

On Getting Better at Golf (and Other Things Too)

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My fourteen-year-old daughter Dee, as I call her in public expressions, lives with her mother on the west coast; I live on the east coast. I'm hearing impaired and can't hear amplified sound, so other than occasional visits to see her, my contact with Dee is limited to emails--no phone or Skype communications, can't hear.

Dee is very involved with golf and shoots in the mid-70s and hopes to play on her high school team and in college. During the 2018 Christmas break from school, she with and her mother traveled to Arizona to compete in a junior golf tournament. Dee wrote me a long email just after she returned from the Arizona trip. She reported that she didn't do well in the tournament. A visit to the Grand Canyon (including the rental Mercedes to get there) was a great time. With a bit of editing, this was my emailed reply to Dee's message:

Dear Dee—

I know you were disappointed with your scores in the Arizona tournament, but I was so, so proud of your response to how things went in the tournament. You used that “hit” as a gift, to make you even more dedicated and to work even harder with your golf. Be proud of yourself for that response to a difficult experience.

I think the key considerations for you around golf are 1) do you have the necessary talent to play golf at an elite level, and 2) is golf as an activity right for you as a person. In my view, the answers to both of those questions are absolutely YES! You are wonderfully talented at golf. And golf suits you, it's right for you, and it's fun for you, and golf challenges you, and your golf involvement makes you a better person overall. I believe a big reason that school is going so well for you now is what you are learning from your golf involvement about what goes into achieving success in something and are developing yourself in those directions.

Here are some thoughts that I have about how you might improve at golf:

1. In any area, whether it's golf or math or designing clothes or being good at business, whatever it is, you should learn from the best. A golfer that really impresses me you can learn from is Justin Thomas. <https://video.golfdigest.com/watch/why-justin-thomas-swing-works> [The links in this thought may no longer be available when you read this. You can find comparable ones on the internet—or anyway, you get the idea.] Note how straight his left arm is on the backswing, and how high he gets his hands on the back swing [I see Dee as needing to improve in these areas]. Notice too how incredibly flexible he is, and the remarkable club speed he generates. Another exemplary golfer is Sung Hyun Park. Check her out on YouTube. While you can learn from the various aspects of their swings, I think it is particularly valuable to get a feel for “all of it,” the totality of their swing. Check out YouTubes of their iron play, and chipping, and putting form. Take “all of that” into your being—your whole being, not just your mind.

2. Strength and flexibility are important. With school and all the other things you do, you don't have a lot of time to devote to these areas now, but I think in you could get a lot done in just five or so minutes a day.

You don't want big bulky muscles with golf. You want long, stretchy muscles. I like resistance bands for that. You could do 10-12 repetitions of these six exercises, one after another, in a total time of just two or three minutes, anytime during the day. <https://www.mensjournal.com/health-fitness/full-body-resistance-band-workout/>. I've sent you some resistance bands from Amazon. You can decide whether to use them.

For flexibility, you could do the twist. Twenty seconds to the left and twenty seconds to the right. Push hard. [The half lord of the fishes pose from yoga. <https://www.yogaoutlet.com/guides/how-to-do-half-lord-of-the-fishes-pose-in-yoga/>.]

And this one, the shoulder pull, 10 seconds each side. Press hard. [In the email, I put a picture here. It's the simple cross-egged pose from yoga. A verbal description: Reach your right arm across your chest, bringing your upper arm close to your collarbone. Clasp the elbow of your crossed arm with the opposite hand. Draw your crossed arm in close to your body. Hold. Repeat on the opposite side.]

3. Relaxation and calming are important in any sport. I'm not comfortable with you using the stress relieving inhalers you asked me to get. This in the questions and answers on the Amazon site gave me pause.

Since there is no nicotine, no tobacco, and no banned substances in our blends, there are no legal prohibitions against minors using them. However, we are against minors smoking cigarettes, and we believe that at the

impressionable age of minors, merely gaining the 'hand-to-mouth habit' could increase the potential for a minor to start smoking cigarettes. We ask that minors avoid using our personal diffusers out of an abundance of caution.

I'd prefer you do things like work with your breathing. For example, relax all your muscles, your shoulders and everything, and un-focus your eyes. Take a deep natural in-breath, and on the out-breath, or exhale, silently, to yourself, say the word "calm." Follow your breath in and out. Do three of those breaths. Or even one. Anytime during the day. If you are waiting to tee off, do one of those breaths. As you are standing on the green, one of those breaths. Anytime.

There are breathing exercises like these you could try. <https://www.drweil.com/health-wellness/body-mind-spirit/stress-anxiety/breathing-three-exercises/>. See what works for you.

4. Nutrition matters greatly. You are so fortunate to be eating the wonderful organic food Mom cooks. Mom is a great, great cook. Your body is your instrument, your tool, for getting you through life, and not just in golf. Nothing is as important now in your life, growing as you are, as what you eat. Eat all your food, drink all your milk. No junk food. Be careful about the food at school. I understand you are mostly packing a lunch, and that you are very selective about what you eat at school—good for you.

It's important to identify the best thing you can eat or drink during a round of golf to maintain your energy and mental sharpness. I don't know what to suggest for that, but you and Mom can look into it and try various things to see what works best. It may be that what is best won't taste all that good, but the key is to do what works best for your energy level and mental sharpness.

Build up your body, don't tear it down. No alcohol or drugs during your teenage years—none, zero. Drugs includes pills. Pills are deadly bad. No substances to get a temporary uplift. Let your friends do whatever they do. You do what you do—honor your body, honor yourself.

I hope this at least gets you thinking and talking and trying things in these four directions—learning from the best; strength and flexibility; relaxation; and nutrition. The gym you go to can offer suggestions, and Mom is superb in these areas. My point is you don't have to spend a whole lot of time with physical exercise—your body will react to just a few concentrated minutes of effort.

It's important to keep in mind that in golf, any area, you need to do things now that won't show positive results for a long time, even years. I

believe strongly that if you do the work now on golf--on your form, on the way you think and strategize about playing, on developing your body--you'll be a top golfer when you are seventeen. I know that sounds like a long time from now, and it is a long time from now. But that time will come. You will be seventeen someday, and eighteen and nineteen and twenty.

Small things add up to big things, though it takes time. Do the very best you can with each detail of your life. Today's homework, today's driving range session, this meal, whatever it is. Do what you do now, this instant, with an awareness that you are creating your future. When you get to your future—like when you are seventeen—if you didn't do what you could have, should have, at fourteen, it's too late, no do-overs in life.

Keep in mind that you only go through life one time—cherish and enjoy every moment. The Grand Canyon with Mom happened just that one time. Love life, every second of it.

I'm always here for you.

Love,
Daddy