



BY
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TAKING THE ULTIMATE SWING

IF YOU'RE SERIOUS ABOUT
LOWERING YOUR HANDICAP, THEN
YOU MUST CONSIDER A LOBOTOMY

My hands are trembling as my fingers tap the keyboard at the start of what I know is the most provocative and controversial article of my fairly undistinguished career.

Without wishing to stir you into too much of a frenzy, I must nevertheless warn you that what follows is nothing less than dynamite.

So, if you're the sort who regularly thumps the ground with the driver after hitting a wicked slice off the tee or frequently whacks the sand with the club after thinning one out of a bunker then you should turn the page now because this is not for those of a fiery temperament down upon whom red mists regularly descend.

On the other hand, if you are inclined to slice your drives and find bunkers difficult then what follows might provide some solace.

Okay, you've been warned.

Ever since I started to struggle with golf, which is more or less from the moment I first picked up a club, I've held this belief that my principal problem is that I think too much about the game. Although moderately athletic, tolerably well coordinated and reasonably determined, I've never really felt entirely comfortable standing over a golf ball.

I have taken dozens of lessons, conscientiously read the instruction columns in this great magazine and hit tens of thousands of balls on the driving range and yet, when I address the ball on the first tee, I have little or no idea where it's going.

Thanks to a bewildering repertoire of disaster shots that I keep stored in my locker, it could slice, hook, fizzle, fade, draw, sky, top or, worst of all, be missed entirely.

Although it happens so infrequently that I can't really legislate for it, very occasionally it goes more or less straight.

Thanks to my diligent research and creative mind, I have somewhere in the region of 175 swing thoughts – about three quarters concern the back swing, an eighth are non-specific, e.g. keep the head still, and the remainder are down swing related.

One hundred and seventy-five swing thoughts on their own would not be so much of a problem were it not for the fact that they can be combined in what, for practical purposes anyway, could be regarded as an almost infinitesimal number of ways.

For example: bend knees, head still, chin out, slow take away, coil, bring club inside, gently break wrists, keep right elbow in, don't over-swing or straighten right leg, pause, hands before shoulder, twist hip, square clubface and follow through is just one combination that may or,

more probably, may not work.

What is truly baffling is that the sequence listed above could function tolerably well for one, two or sometimes as many as four holes until, just as I start to believe that I may have at last cracked it, it rapidly unravels and obliges me to make some necessary adjustments.

Extraordinarily, after 35 years of fruitless tinkering you would have thought that I might have realised that the elusive Ultimate Swing Thought Combination, possibly like God himself, might not actually exist.

Although the above is, at best, moderately interesting, it's not what one might call highly controversial and controversy is what I promised at the outset.

THOUGHT PROCESS

I've left it this long because I'm hoping that those who are least able to follow the thread of this meandering thought process will have switched their suspect attention to another section of this magazine.

If I were to guess where, I would hazard that they are at this very moment admiring some shiny new flange, revolutionary hosel or ultra-stiff shaft in the equipment section where they feel very much more at home.

The bit coming up now is the bit I don't really want them to read. I don't want them to read it because they would almost certainly be offended by it and I'm generally not the sort of guy who wishes to give offence.

Okay, I believe that there is a direct correlation between a golfer's IQ and his handicap. Put simply (because scratch players won't understand it if it isn't), the less intelligent the person, the better the golfer.

Put rather less offensively, the brighter the player, the more he or she will struggle with golf. I warned you it was controversial.

Like every other law, Agran's First Law of Golf requires a theory to support it. In this case the theory is simple. The more intelligent and imaginative you are, the more you are capable of appreciating the myriad things that can go wrong when you try and hit a golf ball.

Not only that but, when addressing a golf ball, a thinking person is quite likely to be worrying about Climate Change, the Growing Threat Iran



Poses to Global Peace, the Widening Gap Between the Developed and Developing World and Why Tee-Pegs Sometimes Fly Backwards. In contrast, someone who thinks less will only be worrying whether, when it hits the green, the ball will release on the second or third bounce.

Although those of us with respectable but unspectacular handicaps can perhaps draw a little comfort from the fact that we are almost certainly more intelligent than really good golfers, we should be aware that the genuinely high handicap players are undoubtedly brighter than we are.

The proof? Whereas we believe we might improve one day, they are smart enough to realise that they won't and are only interested in having fun.

tnp illustration: Cel Gulapa