

Joe Norwood,
The Man and His Swing
By
Dan Norwood

Joe was born January, 1892 in Boston Massachusetts. He lost his mother and father at an early age. His first job was as a paper boy.

In 1905, when he was 13 he got a job in the golf department in the sporting goods store Wright and Ditson.

George Wright was an early-day pro ball player who was later elected to the baseball's Hall of Fame. In the 1860s and 1870s, Wright played shortstop for the Cincinnati Red Stockings and later the Boston Red Stockings. In 1869 he hit a whopping .633 with 49 home runs in 57 games.

After baseball, he founded Wright & Ditson, a sporting goods equipment manufacturer that was instrumental in making tennis and hockey popular in the U.S. Wright also laid out New England's - and America's - first public golf course, Boston's Franklin Park in 1890. Wright and Ditson imported and sold golf clubs. Francis Ouimet and Joe Norwood worked at the same store.

Alexander H. Findlay was the manager of the golf department.

Alexander Findlay ranks among the game's greatest players. Among his many golfing feats, Findlay was the first golfer in history to record a 72, or an average of four strokes a hole over 18 holes; this he accomplished in a championship match in Montrose, Scotland held August 6, 1886, when he was only twenty years old. Findlay is thus credited by golf historians with establishing the standard score for par (72) on a regulation course. Prior to Findlay's score the standard or target score (par) for 18 holes was an average of four and one-half strokes a hole, or 81.

Findlay marketed his own line of golf clubs, "The A. H. Findlay Clubs" through Wright & Ditson sporting goods.

Findlay convinced Harry Vardon, then the game's greatest player, to tour America in 1900, giving exhibitions, playing in tournaments, and promoting the game. Vardon's tour was a grand success. Vardon capped off his American tour winning the 1900 US Open. In 1913 Vardon returned, accompanied by his long-hitting countryman, Edward "Ted" Ray, intent on capturing another US Open title. Ray and Vardon completed 72 holes tied for the lead along with the young Massachusetts amateur, Francis Ouimet.

Ouimet defeated Vardon and Ray in a rain-soaked, drama-packed 18-hole playoff at Brookline Country Club and golf became of age in America. Formerly the great winners were from England, Scotland and Australia. Francis Ouimet became the golfing hero of America with his victory.

Alex Findlay was Joe's boss. Joe Norwood and Francis Ouimet worked together at Wright and Diston and regularly played rounds of golf together.

Alex Findlay gave Joe his first lesson and mentored Joe over the next 5 years teaching him how to play golf, teach golf and make golf clubs. Findlay told Joe there are only two ways of hitting a golf ball, outside in or inside out. Inside out is Joe's swing. Findlay told Joe to study the anatomy of the body so he could teach the separate parts of the body individually so they could all work together as one unit.

Joe loved baseball. He wanted to play professional ball. It was Alex Findlay, Harry Vardon, Walter Travis and Walter Hagen who convinced Joe that teaching golf was his destiny. Imagine sitting in on a conversation with Alex Findlay, Harry Vardon, Walter Travis and Walter Hagen, all legends, talking to Joe Norwood about his future.

In 1910 Joe Norwood turned professional teacher. Alexander Findlay and Wright and Diston were instrumental in getting Joe his first professional teaching job at The Brookline Golf Club in Boston, Ma. Joe taught golf at The Brookline Golf club from 1910 to 1914. As stated earlier Francis Ouimet, Joe's friend, beat the famous Harry Vardon and Ted Ray at The Brookline Golf Club in the 1913 U.S. Open. This particular tournament had to be extremely meaningful to Joe Norwood as his friend was competing with the very men whom he patterned his golf swing after. What a spectacle it must have been. I can imagine my grandfather cheering on with intensity and awe as Ouimet and his 10 year old caddie battled the iron veterans of the day. Vardon was in bad health and the weather was bad. The young warrior was up to the challenge of both nature and the competition.

Joe Norwood was fortunate to watch Harry Vardon play. Joe saw Vardon practicing by swinging his right arm to his right heel and so the Vardon move was born into the Norwood swing. Joe said Vardon would spend hours practicing this move.

Joe actually debated with Harry in the early days because he was convinced that Harry's grip was too weak.

In 1913 Joe played a round of golf with the legendary Walter J. Travis. At the end of the round Travis complimented Joe on his game but said he could not put. After convincing Walter that he was a teacher and not a competitive player Walter showed Joe his putting movement. Walter never told Joe what he did, it was up to Joe to figure it out and that he did. In Joe's book he talks about the Travis putting method which is putting with the right elbow.

During the early 1900's there were no flagsticks. A wicker basket was placed on top of the stick that was in the cup. Joe Norwood was one of the earliest professionals to replace the wicker baskets with banners. There were no flags in those days. When the owner of the golf course saw the banners waiving in the wind he liked what he saw and kept the banners which eventually became the flags that we see today.

