

# Coordination is foundation of golf success

By CORINNE ABATT

Raising a championship golfer is seldom at the top of the American dream list. It is usually well down the line after president, movie star, pro football or baseball player and Johnny Carson's replacement.

But, assuming there are still plenty of parents who wouldn't mind having another Jack Nicklaus or Nancy Lopez at the breakfast table, the questions are, how? what does it take? and are champion golfers — the big money winners — born or made?

Judging by statistics like height and weight, playing golf doesn't hinge on build. Marlene Bauer Hagge, one of the LPGA's top money winners, is 5-2, 115 pounds.

Nancy Lopez, at 5-7, is about average on the women's circuit. Jane Blalock is 5-6, 120 pounds, and blue-eyed, blond Laura Baugh, whose smile is a familiar TV attraction, is 5-5, 110 pounds. The ladies tend to be trim rather than beefy — no Amazons there.

Among the leaders on the men's pro circuit there are a wider range of body types. At the tall end of the spectrum is Howard Twitty, 6-5, 220; Andy North and Andy Bean are both 6-4, 210.

As a teen North was playing basketball and football until a knee ailment sidelined him. He took up golf, which was recommended to him, and did well. But he finished high school as an all-stater in basketball. Golf, though, had grabbed his interest for good.

**TOM WATSON**, 5-9, has outplayed and outpowered the big guys many times. So have Gary Player — 5-7, 150

pounds — and Lee Trevino — 5-7, 180.

OK. If it isn't build, then what is it that separates the champions from the duffers?

Barry Nettle, golf pro at Birmingham's public Lincoln Hills course, works with a lot of beginners during his weekly lesson schedule.

"If there isn't some degree of coordination, there's no hope," he said. "I can usually tell in the first half hour if there's hope. I don't care how smart an individual is, if you don't have the coordination, you're just not going to do well."

Nettles discounts stature saying the legs control the action.

"A trained ape with no leg action is going to hit the ball 150 yards — period."

On his list of qualifications, desire ranks beside coordination. He believes in starting lessons as early as possible if the child has the incentive. He uses one of his former 15-year-old students as an example.

"He's fantastic, I don't think I could beat him. He works as a bus boy to make money to play. That's what I like to see, not parents paying."

Nettles said that as a kid, he was doing the same thing — playing 27 holes of golf a day and working on the side to pay the greens fees. Although the Lincoln Hills pro didn't have a lesson until he was 30, he played on the Royal Oak Kimball golf team and came from a golfing family. He likes to tell about his sexagenarian uncle who plays about eight times a summer and still shoots under 70 for 18 holes.

"My aunt came out here last week and shot a 42," he said proudly.

Golfers do seem to come from golfing

families. Although J.C. Snead can fly on his own record, chances are he picked up a few pointers from his uncle, Sam Snead, along the fairway. Andy Bean's parents owned a golf course in Lakeland, Fla. Pro Dave Bauer taught daughters Alice and Marlene well enough to launch them as perhaps the only sister team on the ladies' pro circuit.

Laura Baugh's brother, Beau, is a professional — both encouraged by their father, Hale, who played golf at the University of Florida. Connie Chillemi's father Nick and brother Tom are both Class A members of the PGA, making

three pros in that family.

Domingo Lopez put a four-wood in his daughter Nancy's hand when she was 7 and remains her first and only instructor.

So, while there are no real ground rules for raising a champion, there are a couple of things that can improve the odds.

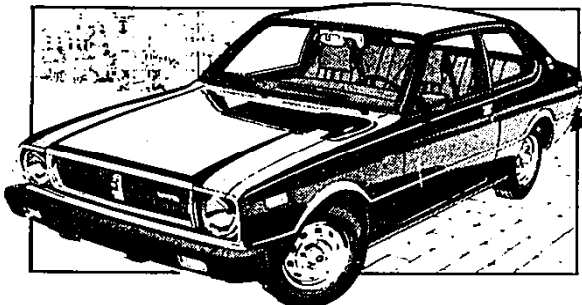
If the youngster has good coordination, starts early, likes sports, comes from a golfing family and talks constantly about backswing, tee shots, approaches and putts, it's possible, there's a future champ at your breakfast table.



Nancy Devine receives golf instruction from Birmingham pro Barry Nettles. (Staff photo)

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