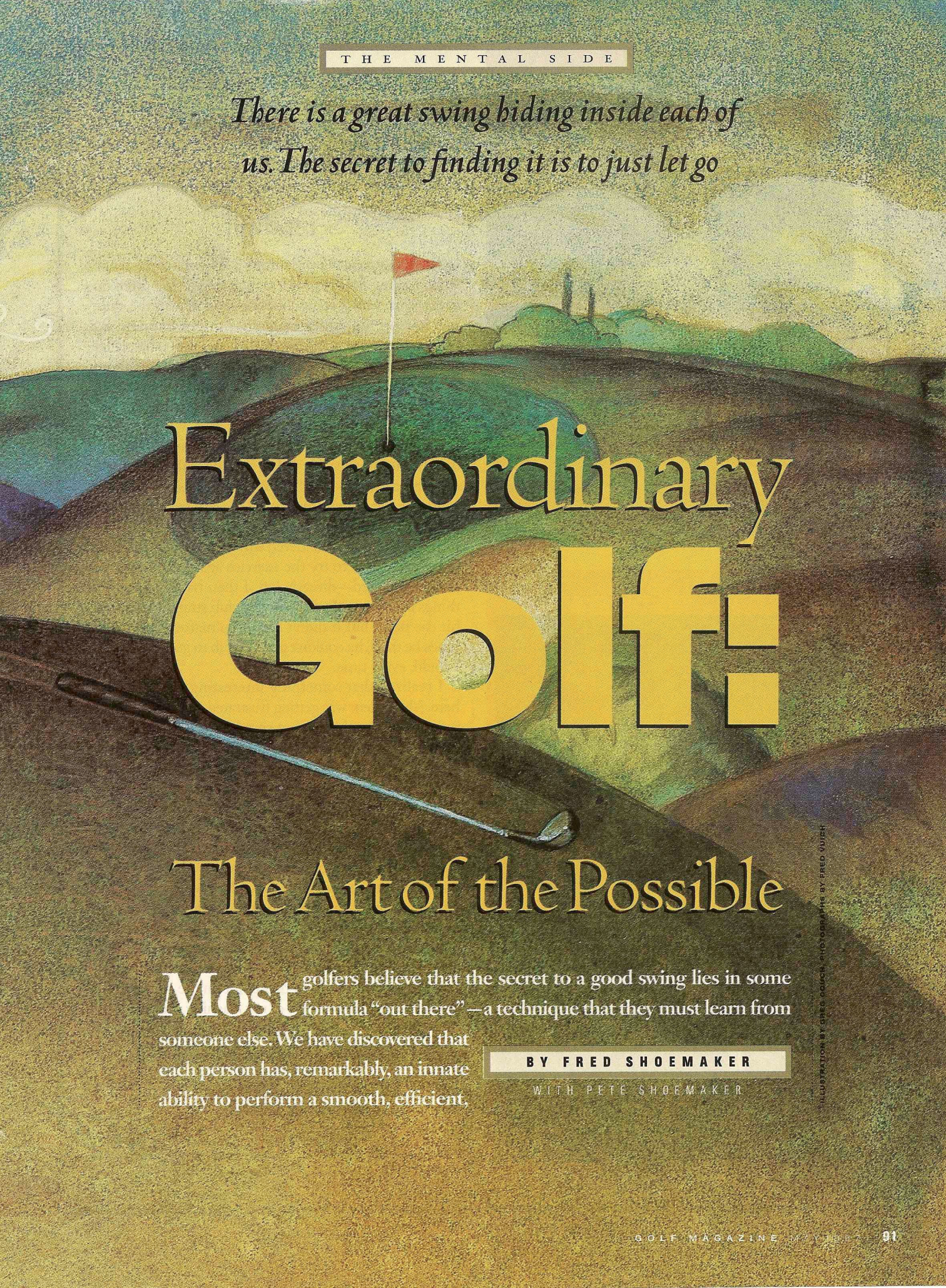


There is a great swing biding inside each of us. The secret to finding it is to just let go



Extraordinary Golf:

The Art of the Possible

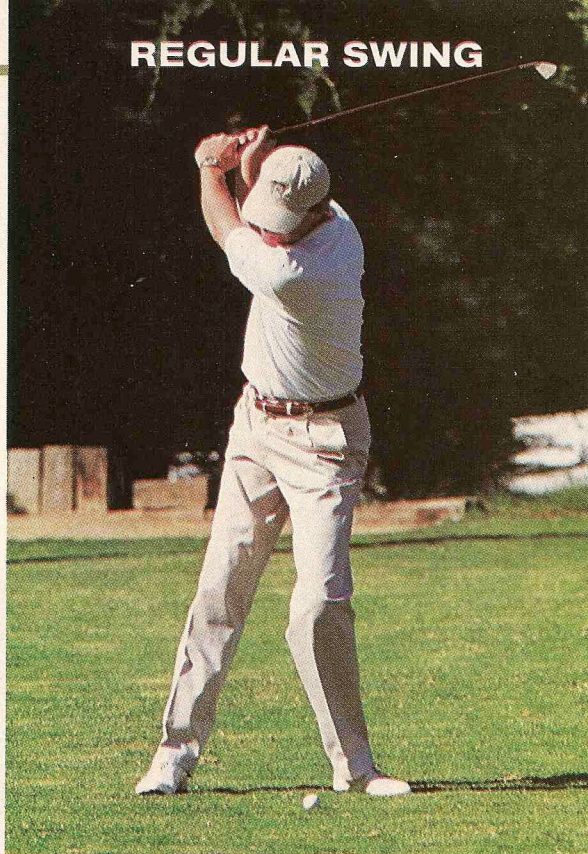
Most golfers believe that the secret to a good swing lies in some formula “out there”—a technique that they must learn from someone else. We have discovered that each person has, remarkably, an innate ability to perform a smooth, efficient,

