



Photo by Joel Veeder

In this drill, golf instructor Chuck Veeder is either keeping Gordon's head from moving too much, or trying to use mental telepathy to instill good swing fundamentals.

Sawed-off clubs, mini 5-irons & video analysis make a difference in Gordon's game

By Gordon Woodworth
Chronicle News Editor

For the last four months, I've been taking golf lessons from Chuck Veeder, who works at Glens Falls National Bank and has a thriving side business of golf instruction and clubmaking. **Chuck**



sought me out last summer after I had written in an early column that I wanted to take some lessons. He was the only person to respond to my cry for help, and after meeting him for lunch at The Gourmet Café, I was intrigued. He has a very reasonably priced winter golf package, with a series of half-hour or hour-long lessons in his studio in Middle Grove.

My boss, Mark "Don't call me Chief" Frost, agreed to foot the bill, even with my left foot in a cast, and it was game on!

The lessons started in mid-January and ended last Wednesday with my final assessment. Chuck is a U.S. Golf Teachers Federation instructor, and also does a lot of work with adaptive golf, helping injured war veterans at two VA hospitals. He also teaches at Galway Golf Club and several driving ranges, including GolfWorld on Route 29 in Saratoga, and works with Special Olympics.

At my first lesson, he had me hit some balls into the screen while videotaping me. That footage would be the baseline that we could refer back to as time went on.

Not surprisingly, my swing needed some work. My posture wasn't good. My shoulders were not square, my back was hunched, and I wasn't using my lower body as much as I should be.

He also tested my club-head speed, which came in around 65 miles an hour. There was sure room for improvement there.

In subsequent lessons, we worked on a warmup routine, one that is much more focused than what I was used to doing. Usually, my warmup routine consists of lifting my golf bag out of my trunk and carrying it to the clubhouse. From there, it's often right to the first tee. Now I've got a real warmup routine that includes stretching the hands, wrists, arms, back

and legs. It can only help.

Surprisingly, Chuck thought I had a pretty good swing to start with. It just needed some major tinkering, mostly dealing with using my lower body more and getting through the ball at impact.

Before I started taking lessons, I was mostly swinging with my upper body. I was able to compensate for the lack of lower-body movement with my off-the-charts athleticism (not!), but it was far from an efficient swing.

To reduce my hip sway, Chuck had me do a drill where he put a chair right next to my right hip as I prepared to hit the ball. The chair kept my right hip from going sideways, and helped me learn to rotate it back, not out.

Chuck has more golf toys than any man should be allowed to have. Besides the mats and screens in his basement, he's got mini-drivers, golf clubs with ri-



Photo by Joel Veeder

Surprisingly, Gordon made this putt, and reports that his putting has improved dramatically under Chuck Veeder's tutelage.

dulously small heads, cones, chairs, soccer balls and tennis balls. And, he's got a artificial-turf putting green, a toolbox, and a huge front yard that doubles as a driving range. How great is that?

At one point, he had me chipping off the concrete floor. It helped reinforce hitting down on the ball during chipping. He radically changed my approach here. Now, on chips, I angle my feet more toward the target, push my hands forward, and make a short swing while hitting the ball first. Try it. You'll find, as I have, that it helps control the distance and almost eliminates the dreaded muffed chips, of which I have experienced plenty.

Chuck also helped my putting immensely, adjusting my grip slightly and helping me find some semblance of touch. I won't give away his secrets, but trust me: the man knows what he's doing.

In late March, I had a breakthrough. After two months of working on getting my hips and lower body through the ball, it all started to come together. It's tough to overcome 35 years of inefficient swinging, but I started to get the feel of what Chuck was telling me. And I was killing the ball.



Photo by Joel Veeder

Chuck Veeder has dozens of props that he used to help refine and correct Gordon's swing. One of them is a shortened driver that helped "drive home" the importance of lower-body weight transfer.

I shot a 90 in my first round of the year, and was thrilled. Now, I can't wait to get out on the course again.

At my last lesson on May 5, Chuck gave me a written assessment of my progress, some equipment recommendations (he suggests a driver with more loft, up to 12 degrees) and practice suggestions (65% of practice on shots from 125 yards in).

He also took another video of my swing, and showed me how it compared to my swing in January. The difference was amazing. My swing now is much smoother, more efficient, more athletic, more natural. I'm using my lower body more. My posture is much better. My alignment is great. Who knew all I needed were a few lessons with my new swing guru!

Chuck took a chance when he called me last summer. He figured I'd have PGA pros lining up to give me lessons after asking for help in my column, but he was the only one who responded. It turned out to be a great experience. I couldn't be happier with the results, and I plan to keep taking lessons from Chuck as I continue on my golf journey.

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