During the early 1900's clubs were not made as sets. You bought several at a time but none were balanced. Joe Norwood while working at Wright and Ditson Sporting Goods, under the management of Alex Findlay, made clubs. Joe was one of the earliest club makers who balanced each club so that the entire set would be balanced. We're used to the same swing weight in clubs today but back then it was un-thinkable. When Joe Norwood moved to California one of his various golf endeavors was to make golf clubs that were balanced.

Joe loved Walter Hagen and said that Hagen was the best competitor he'd ever seen. Hagen putted using the Travis method also.

Joe Norwood told me early on when he was teaching me that Bobby Jones would place a cigarette to the right and in front of his golf ball so he would have a target to swing for. Joe Norwood walked with all the great golfers and learned from them so he could teach people how to swing and have fun playing the game of golf.

In 1921 Joe moved to Los Angeles, California where he became head professional at the Los Angeles Country Club. In 1924 he was instrumental in chartering the Southern California Section of the Professional Golfers Association. He was the last living charter member when he passed away in 1990.

In 1926 Joe inaugurated and directed the first Los Angeles Open which was held at the Los Angeles Country Club. He managed the Los Angeles Open 5 times. He was known as the Pros-Pro because so many professional golfers would go to him for help. Lighthouse "Harry" Cooper winner of the first Los Angeles Open worked with Joe Norwood. Horton Smith, winner of the first Masters tournament worked with Joe Norwood. Wherever the Los Angeles Open was held, there you would find Joe Norwood teaching and helping the pros find their swing.

During the 1920's , 1930's and 1940's Joe Norwood was head professional at the Los Angeles Country Club helping members, and professionals alike. Henry Cotton, the golfing legend of the 1930's and 1940's, called Joe the King of Swing.

My father witnessed many things during these times. Great golfers came to Joe for help. Sam Snead, Ben Hogan and Babe Didrikson Zaharias sit at the top of a very long list. Later on the legendary golfer Marilyn Smith, co-founder of the Ladies Professional Golf Association worked with Joe Norwood. There was no selling Marilyn Smith on Joe's Swing. A great golfer buys into the method to improve their ability just like amateurs. Here is a list of the many professionals who sought out Joe Norwood for his knowledge of golf.

Howard Hughes, Jack Warner (Warner Brothers Studios), Sam Goldwyn (Metro Goldwyn Studios), Paul Helms (Helms Bakeries), Ruby Keeler (Actress), Joan Fontaine (Actress), Buzzie Bavasi (G.M. L.A. Dodgers), Walter Austin (MGR. L.A. Dodgers), Steve Garvey, Willie Davis (L.A. Dodgers), Jimmy Demaret, Lloyd Mangrum, Gene Sarazen, Vic Ghezzi, Lee Trevino, Gene Littler, Ken Venturi, Bob Miller, Patty Berg, Betsy Rawls, Betty Jameson, Marlene Hagge, Kathy Witworth, Joanne Carner and there are many more.

Joe said Sam Snead was the greatest sitter in the game of golf. Joe details the sitz in his book and how to achieve it.

My father, Joe Norwood II, was fortunate to watch Joe Norwood, Sam Snead, Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson play a round of golf together at the Los Angeles Country Club. Joe held his own for a few holes but being a teacher, in the end, he could not best their scores but just the thought of playing in a group with Snead, Hogan and Nelson is mystifying to say the least.

Joe said Ben Hogan had the greatest left arm in golf. Ben Hogan told Joe that he spent two years working on his left arm. Joe details the left arm in his book and how it works with his swing.

Joe Norwood completed his golf swing in the mid 1960's when he saw Bruce Crampton's high finish. Joe Norwood studied the human body and spent endless hours learning how it works during the years between 1910 and 1967. His golf swing took 57 years to complete and utilizes the best parts of 5 of the greatest golfers in the world.

These are the main components of Joe's swing:

Harry Vardon's backswing and downswing (known as the Vardon move)

Sam Snead's sitting power (known as the sitz)

Ben Hogan's left arm

Bruce Crampton's high finish (known as reaching for the sky)

Completing it with the putting technique of Mr. Walter J. Travis

From 1947 to 1990 Joe taught at local driving ranges in the greater Los Angeles area. During the Los Angeles Open you could find Joe Norwood at the driving range at the Riviera Country Club helping the professionals find their swing. He was the only local professional teacher allowed to do this. I was fortunate to be at the range and watch him work and talk with these professionals. My father was even more fortunate as he was able to watch Joe Norwood play rounds of golf with the top professionals of the 1930's and 1940's.

Joe Norwood taught golf for the love of it not for the money or fame it would bring. You could spend all day with him at the range and pay him what you felt was fair. He had no minimum hourly rate. Professionals and celebrities would come from around the country to take lessons from Joe Norwood. This was a time when everyone from John Doe to former president Gerald Ford could get a lesson. Joe said that former President Ford always had good practices but that he became very nervous when playing around people.

