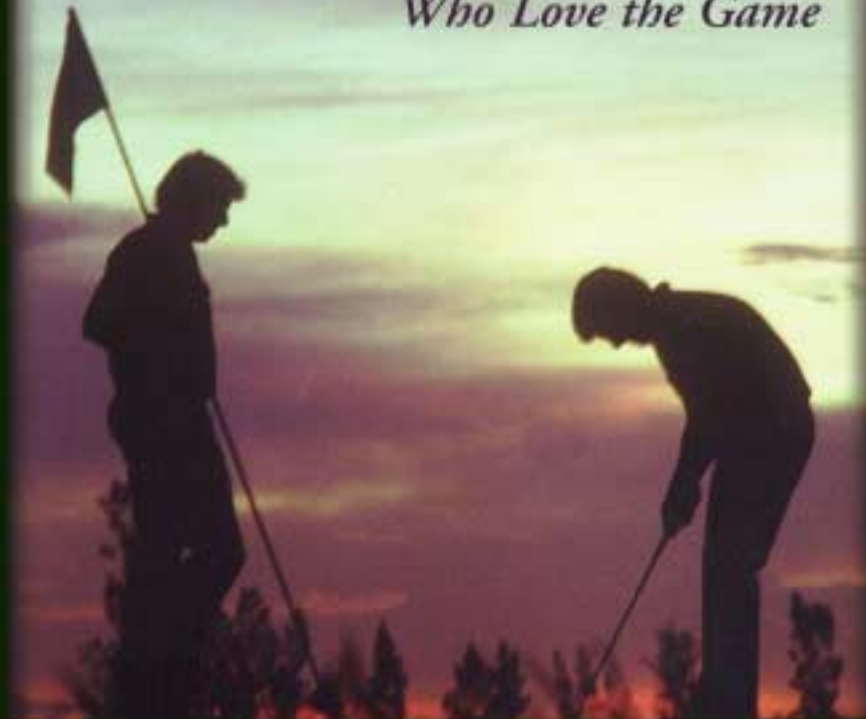


# A SPIRIT OF GOLF

*Stories from Those  
Who Love the Game*



Compiled and Edited for the PGA of America  
by John M. Capozzi

### **Jack Doss, an Unforgettable PGA Professional**

It's been a little over eight years since I took up the game of golf. When I started, my friend, Doug, a more experienced golfer, who was probably tired of seeing me slice every ball, politely suggested that I seek instruction from an excellent PGA Professional he knew named Jack Doss. I decided to accept his advice and the call to Jack changed my golfing life for the better and earned me a treasured friendship with one of the warmest human beings I've ever known.

For one reason or another, I hadn't taken golf lessons before and as I drove down the palm tree-lined lane into the Santa Clara Golf and Tennis facility, I was a bit nervous. I tried to envision what this strange new experience of a golf lesson might be like. There, at the first mat on the practice range, flanked by his ever-present video camera, was the man who would eventually be responsible for lowering my score from 110 to 80.

From a distance, he reminded me of the actor, Buddy Ebsen, from the *Barnaby Jones* television series. He had the same graying light brown hair, 6-foot tall medium frame, and handsome sun-and-wind tinged face. As I approached, his warm smile was already putting me at ease. I remember saying, "I'm a beginner."

Within the first 10 minutes, Jack remedied my slice by having me add another knuckle's worth of strength to my left-hand grip. Most importantly, he enabled me to feel, for the first time, that wonderful sensation of hitting down on the ball. He accomplished this task by methodically positioning my arms, shoulders, and hips as he led me through the swing, ending it with his trademark drill: him gripping the shaft about one-third of the way from the bottom and forcing me to thump the mat while missing the ball on the inside in front of the ball. I remember in countless subsequent lessons, Jack would say,

“Take your grip and hold on real good.” He would then lead me through those increasingly familiar positions and have me thump the mat. “That’s a good feeling for you,” he’d impart.

