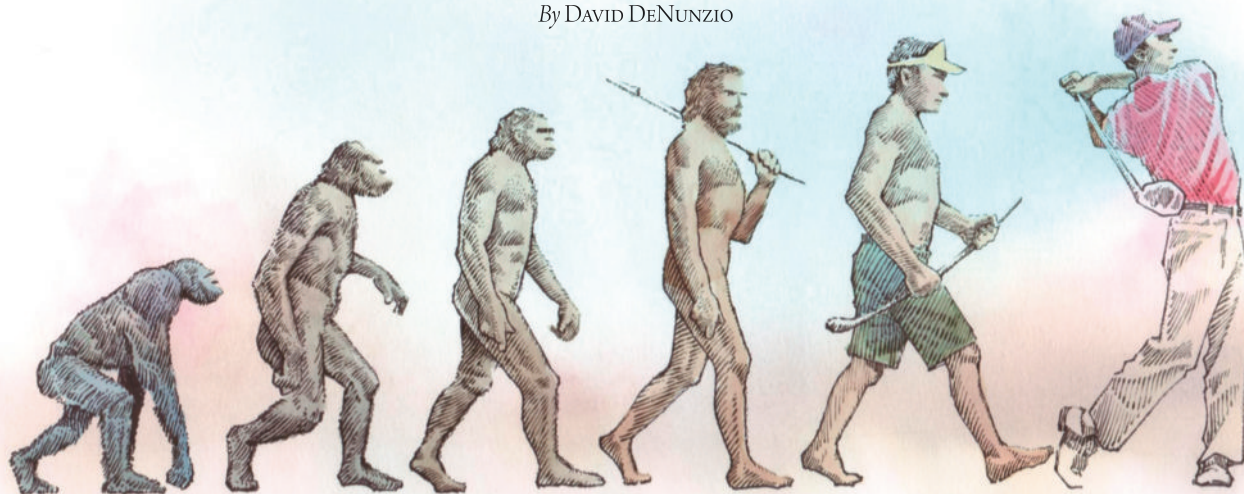


THE NEW WAY TO IMPROVE

While you've been looking for a new way to get better and shoot lower scores, scientists have unearthed something far more important—how *we learn* to get better. Knowing the difference can help you become the golfer you were always meant to be

By DAVID DeNUNZIO



WE'VE NEVER KNOWN MORE ABOUT THE SWING, ENJOYED BETTER-conditioned golf courses, or used more advanced and forgiving equipment than we do today. So why hasn't the average amateur handicap dropped in 50 years while the pros continue to set scoring benchmarks that would make Hugh Hefner jealous?

Forget Ben Hogan's mantra! The secret to success won't be found only through digging dirt on the practice range (although practice certainly helps). The first clue might just lie in new studies by the world's leading performance researchers, psychologists and kinesiology experts. These scientists haven't discovered a new way to swing drivers, irons and wedges, but rather how we learn to swing these clubs. Getting in touch with their findings may hold the secret key to releasing the low-handicapper within. ➤

YOUR LEARNING PILOT



Meet Dr. Robert Christina, dean emeritus of the School of Health and Human Performance at UNC-Greensboro and *Golf Magazine's* learning expert in residence. This story is drawn from Dr. Christina's extensive research on improving motor skills.

COURTESY UNC SPORTS INFORMATION

3. Take a Lesson

Learn from a pro to play like a pro



THE PROBLEM

Since you know your swing better than anyone, you choose to navigate your own path to enlightenment. You never take lessons and think all you need is some extra range time.

THE SOLUTION

Book time with a pro—it's that simple. Whatever your skill level, it's highly unlikely that you can recognize swing or putting-stroke flaws, let alone prescribe an appropriate fix. "Taking lessons from an experienced teacher or mentor helps you learn motor skills the right way, and learn them more effectively," says Dr. Christina. "An instructor won't allow you to perform or ingrain errors when you practice—he or she is interested only in getting you to do the right things, and getting you to do them over and over."

THE SCIENCE THAT PROVES IT

Golf Magazine looked at the handicap changes of 318 amateur players. These were no ordinary golfers—each had studied with our Top 100 Teachers in America between September 2007 and September 2008. The numbers on the opposite page illustrate their startling progress—these students lowered their indexes by an average of 35 percent.

