



Wally Armstrong Golf™
Feel Your Way To Better Golf

Wally's World



INTRODUCTION

The great golf writer P.G. Wodehouse once said, “Golf, like measles, should be caught young, for if postponed to riper years the results may be serious.”

I’m thankful that my heart was infected with the golf germ many years ago. In one form or another I’ve spent most of my life around the game of games.

You would think that by now a man my age would have grown out of this obsession with chasing a tiny white ball around the fairways, trying to knock it into a small cup, but the truth is, I have a heart for the game today as much as I did the first time I stepped onto a golf course. Actually more, in fact! My appreciation for golf has only grown, and because of it, I’ve been blessed with a wealth of life changing experiences and relationships through the years.



EARLY YEARS

I remember having my first golf lesson when I was about 12 years old. It was with an old teacher Fred Keesling. All I remember about that lesson is that he worked on my grip the whole time. I was kind of bummed about it at the time but now as I look back I can see very clearly that Fred understood one of the most important things in golf and that is to have a good grip and hand placement on the club. As Ben Hogan said “The grip is the heartbeat of the golf swing”. If Ben said it, then it should be good enough for all of us to take heed to!



I grew up in Indiana caddying and playing in golf tournaments. After winning a couple of state titles and numerous other junior and amateur events, I received an offer to attend the University of Florida on a golf scholarship. During my 4 years there, I helped our team finish 2nd and 3rd in the NCAA Championship and made All American my senior year, playing with the likes of Hale Irwin, Bob Murphy and other Hall of Famers. Not only did I get my Bachelor’s Degree, but I decided to stay on two more years at the University of Florida and get my Master’s Degree in Education with an emphasis on Human Performance.

LEARNING HOW PEOPLE LEARN

During this graduate degree work at the University of Florida, I studied under Conrad Rehling who was a nationally acclaimed professor, coach and golf instructor at the time. Under his guidance, I spent a year and a half researching the human mind and how people learn, trying to discover all I could about how the brain processes information. I was fascinated by the topic and intent on finding new, creative ways to connect with people and help them understand basic concepts. Conrad’s specialty was teaching with drills and training aids and so I picked up on this area and then took it to the next level. At this time, there wasn’t much research at all in golf as compared to other sports such as skiing, weightlifting, track & field, etc..

Through my research I realized that the most effective way of teaching the game of golf is by having people clearly see and understand the principles underneath the teaching. I then began developing the pictures and training aids needed to convey these truths. Part of my master's thesis was a compilation of numerous drills and pictures/analogies that I was able to find in magazines, books, as well as making up many of my own which I categorized into sections such as the long game, short game, chipping, putting, pitching, bunker play, trouble shots, etc...



What I learned during that time is that the most effective way to teach someone hands down is through word pictures and associations. By using these visual analogies and then creating training aids to emphasize the feeling of what they were seeing allowed me to “show” and then my students to “experience by feel” rather than having me just do the “telling.” For example, if a student is struggling to produce a circular swing pattern, I’ll put a hula-hoop around their body to help them get the feel of a true circle. If they are having a problem shifting their weight forward during the swing, we’ll put the clubs away and spend some time throwing a football back and forth helping them sense how that movement should feel. Whatever it takes to divert their attention away from what they’re doing wrong and onto what they need to be doing right, I do that, because it works. People tend to respond to mental images and feelings much more quickly than they would a simple word of instruction. And once our mind’s eye can conceive a particular swing thought or motion, the body is more likely to be able to achieve it.

This was confirmed by Dr. Tom Repaldi. Tom was a psychiatrist who had done numerous studies on the left and right hemispheres of the brain. His specialty was in analyzing how people learn which made it that much more frustrating to him that he couldn’t seem to figure out what he was doing wrong in his own golf game. Tom was so frustrated with his game because he couldn’t relate to the words that other golf instructors were using to try to communicate the golf swing to him. Tom had been to teachers all over the U.S. trying desperately to improve the quality of his game, yet he couldn’t seem to get past the wall he’d hit in his scoring. After talking with Tom and watching him swing, I could see Tom’s dilemma. He had a hundred swing thoughts going through his mind every time he stood over the ball—keep your head down, left arm straight, eye on the ball, swing inside out, club on plane, pronate, supinate, take it back inside, shift your weight, etc.. It’s a wonder Tom ever made contact as he was struggling with dozens of incorrect swing habits, each brought on by a preconceived notion about the proper swing pattern.

