have me use several different clubs to the same target, using my driver to play shots under trees on the West side of the range, buried lies in the sand trap, the gravity shot, the dreaded 40 yard bunker shot, using a putter from the rough just off the green, the perched lie, with a restructured swing starting from the top of the backswing and others.

Out of nowhere he would have me try to copy a touring pro's swing. One day he said that I was to be Dustin Johnson, and had me turn both hands way to the right on the grip and swing. I told him that the ball would go straight into the trees on the left. It felt really awkward holding the club that way, but he told me what to do and as strange as it felt the ball went straight. Another time he had me try to initiate Fred Couples swing taking the club back way outside. Again, following his instruction, the ball went to the target. He also frequently complemented Tim Furyk's Swing. What all three really have in common are different back swings but play golf on the highest level due to consistent forward swings. Manuel would say that even though the backswing is important the forward swing is more so since that is where the ball is taken. Only in golf he says the importance of the first half of the motion emphasized so much.

Often on a first lesson with Manuel he would start with the "little ones," working on their motion. This was also helpful in that it took all thought a distance away. Manuel and I spent many an hour on the "little ones" He emphasizes using the whole club in the forward swing. I had a tendency, like most golfers, to use the club head and my hands to try to help the shot, especially with a poor lie, which led to inconsistent contact. With a lot of work together I really did improve. This not only helped my shots around the green, but also my full swing. Manuel really did not like the term quote "clubhead speed." He preferred club speed since the shaft and the grip were connected on the whole club more together. Many poor shots are the result of that last split second attempt to add speed to the club head by using the hands according to Manuel. The solution is to swing the whole club using your arms and that is what we worked on.

I had a tendency to "hit" my putts at times. He had me address the ball with the club behind my back foot and with no backswing roll the ball to the target. With practice this did help me take the hit out of my stroke.

Throughout the years of working with Manuel on my swing my main fault is swinging the club to the left on my forward swing. During a lesson while swinging to the left, Manuel sensing my frustration, stopped me and said "human beings are creatures of habit, this happens to all of us." He said to continue to visualize the club going to the target and then go and do it. I have improved on it but I know I will always need to be aware of the tendency of mine to come back.

In His Spare Time

In records available through Milwaukee Country Club spanning 43 years there he gave approximately 45,700 lessons. This number going through his lesson books was counted in a very conservative way. There are no records for his last two years as head professional at the club.

This number does not include lessons given to both local PGA and LPGA Professional men and ladies district teams, caddy and club employees and lessons given during the offseason especially in Florida. It also does not include instruction he gave while playing on the Caribbean tour where he gave seminars in both English and Spanish There also were no records found for any lessons given as Pro EMERITUS this from 1996 until his final year of teaching 2015.

What really stands out to me, looking at his log was how well he played with so little time to prepare. For example he made the cut at the PGA Championship despite giving 57 lessons the week before. He gave 19 lessons on Tuesday 11 on Wednesday and even taught on Sunday morning before leaving for the tournament in Firestone Country Club in Akron OH.

In the 1963 PGA he was tied for fifth place after two rounds with Jack Nicklaus eventually tying for 17th place. The week prior he gave 54 lessons including 16 on Tuesday and 18 on Wednesday. The tournament was played at the Dallas Athletic Club in oppressive Heat. Also, prior to the 1965 PGA he gave 49 lessons.

Besides teaching he fulfilled his other duties at Milwaukee Country Club. You wonder when he had time to work on his game and play practice rounds. This held true for the tournaments he played as a member of the Wisconsin section of the PGA where he won five State Opens and five State PGA Championships with the same kind of schedule. They started on Mondays and he wasn't at the club teaching on Sundays He would play a practice round on Monday his off day prior to the tournament.

A Different Way of Thinking

After spending even a little time with Manuel, it was quite obvious that he had a different way of looking at things. His thought process seemed to come from a very different angle than mine and talking to others they agreed. Oftentimes showed itself in questions he would ask.

We both really loved tennis and would talk about it often. One day at lunch at the Perkins restaurant that he favored, he asked me out of the blue what is the object in tennis? I really wasn't ready for his question and gave several weak responses. After all my confident talk about tennis I couldn't answer the most basic question about it. He gave me that look and said "hit the ball over the net because if you don't nothing else matters." I thought it was so simple it was hard.

