

For your game

Instructor preaches a pushy start

By James Achenbach

SUNLAND, CALIF.

How does a golfer start the swing?

Answering this question is a key part of the Croker Golf System, taught by Australian golf instructor Peter Croker.

Croker is very exacting with his technique. It is used for all shots with all clubs, from the driver through the putter. It involves a series of "pushing" movements, as opposed to "pulling" motions.

If done properly, he maintains, his system can nullify tension and even prevent the putting yips.

Croker teaches a relaxed waggle, controlled by the hands and wrists, not the arms. After a few waggles, a golfer starts a series of 1-2-3 sequences that characterize the Croker System.

The waggles are followed by a light "tap-tap-tap" of the clubhead on the turf. This motion, too, is initiated by the hands and wrists.

In a bunker or other hazard, the tap-tap-tap occurs above the ground. On putts, the tap-tap-tap is done lightly and almost imperceptibly.

This tap-tap-tap tells a golfer exactly where the ground is, and it helps maintain a square clubface (or however the player chooses to align it). It also keeps the club moving, creating a flow and helping prevent a frozen or locked position at address.

After the waggles and three taps, the swing starts with a pushing motion of the right hand (for right-handed players) against the left hand. This moves the

shaft forward and rotates the hips slightly toward the target to produce a coordinated "forward press."

The push of the right hand (toward the front leg) is followed immediately by a push of the left hand (toward the back leg). The hands move together to initiate the backswing, but the clubhead remains in its original position for an instant. The clubhead is the last part of the club to move, meaning that initially it lags slightly behind the hands. This sets the stage for the swinging clubhead to cause a shoulder turn and wrist cock.

Croker is adamant that the swing starts with a "push-push" and not a "pull-pull" or "push-pull." He says the club is not pulled away from the ball by the right hand; rather it is pushed by the left hand.

The three-step thought process here becomes "push-push-hit." The hit also is a push, or a throw. If skilled players say they feel a pulling sensation, they are experiencing an illusion, according to Croker. He says the downswing is a throw, and he says this pushing or throwing actually turns the body.

Croker uses the analogy of a horse hitched to a wagon. He says it may appear the horse is pulling the wagon, but in fact it is pushing.

"Your first impression is that the horse is pulling the cart," Croker explained. "Certainly the cart is being pulled by the horse. However, the horse is not pulling. The horse is pushing against the harness as well as against the ground. The same is true of the golf swing."

Some critics say Croker advocates an "early

release" on the downswing.

"This is not true," he said. "We teach the opposite. The correct way to cause 'lag' is by throwing the clubhead in the correct direction at the right time in the swing. The Croker Golf System actually teaches how to cause a late release, plus the required lag, by pushing – and not pulling – against the handle of the club.

"Lag is greatly affected by the direction of the thrust. With the correct direction of both the backswing and the downswing pushing action, there will be a natural lag angle set up between the club shaft and wrists. The hips will also start their backward as well as their forward motion in advance of the hands and clubhead as a natural reaction to this pushing force."

Croker ties the swing together (remaining "centered" or "connected") with the old image of swinging in a barrel. At his schools, conducted in Australia, the United States and other countries, he teaches precise positions during the entire swing.

It is the start of the swing, though, that is crucial on all shots and must be mastered before anything else. It becomes the platform on which the rest of the swing is built.

Croker often begins his instruction with putting, demonstrating that the putting technique is similar to that used on full shots.

"In 1995, I met up with Bob Charles, the most famous left-handed golfer in the world – before Phil Mickelson – and one of the greatest ▶▶▶



The Croker Golf System involves a series of "pushing" motions that are directed by the hands. These motions allow a golfer to start the swing smoothly and consistently, which causes a wrist cock and shoulder turn. From left, Croker is shown at address before the swing has started; then he is initiating the swing with a pushing movement of the right hand, causing the shaft to move slightly toward the target. In the third photo, he pushes the left hand toward the back leg as the hands begin the backswing. The shaft is moving away from the ball (although the clubhead should remain for an instant in its original starting position). In the fourth photo, the hands and shaft clearly have begun the backswing (the clubhead should lag slightly behind the hands). The hips have started to rotate slightly, but the wrists have not yet begun to cock.