While visiting further with Tom I had found out he had played baseball as a boy, so the first thing I did was to put away his club and hand him a baseball bat. I had him hit a golf ball off of a makeshift T-ball tee on the driving range getting him to feel how natural the swing can be when you don’t think about it. It was amazing how long and straight he could hit a golf ball with a baseball bat in his hand off the T-Ball tee. Then I handed Tom back his club and had him swing it just like a bat in a circle around his body. He continued swinging in this circular motion, slowly moving the club down as he bent over further and further at the waist until the club eventually was at ground level. I then teed one up off a regular golf tee and had Tom hit it. Immediately he was able to see and feel the difference. For the first time ever, Tom felt truly natural over the ball as he could see and feel that the golf swing was just a circle around his body, or using his vernacular, a tilted baseball swing (a baseball swing on a tilt). He told me later that his game literally improved overnight.

As 80% of learning is visual, in my teaching to golf professionals in the many PGA seminars I have given I always say, “Show it, don't say it.” I've even been tempted to do one of my teaching clinics completely without saying a word using just my training aids alone!!!

The key therefore to learning in golf is that you must first see and feel what you want the club to do, and then trust that motion in order for permanent change to occur.



WHAT PEOPLE NEED TO LEARN – THE BIG PICTURE

So I used my education to build my early philosophy of how people learn and how to teach the game.

In addition, I read hundreds of golf instructional books and hardly ever did I see these books start out by showing the big picture of the golf swing. It seemed like everything I read jumped right into the fundamentals – grip, stance, backswing, forward swing or quick fixes...

People, however, don't learn this way as there's no reference, or big picture for them to refer back to at all times. The golf swing must be taught as a whole first. Once you give the complete picture of the swing and this is clearly embedded in your student's minds, then you deal with the parts, always relating them back to the whole picture. This is called "whole part whole teaching." WJ Thompson in his book—"Common Sense Golf" – speaks clearly of this, "The swing must not be considered as made up of parts. Although synthetic, it starts as a unity, becoming fuller and fuller until its maximum effort is reached when the ball is dispatched."

I then began to examine what the overall picture of the golf swing was and how I could clearly describe it so that could be understood by all... From reading the works of the Master Instructor's of old - the Dunn Brothers, Percy Boomer, Ernest Jones and others, seeing pictures of Ben Hogan where the club head was traced swinging around his body in a circular path, and finally having the privilege of spending time with my favorite golf instructor -- the late Bill Strausbaugh, the overall picture of the golf swing as a "circle" came to mind. Bill did not communicate specifically that the golf swing was a circle, but through one of the drills he used I saw that the primary image of the golf swing is clearly a "circle." Bill in his studio had a 4' high carpeted staircase on one side of the room. Bill would put a ball on the waist high top step and have people swing at that ball sending it into a net. He would do the same in placing and having them hit a ball off a step at hip level, then at knee level, calf level, finally bringing the student's circular swing down to the ground. From Bill's demonstration I could see clearly that the golf swing was a "circle" that does not change. The only thing that changed is just the tilting of the spine or axis! Many pros talk about the "plane" of the swing, but this word does not produce a clear picture for the majority of people/golfers. However, everyone can easily picture in their mind's eye the image of the golf swing as a "circle"!!! The circle therefore became the center post from which all of my teaching flowed.

With the golf swing identified as a "circle," we are therefore dealing with maximizing centrifugal force. It is very important to realize, too, that golf clubs are designed to function and support the swinging of the club in a circle. The reason for this is that as the club is swung centrifugally around the body the club head naturally rotates around the shaft. It's not designed to swing straight back and through on the target line, but to rotate around the shaft. This rotation helps promote additional power and distance. The exception to this is the short shots that require more of a pendulum motion, with a putter being the most upright and linear of all the shots. In fact the research shows that best designed putters are center shafted as this design keeps the club head from rotating around the shaft, keeping the face of the club online with the target longer for more accuracy.

By seeing the big picture of the golf swing as a "circle," the basic fundamentals of the swing begin to make sense as these fundamental's sole purpose are to help make it easier for you to be a better circle maker!! Everything you do from the grip, stance, posture, alignment, waggle, backswing and forward swing all support and enhance the swinging of the club in a circle.

Not only did I now understand how people learn and how to teach, but I knew what to teach..."swinging the club in a circle!"

