

Is there **HOPE** for me?

By Tom Beeler

Recently while watching the PGA Championship in the grill room, I was talking with one of the patrons about the recent improvement in play of one of students. As an instructor/coach, I can see little improvements that my students make during their lessons, but it is really nice when someone else or the student themselves notices. It always makes me feel good knowing that I have helped someone get better at a very hard game. Especially when most of the time all I hear are complaints:

“The group in front of me is really slow!”

“The grass to right of #5 is really high!”

“The hot dog buns are too doughy!”

“That was a really bad pin position on #13!”

You get the picture. Most of these “complainers” are frustrated with their golf games and need someone to complain to and something to complain about. So, to hear some nice things about one of my students is a nice change of pace.

The particular student we were talking about has been working hard on their game, increasing practice time, playing a little more, and, most important, starting to understand that how they think has a lot to do with the outcome of the shots.

The person I was speaking with was very impressed with my student’s game that day and had played with them many times in the past. They noted that my student was hitting it further and straighter, getting on the green more often, and putting better. I thought to myself, “Wow, they must have had a really good day!” When I spoke to my student about it, they told me that they had hit the ball OK, nothing spectacular, got up and down a few times, made a few putts, and shot a few strokes better, but it could have been so much better.

I love it when my students are happy but still want more. We all know that no matter how good you are at golf, you can always get better. As we continued to discuss what my student was working on, I could see that the person was wondering if there was any hope for them. Could they still get better at their age?

I had seen this person on the course a few times, but I never really paid any close attention. So I started by asking some general questions about their golfing history: How long they had been playing? How often did they practice and play? Had they ever taken any lessons? What were their goals for their game and what were they doing to reach those goals? Obviously, the first couple of answers were easy. They knew his golfing history, how

long they’d been playing and how often they played and practiced. The stumbling blocks were their goals and what they were doing to get there.

Most players tell me that they want to “be more consistent.” At the risk of sounding rude, I will tell you that all of us are consistent; it’s just that some of us are consistently bad. We have all figured out what to do to make the ball go forward. But those of us that have a goal and a plan to try to achieve the goal are able to make the ball go forward a little better. So I told this person that they needed to have a goal and a plan to work towards that goal. It doesn’t really matter what it is—golf, losing weight, getting stronger, bowling, archery, keeping your house cleaner—whatever it is that you want, you need to have a plan. The golf ball has no clue how old you are, no idea how bad you are, and no inkling that you don’t have a plan for how your golf club should be moving.

There are dozens of types of golf swings out there. That’s why Butch Harmon, David Leadbetter, Hank Haney, Sean Foley, and PGA professionals like Tom Beeler exist. I’ve taken lessons from three of these individuals, and, essentially, they are going to tell you the same things I would tell you to help improve your swing. You are just going to pay more for the information. They will also try to make you swing the club the way they think it should be swung and use really big words to sound more important.

But let’s get back to the player, the one that thought they might be too old and didn’t have



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a goal or plan. Getting better is pretty much relative. I remember watching a program about Phil Mickelson where Dave Pelz (the short-game guru) said that Phil came to him looking for a quarter of a shot per round during the majors—twenty-five percent of a shot per round, or one full shot stroke during the four-day event. Most of us are looking for much more than that, but let’s examine what Phil did. He had a goal, and then he developed a plan to put him on course to achieve his goal. The most important part is that Phil put in the time that was necessary to reach his goal. Later that year, Phil won his first of three green jackets at the Masters. He has won four majors since then.

Most of us aren’t looking to win majors, but like my friend in the grill room, maybe a club championship or just a few bucks from our friends in our weekly matches.

So, to my friends in grill rooms everywhere, start by setting a goal. It could be as simple as one more drive in the fairway or one more drive in the fairway plus one more green in regulation and one less putt per round. That’s three to five strokes right there. Playing golf is hard, but it’s not brain surgery. I don’t know if brain surgery is hard, but if I wanted to do it, I would need goals and a plan. I do know this: I’ve played golf with some surgeons, and after watching them putt, there is no way I would let them cut me open!

Find yourself a PGA professional who has some patience, take the time to tell him/her what your goals are, then ask him/her to help you formulate a plan to get there. Remember, with a well thought-out and executed plan, there is always hope.