

# GROOVES GOLF®

AT RUDDING PARK

## John's Story

18 months ago, we had a gentleman called John get in touch with us. John was, like many of us, frustrated with his golf game. This wasn't for lack of trying! John had spent a lot of time (and money) on a quest to find "the secret" that everyone seemed to keep promising. Yet all he found was frustration, disappointment and a growing resentment towards the game. Hour upon hour of swing lesson, 6 different instructors in three years, multiple online subscriptions, not to mention the rabbit warren of YouTube videos. Yet John had not improved. If anything, he had gotten worse. His handicap was at a five year high of 22, and he was a train wreck in competitions – the pressure just got the better of him.

Our first meeting with John was on the golf course (which came as a big surprise to him). *"I've never started on the golf course. Don't you want to take a look at my swing?"* he said hopefully. You could already hear the fear in his voice at the thought of heading out onto the course. Keen to put him at ease quickly, we explained that it was the best place to start so we could observe his game where it matters most, on the golf course. He could be rest assured we would take a look at his swing whilst playing but also see all the things that the driving range hides, awkward lies, fairway bunkers, difficult chips & pitches, strategy and perhaps most importantly, pressure! We could then create an improvement plan that was built specifically for him. He could play his worst ever round; it wouldn't matter to us, we just wanted to spend some time getting to know one another.

It certainly wasn't pretty. John struggled as expected but we could see immediately where his problems were. His swing wasn't that bad. Yes, he had a tendency to hit the ball a bit low and struggled with a few hooks and heavy contacts but overall, he hit the ball pretty well for his skill level. His short game needed some work, as did his on-course strategy but John's main issue was the level of expectation that he set for himself. The way he approached the round and some of the shots he took on were similar to what a tour pro would do, not a 22 handicapper. The unrealistic expectations were leading to a bigger problem – tension. No-one has ever played good golf when they are tense, and John was certainly no different. This tension was affecting his golf swing and his decision making.

We lost count of the times John made a beautiful and rhythmical practice swing only to do something totally different over the ball (probably trying to juggle his 10 thoughts for the day) and it always seemed like he would take on the impossible shot.

*"That was a pretty fair reflection of my game"* he said when we finished as he signed for a score of 54 for nine holes. We sat down for a coffee with him and discussed what we had observed during the game. We explained that we could help him improve, in fact we would even guarantee that improvement, but he would need to be open minded to our way of working. *"There will be failures along the way, but without failure we can never learn. We will be working with you to overcome these bumps in the road every step of the way"* we assured him.

We would be working with John intensively over the next 20 weeks to maximise our contact time with him, with a combination of individual and group classes both on the golf course and/or the practice areas when needed. It was a flexible way of working but so important to get the improvement that we both wanted.

At first a little nervous (and dubious) at the prospect of group coaching John absolutely loved it! He got so much from the sessions, meeting other like-minded golfer's that were all in the same boat as him. He began to feel more comfortable around others, soaking up and learning to deal with the pressure of the competitive games we played, and hearing how they went about their games and the experiences that they had learned from.

We spent most of the sessions out on the golf course playing different games and setting certain challenges when the opportunities arose (which they often did). John began to understand *how to score*, using a sound plan and strategy to get the most out of his game. He learned to manage his expectations and subsequently reduce tension so that he could execute his shots much more effectively.

Away from his coaching sessions, John started to track some basic statistics. Not only did this allow him to see he was finally moving in the right direction with his scores, but it also gave us further insight into how he still made too many double bogeys. We quickly identified that he 3-putted too often, due to some inconsistent speed control and also struggled to control distance with his wedges. This opened the door to a new way of practicing for John. There was never any structure to his practice, and it led to many wasted hours. Now John was practicing with purpose, he was working on the specific weaknesses in his game and completing structured tasks which added pressure to his practice.

Twelve weeks after our first meeting, John shot a competition score of 86. His lowest score for seven years! He followed that up over the next few weeks and months with some very consistent scores and has recently seen his handicap come down to a new low of 13. This was all with minimal technical input on our part and we only gave him the information that would ultimately help him.

We helped John to simplify and demystify the game of golf and taught him to play with far less stress, encouraging him to take ownership of his swing, not the one that he spent so long trying to learn. This combined with a sharper short game and a new approach of how to play golf has seen a smile return to John's face for the first time in a long while. Yes, he still has bad days, but he has turned a corner and now ultimately enjoys his golf once again.