He has often been criticized for saying that he never tried to make a putt. He explained his way of thinking this way saying that all you can do is read the putt to the best of your ability and roll the ball on that line. He said that if you try to make the putt, you are putting pressure on yourself and are thinking about the outcome which is in the future, rather than the basic notion of rolling the ball to the intended target. With this calm attitude towards putting there would be very little chance of the yips occurring.

He asked the question of me and many others. With your car in the driveway, what do you have to do to go somewhere? There were many answers to that question including: opening the door, having the car in park, putting the key in the ignition, foot on the brake, turning the key, putting the car in reverse and others. Manuel said these may all be true, but if you don't have a picture in your mind as to where you are going, you won't know whether to turn right or left out of your driveway. This is one of the many ways he would relate things we do in everyday life to golf. In golf we must see the shot and keep the picture of the target while we swing to it.

After a round on the way home in the car, I would analyze my round. I think about my strategy, my club selection or what parts of my game needed work. Manuel said he never did that. He looked at it differently. He would go right back to saying that when he practiced, he worked on all phases of his game to be that complete golfer. He did not believe in second guessing his decisions on the course because it was over and there was nothing you could do about it. One morning at breakfast, he asked what seemed to be a very odd question. He asked "What do you use a golf ball for? Why do you need it?" I answered by saying you need it to practice or play golf or to know where to hit your next shot from. His answer was that you need a golf ball to keep score. Interestingly enough, he said that you could play your home course in your background using your clubs and knowing your swing you can picture where your tee shot would end up then choose a club for your approach to

the green. You could never be sure how close it would be to the hole or whether you made the putt that's what you need the ball for- to keep score!

Manuel would ask what are the three things necessary to play or practice golf? The three things are very basic and after giving many different answers, most students get the first two: golf balls and golf clubs. Very few could get the third- the target! Manuel stresses that golf needs a target, and without a target, all the player is doing is getting exercise!

Players often mention their first desire to shoot a certain score. Manuel has never looked at it that way. He explains it this way: good swings equal good shots equal good scores, and no matter what, that order can never be changed.

By focusing on shooting a desired score, the player's thoughts are not on producing his swing, which will produce the shots he needs to shoot that score. Manuel said that he was not aware of what score he was shooting. He focused on making good swings, and added up his score when he was finished.

Fortunate One

As I spent more time with Manuel, it seemed as though just about everything went well for him. Was he just fortunate or were there reasons for it? I'll give you some examples and let you decide for yourself.

Manuel really loved to drive and he traveled quite a bit over the years during the winter months. He loved to listen to classic music as he drove. He mentioned that he never got lost on any trip he took. I told him that I couldn't believe that. Everyone has gotten lost at one time or another. Manuel said that he carefully studied the maps necessary to make the trip before he left. With his amazing memory, he merely drove right to his destination. Automobiles breaking down in those earlier years was not uncommon at all, but Manuel said that it never happened to him. He realized that he was quite fortunate in this regard, but pointed out his vehicles were always very well maintained and he would trade in his car at 80,000 miles. Not even a flat tire? I asked, since tires especially back then were more prone to go flat. He said no, but he regularly checked his tire pressure and rotated the tires. He admitted that car problems on the road would have made things quite difficult since his car was very tightly packed. It would have been very challenging, he said, when they took young Lynn with her playpen and their portable washer in the back.

One day Manuel did admit to a problem. He always filled the car with gas in the evening to get a fresh start the next morning. One evening, he did not and ran out of gas the next day. In very short notice a car pulled over and the gentleman asked what the problem was. When Manuel told him he opened up his trunk and inside were several containers of gasoline. The good samaritan was actually a manager

for Texaco. He filled his tank and when Manuel tried to pay him he refused any money just asking that the next time he filled up to use a Texaco station if possible. I asked Manuel if he did and he replied “of course, that man really helped me out.”

Throughout his entire golf career, Manuel noted that he never had any putting problems. He said he never had anxiety or anything like the yips for a couple of reasons. He was taught by his father at a very young age to not focus on trying to make the putt, but rather see the ball rolling on the line you picked all the way to the end. Seeing the line and rolling the ball on that line took the focus away from both his stroke and trying to make the putt, he said. He also used a “high center” when he putted; that is, he used his arms to swing the putter rather than using the hands as many players did in those earlier years.