PGA TOUR YEARS

While I was finishing a Masters Degree in Education I had an opportunity to go out onto the PGA Tour and caddy a few times for a fellow University of Florida alumnus & Ryder Cup player, Dave Ragan. One round while caddying for Dave, we played with Gary Player. The next week Gary's regular caddy was sick so Gary

asked Dave if I could caddy for him. I ended up caddying for Gary at the next three PGA Tour stops until Gary fired me when I left a couple bananas in his bag and forgot to take them out. After a week in the bag the bananas were rather ripe and rotten..... At the next tournament in New Orleans we got hit with a torrential rainstorm and when I unzipped the bag to get dry gloves and a rain suit out for Gary, to our dismay everything was stuck together and ruined by the rotten bananas!!! Needless to say, that was the end of my caddie career as Gary fired me. However, a couple of weeks later when I returned to Indiana on my doorstep was a staff bag, woods, irons, balls and gloves from Gary Player with a note encouraging me to get out on the tour and play professionally!!

That note from Gary was the motivation that drove me to practice hard to get out and play on the PGA Tour, but first I spent two years in the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Bliss Texas where I managed the base golf course and played golf with the brass. When I got out of the Army I qualified for the PGA Tour. We had a great qualifying class as my other Q-school graduates included Ben Crenshaw, Tom Kite, Gary McCord, Gil Morgan, Larry Nelson, Mark Hayes Joe Inman... all great players!



In my first year on the PGA Tour, I finished 5th in the Master's setting a rookie scoring record at the time and throughout my PGA Tour career of competing in over 340 tournaments I had numerous second place places. The place where I really excelled, however, was in winning many of the Wednesday pro-am tournaments at each tour stop. Therefore many of my other tour buddies started calling me "the Pro-Am King!" The major problem I observed in these pro-am players, particularly when they got under the gun in having to play in front of all their friends was that they all got wrapped up in the mechanics of the swing. They were trying to do the golf swing rather than just play the game and swing in a circle. They would

go through their checklist of swing keys and start instructing themselves how to hit the ball and very often their swings looked like they were tied up in a straitjacket!! My simple picture of the golf swing as a circle with a few pointers thrown in allowed these amateurs to relax, enjoy their games and produce their best results... along with winning me the pro-am that helped pay the bills!! I still think the major problem with all amateur golfers today is they play mechanical golf rather than playing golf by feel which is the way the greatest players in the world play the game.

I learned many other things in playing the Tour but two further items stand out. The first was in playing many practice rounds with Gary Player. These rounds were not only great fun, but fantastic training as Gary taught me how to practice and how to hit every type of shot in the bag from every conceivable position. Gary was the most prepared of any golfer I have ever seen. This preparation rubbed off on me in knowing how to practice and then in taking it and applying it out on the course and scoring!

The second thing was in playing with all of the greats – Nicklaus, Palmer, Player, Trevino, Casper, Watson, Miller... they all confirmed my main thesis – that the golf swing is a circle! In fact, Johnny Miller was quoted in an NCGA magazine as saying the best tip he ever received was to just simply swing the golf club in a circle!!

POST PGA TOUR

Not only did I now understand the way people learn... that the overall picture of the golf swing is a circle... and how the design of the golf club is made to swing in a circle, but I realized I needed to make learning "fun."

This became very clear when after I left the PGA Tour I began doing golf instructional clinics for kids around the country with my son Scott and later with my other son Blake. We quickly found out that to keep kids attention we had to have a lot of fun props/aids to use in our teaching. So out came the footballs and baseball bats and water balloons and the analogies started flowing in our teaching.

I also began also to see that if you can teach kids then you can teach anyone as in many ways everyone needs to learn like a kid. That's one of the reasons that I enjoy working with kids so much. They come to

the lesson tee with no pre-conceived ideas about how to play the game. There are no bad swing habits to break, no mental blocks to overcome, just a blank slate, willing and able to learn.

In teaching adults one of my first goals is to de-program them away from the bad habits they have learned from playing mechanical golf, and get them back to a childlike faith of "seeing, feeling & swinging it," which is exactly the way the Tour Pro's swing when we are playing well. I therefore began to structure all my teaching for all categories of players - from beginners to juniors to adults, around



1. *The simple image of seeing the golf swing as a circle, and*
2. *How the design of the golf club is meant to swing in a circle around a fixed axis to enhance centrifugal force for maximum distance & accuracy, and by*
3. *Creating & using fun training aids/props so that people could begin to feel what a circular golf swing was all about*

By doing this I began to rescue people from the paralysis by analysis of mechanical golf, setting them free to enjoy this great game by simply seeing & feeling their way to better golf. Over of the years through my lessons, clinics, videos, DVD's this has numbered in the 100's of thousands of people around the world!

TEACHING BEGINNERS

Most every sport has some type of "training wheels" where one can start with beginning equipment designed to make the game/sport easier to play.