Joe's book is 150 pages of details. He doesn't tell you how to feel. He tells you how to do it. Teach the body first and the feel will come. Joe's motto: Poor golf is a Gift – Good Golf is Acquired.

Something that is not in his book: Joe told me that the best way to teach someone how to swing is by starting with the short irons. He didn't like the driver, he always said you could score better off the tee by playing a three wood.

You have an opportunity to see inside the mind of a man who taught golfers for 80 years, that's right 80 years from 1910 to 1990. No other professional golf teacher has that record. This book gives you a chance to learn a swing by teaching yourself with good mechanics and an opportunity to walk down the middle of the fairway with Vardon, Snead, Hogan and Crampton every step of the way and be able to have Mr. Walter Travis at your side when you're putting.

No other golf swing can give you this feeling. 5 professional golfers with the greatest teacher of all time putting it all together for you.

Along with the book Joe Norwood's Anatomy of Golf Video is now available. This video is 112 minutes of instruction.

The blending of his book and video provides you with all the knowledge you'll need to learn how to have a repeatable golf swing. A golf swing that will provide mechanics first and then feel so you can make adjustments yourself on the range or on the course.

Joe never spoke of scoring. His philosophy was to teach you to swing and let you use your judgment in scoring.

He did talk a lot about how to practice. Beginners, he would say, should stick to the short irons. As you get better pick two clubs. He said a 7, 8, or 9 iron and a 3 wood. He liked the 8 iron and so did I. He would have you hit off the "nipple" as he used to call it or the rubber tee because there was no resistance to the golf swing in hitting off the tee. He would have you hit many 8 irons until you felt comfortable off the tee then try to play the same swing off the matt. When the swing left you he would have you start over with the 8 iron.

Once you were comfortable with the 8 iron he would then place a 3 wood in your hands and tell you to play the 8 iron swing. Of course, at first, this would be difficult because the mind is looking at the power of the longer club. You would try to swing the 3 wood like an 8 iron and it just wouldn't work then he'd put the 8 iron in your hand and say play the 8. A few good swings with the 8 and he would take the 8 away and put the 3 wood back in your hand and say play the 8 iron swing. Eventually the thoughts about the difference in the clubs would leave you and you would swing all the clubs the same way. Tee to matt, 8 iron to 3 wood. Matt to grass and so on.

Another thing that is apparent with his swing is the circle of training. At first your muscles won't react the way they're supposed to. They're not trained to flex. As you continue your practice during time the body is able to attain the positions it could not at an earlier time. An example of this is the right elbow holding close into the waistline. At first it seems impossible. After time and practice with the swing the muscles that hold the right arm and elbow close to the waist eventually stay in position.

The legs are another great example. The body wants to move the legs as the arms move. It's normal and seems impossible to hold them in a position of no movement. With practice and knowledge you can achieve this also but you must be aware of the movement in your lower body before you can hold it. It's the same with your wrists. If you don't feel them break how can you hold them from not breaking?

It is imperative that you dissect your body parts for this golf swing. You must start to think about the lower and upper body separately and then dissect the lower and upper body individually. Joe Norwood gives you the information but you have to do the thinking. His swing is complete but he can't perform it for you he can only tell you how to do the moves.

The only thing he does not cover in the book or video is the squaring of the shoulders to the target at impact. He assumes the velocity of the swing will push the shoulders to square. This is not true. The velocity of the swing will push the ball to the right with a fade or slice. Only squaring the shoulders to the target with the hips held in check (45 degrees back) can produce a perfectly straight shot. The left shoulder muscle just below the clavicle (upper left pectoral) is the muscle that lightly rotates the shoulder to square.

A hook or draw is caused by throwing the arms to the right toe as Joe puts it. What does this mean? Once the arms throw forward or in front of the right heel the centrifugal force of the swing will cause the shoulders and the hips to rotate thus causing a draw or hook. A draw, although good looking, is a missed shot with this swing. A fade or a push is a missed shot with this swing. Anything less than “dead on straight” is a missed shot with this swing. This swing does produce a consistent miss, as we all miss shots and since we all miss shots it is (to say the least) best to miss them consistently. 99.9% of the time this swing, when performed incorrectly, will produce a fade or a slice but most commonly a fade.

Joe Norwood always told me to miss the ball straight. When I asked him about dog legs holes he said to just hit the ball into the middle of the fairway. When I asked him how to hook the ball his response was; Why would you want to hook the ball when you can hit the ball straight.

You can log onto this link to learn more about the Joe Norwood’s book “Golf-O-Metrics” and Joe Norwood’s 73 minute instructional video “The Anatomy of Golf by Joe Norwood”

I’ve placed 15 pages of his book on my website for you to get a glimpse into the mind of this man who invested his entire life trying to help people have fun at a most difficult game.

The link is:

<http://www.dan-norwood.com/the-anatomy-of-golf-joe-norwood.html>

Visit the Joe Norwood Golf Swing Forum at:

<http://www.network54.com/Forum/569018/>