Manuel also noted that he never had any major swing problems and never even considered changing the swing. He stuck with the principles his father gave him as a young boy. He credits his father, Angel, who he believes is one of the greatest teachers who ever lived, with much of his success both as a player and instructor.

Good health was also something he was blessed with. He believed that he was due in part by good eating habits, and being a non-smoker, a light dinner and the physical activity he engaged in. Besides golf, Manuel also played tennis and handball to keep in shape. So, when looking at these aspects of Manuel’s life, it seems as though he was fortunate in many ways.

None of this would have occurred if, on that October day in 1936, Manuel—having just turned fifteen—had boarded a bus for Madrid with his mother and brother as planned. The bus was later machine-gunned, and everyone aboard was killed.

High School Golf

When Manuel arrived in the United States he attended Highland Park High School, north of Chicago. His father became the head professional at Lake Shore Country Club in Glencoe. Their main high school golf rivals had a habit of looking in their golf bag to check what clubs they were using. Manuel had a plan for this. There were three par “3’s” during their upcoming match of 120, 160 and 180 yards. With the versatility he had in his game already he used his five iron on all of those holes, playing them in one under par. I asked Manuel how the match went, and with that smile of his, he said he won, adding that he didn't lose much in high school. True indeed, as a junior, he finished second in the state tournament and as a senior during the 1939-1940 season he was the state champ shooting 147 and winning by eight shots.

Troubling Shots

On more than one occasion I asked Manuel what shot, or shots, were the most difficult for him. He referenced that he believed the 30 to 60 yard bunker shot was the most difficult shot in golf. However, he sometimes struggled with fairway bunker shots. His contact was not quite as precise and consistent as he would have liked. In his book on page 132 he gives three different ideas on how to improve your fairway bunker play. Manuel finally noted, with that wise smile of his, that he rarely got in them!

In Between Clubs

Manuel could never understand what players (or announcers) meant when they said he or she was in between clubs. He never believed there was such a thing. He mentioned that if there was a 12 yard "gap" between clubs, then only once in 12 times would you have the correct club. He believes that 14 clubs are plenty, and there is always a club to be used for any given shot. Manuel said that, for example, your shortest club is a sand wedge and its maximum distance is 80 yards, couldn't it be used for shorter shots too, even from only a few yards? If this were true of your sand wedge, why not all the others?

He believed it was great practice to use various clubs to go the same distance. Let your mind see the shot to make the swing necessary to reach the target. Using different clubs improves your distance control and makes you use the club properly.

Putting

According to Manuel, there are two different types of putting strokes. Either you putt on an arc which he recommends or straight back and through. Swinging the putter on an arc is more natural since, as with all clubs, you are standing on the side of the ball and the putter is inclined to you. The putter then swings on an arc or circle just as it does on your full swing. When this is done the putter face is always square to that arc. At address, the flatter the putter the more the arc, the more upright the putter the less the arc. The only way to naturally swing the putter straight back and through would be to have the putter standing vertical. Taking a stance with a vertical putter would be very difficult.

I mentioned to Manuel that one winter I tried to change my stroke using Horton Smith's book "The Secret of Holing Putts", in which he advocated swinging the putter straight back and straight through. Using a yardstick, I tried to roll the ball, and found it difficult and frustrating to do. Manuel noted to do this you must hood the club going back and open it coming forward, which he believed is difficult to do

consistently. He finally mentioned that he observed Horton Smith putting on several occasions and he in fact putted on a small arc himself.

Manuel always emphasized seeing the ball roll to end on the line that you pick. That to him is the essence of putting. It's that simple.

One of the members at Milwaukee CC had a very odd putting stroke. He picked the putter up abruptly to the outside. This member however consistently rolled the ball on his line and was one of the best putters in the club. Manuel believed that if he had tried to change his stroke he would have ruined his putting.

Manuel did not believe in aggressive putting. When you putt aggressively you must be even more accurate because if the ball approaches the hole too fast and doesn't enter the center or very near center of the hole it may lip out. He also noted that nobody is that good at making all of those three to six foot comeback putts, and it is much less stressful if the putt is rolled up to the hole and just tap in the next putt,

Manuel believes that today's putters are better because they used their arms to putt rather than using their hands. Just like the full swing, using your arms is vital to more consistent putting as there are so many ways your hands can manipulate the club or putter. Manuel calls using your arms to swing the putter using a "high center". One reason he believed earlier players used their hands more for putting was the longer, irregular, more grainy and bumpy greens. If they putted on today's near perfect greens the hands type of putting would not be necessary. He quipped that today's fairways are similar to greens years ago.