In golf, the swing itself from start to finish for an average adult is about 27 ft. in length, using a clubface about 3" x 4" in diameter, hitting a ball only 1.68" in circumference. For a beginner, this is a pretty daunting task and is the reason why NGF & PGA statistics confirm that many kids and adults aren't beginning to play or are leaving the game because the game is not fun and it is too tough to learn or play well.



To help reverse & combat this trend, using the simplicity of my "circle teaching method" & training aids as the heart of the instruction, another former PGA Tour player, Terry Anton and I created a "near golf experience" called SNAG (Starting New At Golf) using specially designed golf clubs and equipment to make it easy to swing and hit the ball.

The basic philosophy behind SNAG is to simplify the very essence of golf to its most elementary form. Club heads and balls have been made bigger with the ball teed up every time. Because of the unique design of the SNAG clubs, the fun SNAG training aids, and the visual images of the circle/clock

that are projected through all SNAG instruction, learning and performance are rapidly accelerated with everyone having fun in the process.

SNAG can also be used safely in any location - backyards, fields, parks, auditoriums and almost all athletic facilities.

Through Terry's dedication and evangelization efforts, SNAG is now a household name that is used around the world by the National School Program across the USA, by all First Tee programs and many PGA's across the globe to introduce over a million kids and beginners to the game of golf with amazing results! In an era when the PGA and NGF say the game is stagnant, this news is really exciting!

TEACHING JUNIORS

In producing the first junior golf videos with my sons Scott & Blake, we found the best way again to work with young kids is to build pictures and images which they can readily identify with, in an atmosphere of fun. This is highlighted in my new DVD, "Circle Power For Kids," adapted from an earlier video with Blake, where Blake with my help, is teaching kids how to swing in a circle in a fun and engaging way!



Making your teaching fun while enhancing curiosity are a couple of the foundational points of all learning, particularly for kids (even for adults as well). It's important to understand

with children that curiosity and wonder are at the heart of all learning, and the more you can zero in on using fun, creative tools the more effective your communication is going to be with kids. We therefore focus on creating pictures and feelings using baseball bats, hula hoops, PVC pipe as helicopter propeller blades, throwing a baseball or football, skipping a rock, etc. to help engage the kids and get them to see and feel the circular motion of the swing.

Later, when we teach the parts of the circular golf swing (grip, stance, aim, posture, backswing, forward swing) the kids are always able to relate these parts back to the whole – the image of the circle. Using the creative and fun training aids I have developed again helps translate these pictures into the correct feelings of the circular swing producing great golf shots and a lot of fun and enjoyment in the process!

Over the years, I have many people from all over the world come up to me all the time saying that they learned the game of golf from my junior golf videos, which truly were the first of their kind, and are still so applicable today. One of those people who learned watching my tapes is Tony Meechai from Thailand, President – PGA of Asia, where Tony is now teaching and influencing thousand of students of his own in Asia.

TEACHING ADULTS

When teaching adults, the techniques are not much different than teaching beginners or juniors, except that in most instances adults need to be de-programmed from the paralysis analysis of mechanical golf and thinking too much as they have lost the childlike simplicity and faith needed to hit the ball effectively.

The golf swing once again, when learned and performed correctly, is not a natural move. The late great Ben Hogan once said, "If a person played golf by natural instincts they would never finish a round." Ben's comment is so correct as logic would tell us when we look down at the ball that we need to pick up the club and chop down at the ball to hit it long, or swing straight back and through to hit it straight, or scoop the ball up to get it in the air. You can see these misconceptions at work in the minds of most people as they try to muscle the ball forward.

This is why I believe over eighty percent or higher of all golfers slice the ball regularly. In essence the swing is something of a dichotomy. If a player tries to swing straight with the club, it actually causes the ball to curve. But if a player learns to swing in a circle or circular arc, the ball will fly straight.

When I teach this principle, I again hold a hula-hoop around the student's body so that he or she can clearly see how the hands must work in a circle in order to let the club orbit the body. I encourage students to visualize their arms swinging around their spine and body like a helicopter —with their arms being the blades and the club head being the tip of the propeller. The focus is not on hitting the ball, but on seeing and feeling the proper circular swing motion. Then as we carry this same circular swinging motion to the tee, the ball simply gets in the way as the club swings through its circular orbit from start to finish, sending the ball straight and far.

This concept is greatly supported by the writings of two early American golf professionals, the Dunn brothers. They came to America from Scotland in the late 1800s and taught the club swings in a circle with two major power sources supporting it.

The first is the rotation and the twisting of the shoulders and hips around the spine. This inner core twist is very powerful with the legs supporting this powerful twist. The Dunn's refer to this body motion as like a farmer swinging a scythe cutting hay in a field. I personally use the illustration of someone swinging a baseball bat or the rotational motion of a discus thrower in track and field.



