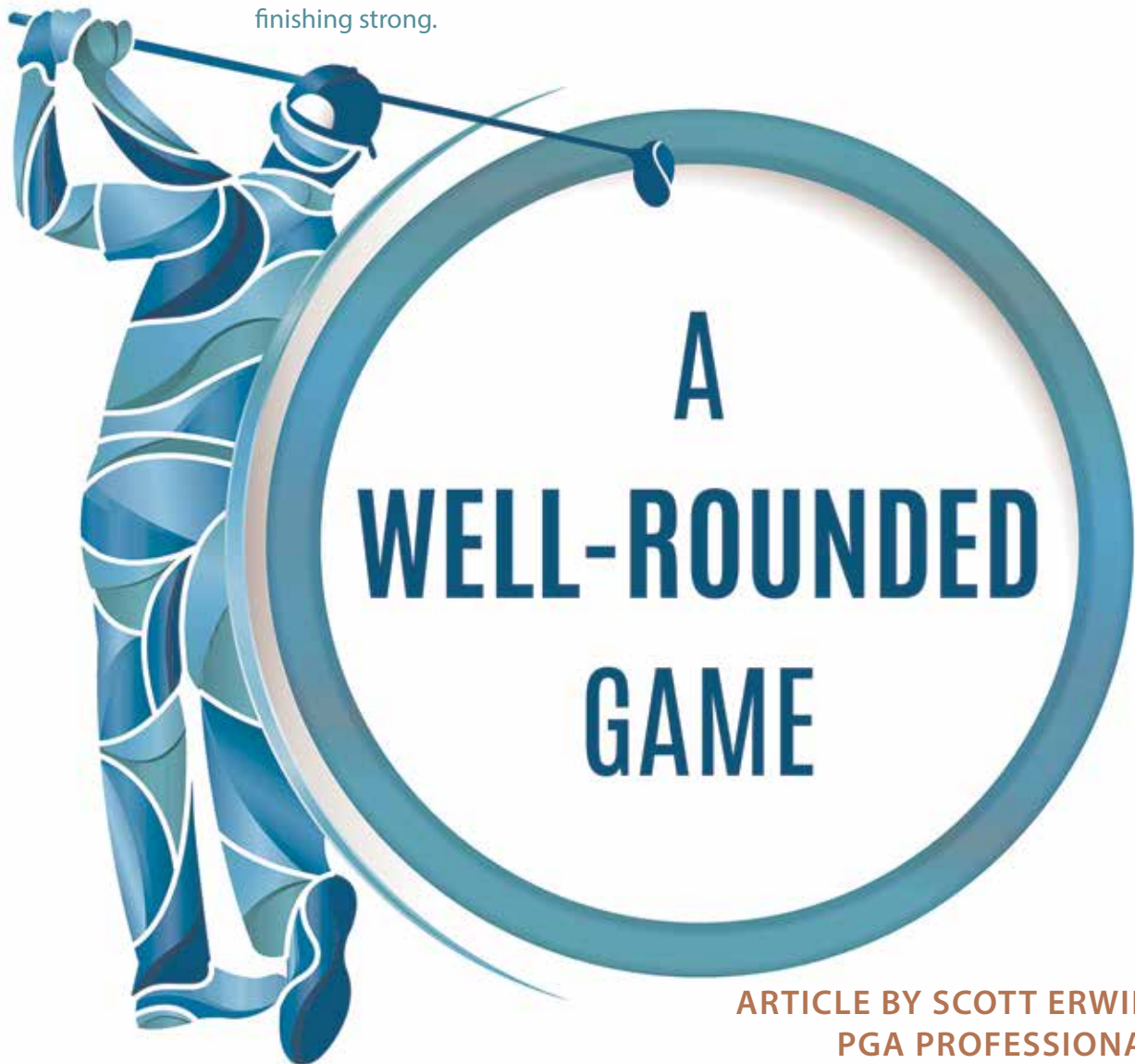


Improving your golf game is a process. That process starts with some good fundamentals, grows with solid practice and the right application of power, and ultimately leads to a place that is “your best golf.”