Consistency

What question has been asked more, especially from those who have been playing a while? It's "how can I be more consistent?" How does one become more consistent? According to Manuel it is constant work on the swing fundamentals.

It all starts with how you hold the club and making sure that you always hold it the same way. Manuel's father showed him the correct grip and advised him to check it every time. According to Manuel in an article in Golf Magazine, his father never really had a slump in his career in large part because his grip never changed. Your hands do not always feel the same on the golf club in humid weather for example it is not uncommon for your hands and fingers to puff up somewhat. This will cause quite a different feel of your hands on the club. Regardless of how they feel on the club, Manuel notes you must look at your hands as you place them on the club to ensure they are correct. He developed this good habit as a young boy and continued it the rest of his life. Even at 93 years of age, he always checked to see that the "v's" from both hands pointed to his center, thus giving him the balanced grip he desired. Certainly, this is great advice for any golfer since your hands are the

only link to the golf club. If they are not placed on the club the same way every time, you are adding one more variable to your golf game. This is certainly not the route to consistency.

Another key fundamental is alignment. Poor alignment can lead to a myriad of swing problems. Most common is the player believes either their feet, hips or shoulders should aim at the target. In the case of the right handed golfer when the club is placed behind the ball he will be aiming well to the right. Proper alignment is a swing fundamental.

Manuel believes that the player should use his basic swing to play all shots. Some players will change their swings or grips to play various shots. Manuel does not believe in this and gives an example. A player is preparing to play in a tournament where the greens are surrounded by deep greenside bunkers. The player spends a significant amount of time working on sand shots. He has heard so often that you need to swing outside-in to play these shots and he works hard at it. Then, as Manuel says, "now pick up your driver and enjoy those pull slices". Certainly again, not the route to consistency.

It's common today for players to hit down on the irons and swing up with the driver. For more consistent play Manuel advises the player to neither hit down or up, but to swing the club forward to the end of the swing. By swinging all of your clubs with a forward intent, the club will be used the way it was intended. If the player swings the same with every club when he's practicing with his wedge he is actually practicing with all his clubs. The only difference is the length of the club. Swinging with this intent will certainly aid one's consistency.

Avoid "flavor of the day" tips and constantly changing your swing. Consistency comes from repeating your fundamentals. Constant changing of your swing or "tips of the day" will get you only further from your goal of consistency.

Work on your basic swing that produces a straight shot. When trying to curve the ball or play a special shot merely change your set up. Manuel believes there is too much emphasis today on curving the ball. He adds, if you were close enough to throw the ball on the green with the flag on the right for example, would you try to put a curve on it to get near the flag, or would you throw the ball straight at it?

To be more consistent: 1) Hold the club the same way every time by looking at your hands while placing them on the club; 2) Aim the clubface at the target first and then set your body square to it; and 3) Use the same swing for every shot you play and make that swing to the target.

Changing Your Swing

Too often players who want to go to the “next level” will change their basic swing. Manuel could never understand this way of thinking. Several times Manuel would refer back to his return from the 1942 NCAA tournament where he made it to the finals. His father asked him if he knew what he was doing, does it work, and if it does spend the rest of your life perfecting it. Manuel often has said that it was the best advice he ever got.

Manuel believed that Tiger Wood would have broken all men’s professional records had he not continued to change his swing. It took Tiger around 20 years from his beginnings as a young boy to perfect his swing, according to Manuel. There is simply not enough time in a golf professional’s life (or for that matter, anybody’s) life to change and perfect new golf swings.

Without naming individual players, Manuel insists the list of players who made major swing changes were never the same again is quite long, while those who changed and saw significant improvement in their game is very short indeed.

Off the Back Foot

On short chip shots and pitches you will very often see the player place the club off the back foot. Manuel believes this is not necessary, but players do this because they are afraid of hitting the shot fat. By placing the club off the back foot with the hands well ahead, the club contacts the ball before the bottom of the arc, essentially de-lofting the club and creating a lower shot. Manuel would prefer with a level lie to put the club in the center which would result in contact at the true bottom of the arc which would use the loft of the club as it was designed.