The other power source the Dunn's taught was the hinging of the wrists which cock the club up at a 90° angle between the forearms. The key then becomes a blending of these two power sources into the golf swing. As the body rotates around the spine, the wrists cock up and down and then rotate as the club is swung around the body in a circular centrifugal manner.

These concepts are reviewed in my adult teaching series entitled "Maximize Your Game" with Pat Summerhall, former CBS Sports Announcer and Kenny Rogers, Country Western Singing Star, one of the most popular golf instructional series ever. Pat Summerhall stated that my methods and what they teach "are unlike anything he had ever seen and set the standard by which all other golf instruction will be measured." This was nice of Pat to say, but what is most gratifying is what happened when I was in Palm Springs recently and this old Japanese lady came up to me on the driving range saying, "You, Wally Armstrong. I learn from your videos. Thank you very much!!" She then proceeded to hit the ball right down the middle with the most beautiful circular swing that you could ever see! Now that is real praise!! For those of this new generation who never saw these videos, they have recently been updated, redigitized, formatted to DVD and can be found at my website at www.wallyarmstronggolf.com.

SUMMARY

Each generation will fight the same battles unless they look at what prior generations have accomplished."

Wally Armstrong

History always repeats itself. Applying this to golf instruction, it seems like the same battles are always waged by each generation. Ernest Jones, the famous golf instructor from of the early 1900's was constantly ridiculed because everyone thought the golf swing could not be as simple as just "swinging the clubhead."

In my day, it has been the same where golf instruction is too complicated and is geared more toward what the PGA Tour Pros are doing, rather than the capabilities of the average person.

I have therefore simplified the swing and it's fundamentals down to one common denominator – the image of the circle, with all subsequent fundamentals designed to enhance the efficiency of swinging the club in a circle, so that centrifugal force can be maximized, distance & accuracy increased, with subsequent performance, enjoyment and fun enthusiastically enhanced.

In going back to basics, let me repeat the statement I made earlier, "People don't learn piece by piece because there's no reference, or big picture for them to refer to. The golf swing must be taught as a whole first. Once you present the whole picture and this is clearly embedded in your student's minds, then you deal with the parts, but always relating them back to the whole picture. This is called "whole part whole teaching" so as your mind's eye can see it, the body will then be able to achieve it!"

This whole picture is being able to see the golf swing as a circle. It is this image of a circle which has been at heart of all my instruction all these years for all age groups, in

- *SNAG: For kids & beginners*
- *Circle Power For Kids: For kids & junior*
- *Maximize Your Game: For Adults*

In addition to help introduce a new generation of golfers and golf pros to the simplicity of feeling your way to better golf, I have recently summarized the essence of my circle teaching method in my brand new DVD called Swing The Circle along with many new tips and drills. This new DVD and my other DVD's can be found at my website at www.wallyarmstronggolf.com.



Once you “see” the overall picture of the golf swing as a circle, and “feel” the circular swing through using the training aids I have designed, then everything you do from your grip, stance, posture, alignment, waggle, backswing and forward swing will all support and enhance the swinging of the club in a circle. As you simply swing the circle as a whole, not focused on any parts, centrifugal force will increase thereby maximizing distance, accuracy and performance.

As you learn how to practice and enhance this circle “routine” and then transfer your circle ‘routine” from the range to the course, your scores will rapidly drop and your enjoyment of the game will multiply drastically as you simply “see it, feel it, swing it!”

This is the very essence of my instruction.

It is my hope and prayer that a new generation will capture this vision and passion of getting away from the paralysis by analysis of mechanical golf and get back to a childlike faith of “seeing, feeling & swinging” the golf club in a circular motion which is exactly the way the Tour Pro’s swing when we are playing well!

I trust you will learn to enjoy this great game as you simply feel your way to better golf!

EPILOGUE

I think the main reason I’m so fascinated with the game is that I love to learn. And no other sport provides more of an opportunity for growing in knowledge, skill and understanding. I have a passion for learning about golf, and then sharing what I’ve learned with others, whether it’s about the history of the game, stories about the players or fundamentals of the golf swing. I’ve been that way for as long as I can remember, and I don’t suspect that will ever change. I have the heart of a learner and a teacher. I will never forget the quote by one of my mentors Bill Strausbaugh, “Those who strive to teach must never cease to learn.”

Wally Armstrong

To sign up for Wally's free video tips using his many training aids, read other articles about or by Wally, please visit Wally's website at www.wallyarmstronggolf.com.