BY FRED SHOEMAKER

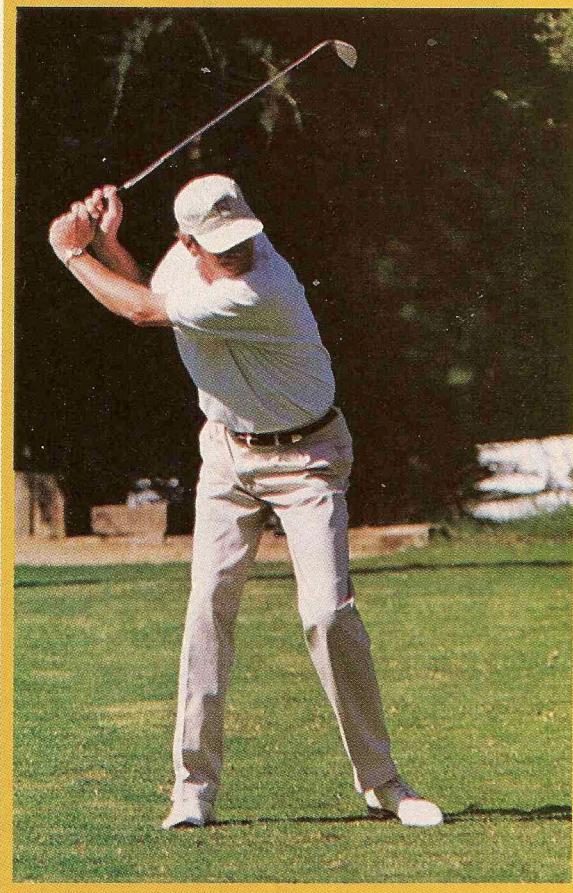
WITH PETE SHOEMAKER

ILLUSTRATION BY GREG COUGH PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRED QUINN

REGULAR SWING



EXTRAORDINARY SWING



powerful golf swing, and this exercise clearly demonstrates this. The difference between this swing and the swing most golfers display when they play is caused by self-interference. Both the extraordinary ability and the interference can be observed in the photographs here and experienced when you do the exercise.

Serendipity

ONE AFTERNOON I was hitting a few balls at the range while waiting for my next lesson to begin. As I often do at times like this, I started fooling around with the club, just having fun and seeing what might happen. By chance I found that if I hit the ball, it immediately let go of the club, the club would fly straight ahead about 20 yards. I did this a few times and it intrigued me, so I decided to try it with my next student, a man who had about a 25 handicap.

I asked him to hit the ball and release the club immediately after impact. He did so and the club flew almost directly to the left,---the "hook" direction, since he was a right-handed golfer. Luckily, there were few other people on the range and it didn't interfere with anyone. As I retrieved the club I wondered why it had landed where it did. I asked him to try the exercise again and the same thing happened---directly left. I then tried to simplify things by saying, "Just throw the club straight after you hit the ball," but it didn't help. No matter how many times he tried, he couldn't get the club to go straight, yet I could, every time.

I realized that something interesting was going on here. My student was getting frustrated, so I told him not to put a ball on the tee, but simply to take a golf swing and throw the club straight ahead. This time the club went straight, and I noticed a change in his swing. I had a video camera sitting on a tripod, filming the whole thing. We rewound the tape and took a look at it.

