



## Natural Golf - The Hit, Let the Clubhead Lead the Way.

By  
David Gould

On a winter night, you're seated before a crackling fire holding Peter Croker and Jeffrey Johnson's *Natural Golf-The Hit*. You're about to open the book when the top log on the stack rolls forward and to the right. You grasp the andiron (subconsciously using a Vardon grip) and begin moving that log backwards and a bit left. With your left hand, you're pushing the poker hard into the log. With your right hand, you're pushing hard against the handle of the poker, causing the log to slide to the left.

Having done that, you probably don't have to read a single page of Croker and Johnson's beautifully organized and illustrated book. The book, along with Croker's growing legion of certified teachers in the United States and worldwide, urges golfers to basically learn the game from their hands inward and outward.

"We teach golfers to use their hands for control and power, so that they can simply hit the ball," says Croker. "The hands are able to control both the clubhead and the body. Your body naturally responds to the action of throwing the clubhead with your hands at and through the ball. Therefore, the feeling of the swing should be a feeling of pushing the clubhead down, out and through the ball."

For Croker, even these cherished swing thoughts are for drilling only. When you're playing, and even when you're hitting those final warmup shots, only one thought is permissible: Hit that ball. Don't think about weight shift. Don't think about body positions, leg drive, folding and unfolding-just hit.

For a quick taste of what this unconventional teaching concept feels like, grab a club, swing it back to a point just short of your "full" backswing and then do whatever is necessary to make the clubhead arrive first at impact. Make the golf swing a race, and make the the clubhead feel like the hands-down winner. It should feel like it's going to beat your hands to impact. Your absolute intention is to throw the clubhead at the ball. You feel like you're in fact doing that. This is physically impossible, but it must be your intent.

"What has tricked and trapped the world of golf has been the illusion of the late hit," says Croker. "The late hit is the *effect*. It's caused by your intention to throw the clubhead at the ball."

Go to the range and try hitting balls with just that single thought-clubhead first-and with any luck you'll feel a startling new set of forces driving you through your shots.

As Croker paraphrases from *Natural Golf-The Hit*: "From the top of the swing, you're pushing directly against the clubhead. You sense that your body has remained turned away from the target, making no conscious motion toward the target. Your left hip and shoulder will be pushed through by the clubhead as it hits the ball. Your right hip and shoulder will be pulled through by the clubhead."

This passage of their book sets up the ultimate Croker-Johnson swing key. A compelling counterpart to Harvey Penick's right-elbow-drives-into-right-hip image, Croker-Johnson's holy-grail feeling for a golfer is, "using the hands to push the hips through impact with the feeling of the clubhead pulling the right hip through after impact."

The authors promise their students that if they can maintain this sensation, "it will almost guarantee everything else in the swing was done correctly." If you love to feel the clubhead throughout your swing, you should latch onto this teaching philosophy right away. If you can't convince yourself to break the old "no hitting from the top" precept, you'll struggle with Croker-Johnson, which teaches precisely that you *should* "hit from the top providing that you hit directly at and through the ball."

*The Hit* is a philosophy of the golf swing that's refreshing to experience for a number of reasons, especially the little proofs along the way that support the argument. One important proof involves the role of the left shoulder as a resistor. The left shoulder is the the anchor of a sensation of solid resistance at impact. Meanwhile, the right shoulder is driving forward, so there's a noticeable squeezing together of the two shoulders.

Croker, a 46-year-old Australian pro (he was runner-up in the 1976 Australian PGA Championship) who now teaches at full time on Hilton Head at Belfair C.C.(843/757-7726), can't import the term "natural golf" into this country. Copyright to the term is held by an Illinois company founded by Jack Kuykendall and later associated with Moe Norman.

Unlike the Kuykendall-Norman model, Croker's version of the golf swing doesn't involve unconventional setup positions or a radical-looking swing action. Croker wants his students' swing to look very much like the swings of Faldo, Price, Kite, Watson, etc. In that way, he's no different from most other instructors. Croker and his coterie mostly differ in their sense of how a golfer should understand and experience the golf swing. One subtle indicator of a Croker-Johnson student is an at-the-top club position in which the shaft doesn't make it all the way to parallel-it's a *backswing*, not an *upswing*.

"We teach hit-the-ball," Croker said in a recent interview. "Most other methods teach you to make a motion and the motion will hit the ball." The golf swing is a sequence of motions-Croker doesn't deny this. But he does dispute the idea that most people can execute that sequence of motions by equipping their brains with an appropriate sequence of thoughts. "We want you comfortably 'there' in present time," he explains "doing the simple thing of hitting that ball."



## The Hit Drill

Freeze your body at the top of the backswing and don't let the body move. Attempt to uncock your hands slowly, pushing the clubhead directly at the ball. Because you're pushing out and down, your hands will automatically uncock properly through impact.



The Hit Drill should also be done without a club to teach hand release-utilizing your body as the base.



Repeat this drill but "break through the stop sign" and continue to a balanced finish. Allow the momentum of the hands to pull your body up to a full finish.



The still, solid position of the body results from the commitment to a hands-oriented, hands-driven swing. Immediately after impact, both wrists are pushed-fully uncocked-past the left shoulder, away from the head and the right heel.



## Left Hand Push Through Impact

This image teaches:

1. structure
2. stability of the left shoulder and
3. constant rate of clubface closing

to help stop the slice.

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