The problem is made worse when the player has the desire to hit a high shot while using this setup. The player will feel the need to lift the ball to get the desired height which will result in the fat or skulled shot he wants so much to avoid. The real solution is putting the club in the center where the bottom of the arc is and using the club properly in the forward swing.

A True Swing

Manuel always based his teachings on trying to get the student to hit the ball straight. He believed that intentional draws and fades were way over emphasized. When we talked about producing a straight shot, I asked him “does a balanced grip and a true swinging motion always produce a straight shot?” He said “yes!” If a player does those two things the club will return to Square with no compensating moves necessary.

The Double Cross

When talking about the mental side of golf, Manuel liked to bring up the “Double Cross” as an example. The double cross is when the player tries to produce a certain shot, but instead the opposite shot occurs. Manuel believes this happens because of a total lack of mental direction. He notes that though the player might not pull off the shot as intended, the opposite shot only happens because of their lack of mental direction. He likens it to driving your car to a stop sign and instead of turning the desired way you go in the opposite direction.

VE-Day

May 8, 1945 was certainly a day Manuel would never forget and for two very different reasons Most significant by far was the end of World War II in Europe, and all the euphoria surrounding it. Manuel, 23 at the time, had never consumed any alcohol. In France at the time, he and his buddy visited the local bars and had a few beers. Later that night, the two were invited to celebrate with a family that had befriended the two of them. They drank wine and both of them got drunk. Manuel remembered the feeling of being totally out of control, didn't like it, and vowed it would never happen again. At any social event after that he would allow himself only two drinks. He would go up to the bartender and tell him that if anyone would offer to buy him a drink, just make it a ginger ale.

A Memorable Answer

Anyone who has been around Manuel for any period of time at the range or at seminars knows he loves to be asked questions. And of course, after his answer, we wondered why we couldn't think of that. His answers made perfect sense were right to the point and well thought out. I had always tried to have a few questions ready, especially on the range at Milwaukee Country Club.

The question one late summer evening was “do you know what your hips and shoulders are doing while you are swinging the club”? He gave me that stare of his and answered “no, what does that have to do with playing golf”? When I reflected on it that night a few other things hit me really hard and I remembered them to this day. First, the look in his eyes when he answered, and the very strong tone in his voice. It almost seemed as though he had been waiting for me to ask that question. As I reflected on it more my thought was that Manuel was such an accomplished player, even though his schedule permitted little or no practice time. Also as a teacher those body positions had no importance to him at all. Well, just maybe they shouldn't be of concern to me or my students either. Manuel simply wanted me to focus on swinging the club properly and allow the body to respond to that motion.

Last Lesson

October 28th, 2015 was a warm 65 degree windy and mostly sunny day in Milwaukee. The westerly wind from 15-30 mph meant a strong left to right wind on the range at Milwaukee Country Club. There were only a few members on the range and they warmed up and left eager to enjoy the course on a beautiful golf day. Soon we had the range all to ourselves.

As usual, we started our practice session working on the “small stuff”. Starting out with a wedge and hitting 10 yard shots off tight lies, which can be quite challenging. Manuel emphasized swinging the whole club forward and allowing the loft of the club to produce the shot. He always begins his lessons with small shots, which he says takes away the distance and power thoughts that ruin golf swings. This is great practice not only for the short game, but also the middle part of the full swing where the ball is taken.

We then proceed to a favorite drill of Manuel's. We use different clubs going to the same target. He stressed that you must first visualize the shot in your mind which will allow you to make the right amount of swing to propel the ball the correct distance. This can really improve your distance control which Manuel believes is a key component to scoring.

We then worked on full shots into the left to right crosswind. Manuel had me close the club face at address to lessen the effect of the wind. Although I hooked the ball most of my earlier golf life, this was difficult to me as I would square up the clubface on my forward swing and therefore hit a straight shot. We worked on maintaining grip pressure and we finished with three in a row that were correct. Manuel commented “very good” and when you hear that from him it sure puts you in a very positive frame of mind.

We then proceeded to the short game trying different clubs from similar positions and seeing which option works best for me was really helpful. Manuel always stressed the importance of having the ability to play a great variety of shots near the green and this was a terrific way to acquire those skills.

