

BY ANN COCHRAN

HAVE BEEN PLAYING GOLF POORLY FOR 15 YEARS, USUALLY ON getaway weekends and summer vacations.

In lessons over the years at resorts, instructors have corrected the way I cock my wrists, angle my head, grip the club, point my feet, shift my weight, maintain a straight left arm, and follow through. My disregard of the heel of my left hand has been called into question, as has the distance I stood from the ball.

Some teachers fit all that into a one-hour lesson.

Overwhelming instruction has never discouraged me. I enjoy golf. I love spending time among flowers and trees. I look forward to frozen Snickers snacks and 19th-hole cocktails.

My style of play can best be described as on the move. As long as I don't hold anyone up, I consider my game acceptable. As I am not planning to play in tournaments, I don't care about my handicap or keeping score. If you don't keep score, you are not cheating when you pick up the ball. I play my best, laugh a lot, and refuse to be frustrated.

Still, I would like to play better. Finally, time, money, and desire converged and I decided to go to golf school. I thought about regular lessons with a local pro but refused to enter one more weekly commitment into my PalmPilot.

I chose a three-day course at the Golf Advantage School at the Homestead in Virginia. I wanted a resort with a luxurious spa as well as a good-looking golf pro. I had taken a lesson a few years ago with the resort's pro, Mark Fry, and I liked that he had limited himself to adjusting only three parts of my swing.

I had my doubts about three days of lessons. I wondered if I could stay interested for more than a couple of hours, let alone 15. I wondered if there would be lasting effects for a player like me.

IT WAS A CRISP MORNING WHEN I GOT OUT OF BED AT 7:30 TO graze at the breakfast buffet so I could get to the pro shop by 8:15. There were only two other people in my class—usually there are seven or eight. Donna had never played golf, and Bob hadn't played for 20 years. I was relieved that they were not seasoned golfers just hoping to take a few strokes off their handicap.

Mark arrived, greeted us, and reviewed the schedule we had received at home for Day One: full swing, with video, then pitching, bunkers, chipping, putting; 10:15: break. After the break: pitching, chipping, putting, full swing. Noon: lunch. After lunch: chipping, putting, full swing, pitching, and bunkers, followed by, from 2:30 to 4:00, play with the instructor.

That schedule looks repetitive, and it was, for all three days. Repetition is the point. As I blurted out to Mark one day, "Hey, there's something to this practice thing." It makes techniques sink in.

Sometimes Mark had us play games, with prizes—usually sleeves of golf balls.

I did want to walk away once, during the first sand-trap prac-

Better Golf in Three Days?



Photograph courtesy of Ann Cochran

tice. Hated it. At the second session, I got it. Out my balls flew, sand spraying, popping up onto the green.

After the one bout of sand-trap misery, the lessons were enjoyable and time flew. We could see ourselves improving. How? We'd roll the videotape.

I feared the video would be an assault on my pride. But after watching myself, and listening to Mark's commentary, I understood the golf swing a little better.

On graduation day, our class of three agreed the school was well worth it. Playing golf since has made me sure of it.

The following week I attended a conference at Nemaquin Woodlands, a Pennsylvania resort with two great courses. I had no time to play a round, but I was drawn to the driving range. My performance with the first bucket of balls was unimpressive. But everything came together on the second bucket.

For the foreseeable future, I will still be a vacation golfer—but standing taller, in pride and swing.

Golf Advantage School at the Homestead (800-838-1766; www.thehomestead.com/golf/school.asp) starts at \$1,260 a person, including three nights' accommodation, three meals a day, and unlimited golf outside of class.

Each morning the author (second from right), her fellow students, and instructors warmed up with a series of golf stretches.