My lessons with Jack always involved drills and various items that he would position in and around the mat to force me to make a proper swing and to ultimately hit down on the ball. “Hit it on the doon swing,” he’d say, in his best imitation of a Scottish brogue. I’d have to miss the penny or the clipboard he’d placed behind my ball. Or, I’d have to avoid the bucket, the rubber tubing, or a myriad of other props that Jack creatively incorporated. He is the master of getting his student to feel the requisite motions and positions.

As a reflect on my lessons with Jack, I feel like *Kung Fu’s* “Grass Hopper” who was always hearing his master’s voice giving him counsel. There are probably a dozen swing thoughts instilled in me by Jack that will never leave my memory banks.

Once, I had fallen into a bad habit of dropping my right shoulder and consequently coming out of my swing as I brought the club down. A man named Roger was sitting in a white chair a few yards behind us, observing the lesson. Jack told me to, “Look at Roger” as I was about to make impact. That helped me considerably. I became a madman over the next few improved rounds. I’m sure others in my foursome could hear me muttering that phrase to myself like some kind of mystical incantation every time I stood on the tee-box.

My all-time favorite swing thought, however, is the “battering ram,” I never could figure out how to initiate and proceed through the appropriate positions once I had the club cocked and poised for action at the top of my back swing. Jack explained that everything happens way too fast (about 1.3 seconds), so there was no time for

me to think of such things. He took me over to a nearby pole and had me tap it with the butt of my club handle as I moved the club into the impact position. “It’s like a battering ram.” Jack told me. I absolutely annihilated the ball after that. The difference was incredible! It totally cured the miry slump I had fallen into. Feeling like a parched man that had finally been led to an oasis, I looked at Jack and asked, “Why didn’t you teach me that sooner?”

The man has such a wellspring of knowledge. I could take lessons forever and probably not begin to exhaust it. Actually, this shouldn’t be surprising. Jack was a money winning tour player back during the era in which Arnold Palmer played. After that, he served as a club professional under former Master’s champion, Claude Harmon, at the famed Winged Foot Golf Club. He has set several course records (his 63 still stands as the record at Baton Rouge Country Club). And, as an instructor, he has flourished even more — he was named 1997 Teacher of the Year by the Northern California Section of The PGA of America.

The single most memorable experience I’ve had with Jack occurred during a practice round.

Jack and I teed off on the back nine and I got off the tee in lackluster fashion, while Jack hit a prodigious drive with his brand new graphite-shafted titanium Great Big Bertha Driver. I complimented him on his drive and he begun enthusiastically telling me all the new driver’s specifications and how this exceptional new club was performing better than any other he had hit to date. He was really proud of his club.

Several double bogeys into the round, it became glaringly clear that I had fallen into a horrendous mode of coming over the top on every swing. I simply couldn’t stop doing it. Jack had a sudden flash of

insight as to how to alleviate this malady. Recall that one of Jack's favorite teaching techniques is to use props with which to force the student to make a correct swing path. He instructed me to set up to my target and prepare to swing while he gripped the head of his driver and positioned the shaft parallel to my target line about 3 feet away from my body. Now I was assured of making a proper swing. I went through my usual waggles and glances at the target, and then took the best swing I knew on my 4-iron. As I brought my club into the downswing, something went wrong. Rather than a solid impact with the ball, I had a solid impact with Jack's club. I immediately glanced back at Jack quizzically as I've done a hundred times before to get his analysis of what went wrong and there, on the fairway, was the shaft of his brand new great Big Bertha Driver. It was chopped perfectly in half by my 4-iron.

My profuse apologies didn't even matter, as Jack didn't skip a beat. He indicated that it wasn't my fault and it may not have been one of his better ideas for curing a swing problem. Although somewhat shell shocked, we continued the playing lesson.

Over the years that followed, Jack and I would occasionally joke about the incident, but mainly we focused on making improvements to my golf swing, which Jack has done admirably. He has become more than my teacher and golfing guru. Jack is a friend whose warmth will stay in my heart and whose words I will hear in my head each time I make a golf swing.

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