After about an hour and twenty minutes as we walked to the car on that beautiful day Manuel commented that the lesson went very well and he really enjoyed it. As you can imagine, this made me feel great, not only for the golf part of it, but even more realizing that a great friendship had really blossomed between us. How lucky can a guy get?

Later that evening thinking about our day, I couldn't help but wonder if this would be the last time Manuel would be able to teach. Although his mind was still really sharp at 94. Manuel had a stroke; his health was slowly but surely declining.

Routine

With all the talk on television, magazine articles and player interviews about the importance of having and using a routine, I had to ask Manuel his opinion on the subject. We talked about the importance of having a routine and whether he had one. Manuel's answer was not what I had expected it to be so I asked two professionals and good friends who played with Manuel quite a bit and their thoughts on Manuel having a routine. Carl Unis, longtime friend of Manuel's and the head golf professional at Brynwood Country Club played quite often with Manuel in Wisconsin PGA events, and Tommy Aaron, a student of Manuel's who played with him during the winter in Florida. Both players agreed that Manuel had a routine, and it was done in a prompt manner. They were both quite surprised when I told them that Manuel didn't believe, first that he had one or of its importance.

While he writes in his book, the method he uses and believes is best for addressing the ball and alignment he didn't think of it in terms of a routine. Depending on how he felt on a given day, for example, his stance would be of different widths. He also didn't always use the same number of waggles or look at the hole the same number of times. All of these slight changes on a given day or shot to him was a break from having a strict routine. What Manuel really emphasized was not the importance of having a routine, but as always swinging the club to the target. Manuel said very strongly "what good is having a routine if you don't swing the club to the target- it would mean nothing at all."

Manuel's Clubs

Manuel played with a very basic set of clubs. They, of course, were wood woods and forged irons. He played with laminated maple woods because he believed that persimmon woods over time become too heavy as moisture would get inside the wood. Therefore, he said laminated woods were more durable and easier to take care of. His set consisted of a driver and three wood, 1-sand wedge and putter. His driver was 43 inches long and had eleven degrees of loft. His sand wedge had 54 degrees of loft. Although many years before the advent of lob wedges he never felt the need for a more lofted wedge. Like all the players of his era, he simply opened the face to get more loft if necessary. Manuel preferred a slightly heavier putter and used a Golfcraft mallet for a long time.

He did switch golf balls from a Spalding dot to a Titleist because he found the Titleist to be more consistent. They of course were wound balata balls and he would replace his ball every six holes.

Greatest of all Time

I asked Manuel several times who he thought was the greatest golfer of all time. He would never say who he thought it was. He believes that evaluating a player's greatness while he was still playing was just idle talk comparing any athlete to players of other years is very difficult in his way of thinking. He listed several factors which made these comparisons difficult, including, changes in levels of competition, conditions, equipment and the natural evolution of the game. Manuel noted that all you can be is the best in your own time that you played and leaving it at that.

Humility

Even though he is a very confident man who believes strongly in his principles relating to the golf swing, he is by nature very humble. He has often said that if it had not been for Mike Cavanaugh giving a copy of Ernest Jones "Swinging the Clubhead" to Carol Mann and mentioning he knew someone who taught that way, he would have just been another PGA professional working in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

He may very well have gotten his humility from his father. Angel never spoke of his own accomplishments. Manuel was invited to play in the Spanish Open, and it was only then he saw a list of former champions that he learned his father had won the Championship five times. He also won the Spanish PGA six times. His father shot a 61 on a difficult course despite only using five clubs.

Also, even though Manuel never did mention it, I later found out he had thirteen holes in one in his career.

Final Thoughts on Teaching

Manuel always spoke of how the golf swing was really very simple. He believed that keeping everything simple not only made sense, but made golf more enjoyable. His greatest satisfaction in teaching is when his student would say to him "this is simple, I can do this." It was not only simple for Manuel's students, it also worked. When asked what the best swing is he said that it is the one that works for you. While he really believed in his system of teaching golf, he always said that you must keep an open mind.

Business Card

On the back of Manuel's business card is a quote, "I pledge allegiance to the swing and to the freedom which it provides. One motion indivisible dedicated to the joy of all golfers regardless of race, creed or color".

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