A LESSON IN LEARNING



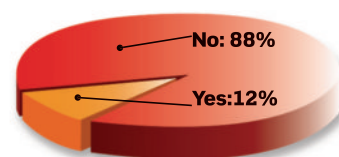
DARRYL FONG, 64
San Diego, Calif.
Improvement:
11.2 strokes (24 to 12.8)
Top 100 Teacher: Kip Puterbaugh

"In my mind I don't think I am a good golfer—yet. But I'm a lot better than I was, and I've never enjoyed the game more. I shot in the high 90s for close to 50 years, but now my ball flight is solid and my swing feels almost natural. The reason for my improvement is that my swing is now based on proven fundamentals. I tried to grasp these on my own for years. I read every golf book and tried all the new theories, but nothing clicked until I started taking lessons. When I have grandkids and they ask me to help them play golf, I'll do two things: I'll show them how to grip the club, and I'll tell them to take lessons."

COLD HARD FACT

Wondering why the average amateur handicap hasn't dropped in the past 50 years? Here's why...

Source: *Golf Magazine* reader survey



Q: Have you taken a lesson in the past 12 months?

IMPROVEMENT MOVEMENT

In one year, 318 Top 100 Teacher students lowered their handicap by an average of 4.5 strokes:

12.8 **8.3**

Average established handicap of Top 100 Teacher students on September 1, 2007

Average established handicap of Top 100 Teacher students on September 1, 2008

35% **.01%**

Average decrease in Top 100 Teacher students' handicaps over one year

Average decrease in average handicap in the USGA database, 2007-'08

GO OUT AND LEARN!

Not enough golfers are taking lessons, and there's a reason for it: lame excuses. Consider our rebuttal to the five most common cop-outs.

1. I DON'T HAVE THE CASH

Play one less round a month, and apply that money toward a lesson with a qualified PGA teaching pro. You can make up for the missed on-course experience by playing an imaginary round on the range, or bring your favorite foursome and make it a group learning session.

2. I DON'T HAVE THE TIME

See the answer to No.1, or simply make time. Get up an hour earlier on your day off—most teachers start their lesson day at 7:00 a.m. This works on weekdays too—you can easily make a 9:00 a.m. meeting.

5. I JUST NEED A TUNE UP

Fine. Your instructor can build a lesson plan, or even a single lesson, to match your schedule, time, goals and wallet.

4. I'M TOO EMBARRASSED

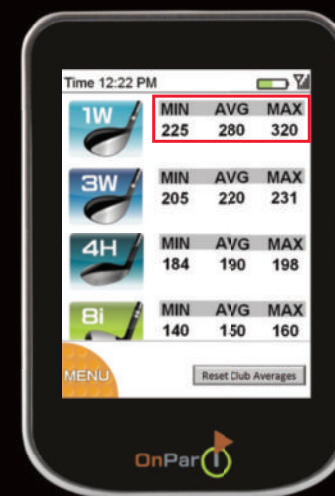
That's like saying your teeth are too rotten to go see a dentist. Calm your fears: your teaching pro—and dentist—have seen worse than you. Plus, they need your business as much as you need theirs.

3. MY HOME LIFE IS TOO BUSY

C'mon! Make your lesson a family event. You should be introducing your kids to the game anyway. Have your spouse take the kids over to the practice putting green during your lesson, then swap if he or she needs lessons, too. Your kids will get a kick out of rolling the ball into the cup, and there isn't a course in the world that discourages young golfers.

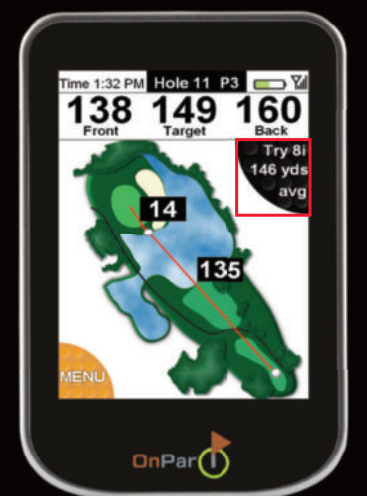
Visit golf.com to find a Top 100 Teacher near you.

Can your GPS Rangefinder track and suggest this?



← **Club power** - Displays your club averages based on your tracked shots

OnClub - Displays your closest club average for distance remaining →



"Golfers are getting better—just not the majority of them. Because the majority doesn't take lessons."

—Top 100 Teacher Dom DiJulia



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