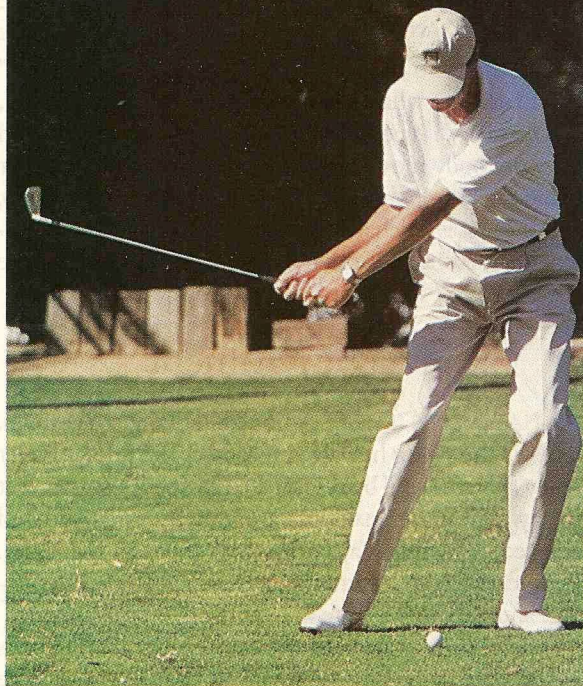
When he was hitting the ball, his position through impact was that of a typical golfer: His body almost stopped, the club completely released. He sort of "snapped" at the ball, with the club moving hard to the left after impact. But when the ball was not there and he simply threw the club, a remarkable change took place. A remarkable and instantaneous change. Watching it on tape, I was amazed and exhilarated---something special was going on here. From that point on the club-throwing exercise became a part of my teaching process.

Scene of Transformation

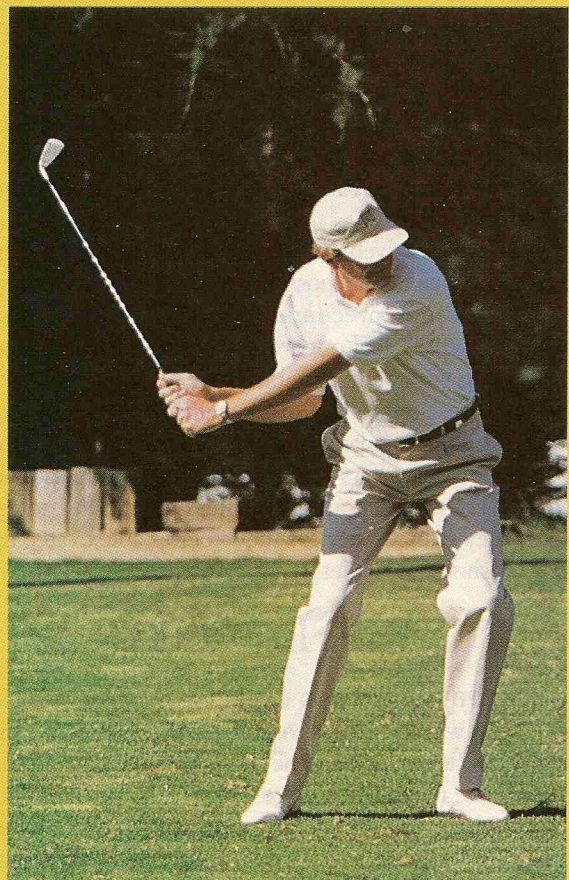
I WILL ILLUSTRATE the wonderful things that happen during this exercise by describing one of my favorite

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REGULAR SWING



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workshop scenes-one that has been repeated many times but which I continue to find fascinating. It takes place in the late afternoon. Earlier in the day, the students have done the club-throwing exercise with some old clubs I keep for this purpose. The other coaches and I have videotaped each student taking two swings. The first is their nonnal golf swing (the "regular" swing pictured here), and they hit a ball. The second-immediatelyafter-is a swing with no ball present (the "extraordinary" swing), and they simply throw the club straight ahead.

We gather in the meeting room to watch and discuss the videos. The first person we take a look at is Richard-a 48-year-old with a 10 handicap. Richard has played golf for 30 years-longer than any student in the group-and has tried everything he could think of to achieve a consistent golf game. Yet by his own admission his game is erratic and often frustrating ..

First I cue up his regular golf swing, and we play it a couple of times. Richard has a slightly better swing than the average golfer, but even he can see why it's not efficient or powerful: reverse weight pivot, club "thrown;" from the top of the backswing, body stalling and a release of power before impact, club head "scooping" the ball.

I go through Richard's swing point by point in front of the group, and it's an upsetting time for him. We talk about what it would take for him to improve, and I ask him what he would do first. He says, "I'd get my weight back." I ask him ifhe's tried that before. He says yes, but obviously it's had little effect. I ask what he would do next, and he says "Delay the lag." I ask if he's tried that before, and he says yes, but to no avail. This pattern continues for a few more areas of his swing.

I finally look right at him and say: "If you've tried everything before and it hasn't worked, why should you expect anything to change at all? By your own admission, there are many things that are awkward and inefficient about your swing. Fixing all of them looks like a long and really difficult process." Richard now feels like he's stuck and sees nothing that can make any real difference in his game. He's at the point of breakdown, ready to give up on all the methods he's tried before. Cruel as it may seem, bringing him to this point is a necessary part of the process. This is a crucial moment in the exercise.

I then cue up the video of Richard throwing the club. I ask him: "Could you ever imagine yourself swinging like a golf pro?" His answer-"not really"-is typical of most golfers. I have found that very few people are capable of even imagining themselves doing extraordinary things, and thus resign themselves to mediocrity. I then ask Richard what position he would like to have at the top of his backswing.

As he describes his ideal position, I pause the club-throwing video at the backswing frame. His weight is set