For some that will be the stage of a professional tour, though for most of us it will simply be those shining moments when all the of the hard work and determination culminate in our “personal best” score.

But what about our best score in life? How do we get better there and finish strong?

As someone who knows a lot about the game, and a lot about life, PGA professional and Links Fellowship leader Scott Erwin sees the connections in how we approach both, using four steps to guide us to starting well and finishing strong.



**ARTICLE BY SCOTT ERWIN,
PGA PROFESSIONAL**

Start with the basics

The golf swing must begin with a good grip, stance and alignment. Even before you develop a good stance and alignment, you must begin with a good grip. Most PGA teaching professionals will tell you that the V's formed by your thumbs and palms should point to your right shoulder (right handers).

Before Jesus was crucified, He wanted to say something to His disciples and others to inspire them to have a close personal relationship with Him—the foundation of our walk. So Jesus made a statement so profound that it has been shared by believers for 2,000 years: “If anyone wishes to come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

As a first step, golfers check to see if their V’s point to their right shoulder to know their grip is correct. Jesus also gave us a first step: deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him.

Secure power for a big advantage

Rory McElroy is living proof that you don’t have to be big to create power. Some explain it is just how fast you can swing the club, while others tell you that having a strong core and pushing upwards with your legs at impact has something to do with how far a person can hit a golf ball. However it is generated, power is a definite advantage in golf.

Power is very important to Christians as well, especially power to live a life that honors Christ. We pray to God for a plan for our life that honors Him, and we wait for the Holy Spirit to give us that plan and help us live it. Jesus explained specifically where power comes from: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

We can think of power in the sense of strength. Certainly, a booming drive shows us this! But big, strong athletes will hit weak shots if they have no confidence in their swing. The strength and speed you need to propel a golf ball a long way comes from confidence. The same is true in your spiritual life. If you are

confident that God is at work with you, in you, and through you, the result will be powerful. This is what happens with the Holy Spirit: “Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right and to the left” (Isaiah 30:21). When you know God is speaking to you, and you act on what is spoken, you can anticipate big results.

Have a routine

For golfers, the daily routine of practicing the right thing over and over, including a pre-shot routine, causes the right thought to come to mind under pressure. If you asked the best players in the world what they were thinking about before they hit the last iron shot onto the green on the eighteenth hole to win, they would say they were focusing on their pre-shot routine. When you have well-established habits and practices, you’re not likely to get distracted in the moment.

As followers of Jesus, daily routines of prayer, reading the Bible, and reciting Scripture passages prepare us for whatever comes our way. This daily activity allows us to experience meaningful knowledge, true joy, and absolute peace of mind. Paul wrote to his readers, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). We can trust our instincts to deal with our daily choices or we can renew our mind daily—God’s plan is for us to keep coming back to Him and His word.

Finish strong

To be successful as a professional

golfer, you can’t get distracted by the crowds or the media. Even supportive influences, like one’s sponsors, can draw your mind away from what you need to do in competition. You must be able to block that out and stay focused on the fundamentals and pre-shot routine that got you there. If you have the talent and focus on your routines, you can finish strong.

Jesus knows some of us are ready to go on the DOT (Discipling Others Tour) and share our gifts. The gifts and talents He has given us could be used in a more meaningful way than we have used them in the past. One of the last things Jesus said on earth is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). When we follow Christ, we want to replicate ourselves with other followers. This is something we can do right up to the end of our lives.

The golfer can find many ways to be satisfied in the game, but one way has an impact beyond ourselves: giving the game to others. We might say that in this way we are serving the game and serving others. Likewise, when we reach out with the love of Christ, we are serving God and serving others. Jesus Himself came to serve. He told His disciples, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When we live a well-founded life, rely on God’s power, build faithful routines, and look to finish strong by reaching out in Jesus’ name, we are exercising the salvation we have been given. ■■■