

The Times

Martin gets a thumbs up for his "Thumbs Down"

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By BILL KENNEDY

EAST WINDSOR - A golf slump never got the best of Alan Martin - at least he never has admitted to it.

But in 1990, his golf game had deteriorated to the point where it was a struggle to play and he literally was hurting himself while playing so badly. "For the first time in my life, I hurt my back," he said. "I was swinging so badly, I was losing 20 yards on every shot. I couldn't hit a 9-iron 110-120 yards. It was so bad, even my good hits were not going anywhere. My power fade turned into a vicious slice. And I was corkscrewing myself into the ground."

It didn't go away. Three years later, he took a lesson, and nothing clicked. In 1994, it got a little better. "I started using my wrists, but I was inconsistent," said the 50-year-old East Windsor resident, who has been a member of the Springdale Golf Club for 20 years and three times has won Springdale's President's Cup. His handicap is around eight. That's when it occurred to Martin that the use of his hands might be the key to straightening out his problems. So he began to work on it. The result of his anguish in the early 1990s, has been a renaissance in his game, as he said: "I've been doing it for seven years." Doing what?

Martin has developed what he calls "Thumbs down - The virtual golf lesson." It is designed to be a self-teaching methodology based on subtle adjustments in the swing. In its simplest form, this technique calls for the golfer to attempt to turn down his strong hand thumb as he is coming through the ball. It is a technique which keeps the ball straight and develops a draw. He has written a pocket-sized book on the subject for a golfer's bag.

Martin has shared his theories with head pro Dan McCarthy, now in his second year at the helm of Springdale, after two years as an assistant and eight previous years as assistant at Navesink and Eagle Oaks.

"It's almost golf for dummies," McCarthy said of Martin's book/manual. "There are no big words, or things people don't understand." This kind of coincides with the basic Martin philosophy which is: "I'm not big on fundamentals. But I'm all about them."

Martin, who was a football kicker for Albany State 1972-75, and had tryouts as a kicker with the Giants and Jets, is in agreement.

"He has a solid understanding of what's going on," McCarthy said. "I read it. His book is very good - very simple." Martin does not profess to be anything more than an amateur player, but he has helped a few selected people to eliminate a slice and to improve their golf games. He doesn't have time for much more than that because he is married with two children and has a full-time job as regional sales manager network security space for Network Intelligence, a Massachusetts-based company.

Even though he has a practice range in his backyard, practice time is not frequent.

"It's in my head all day long," he said on his range last Saturday. "But not here, at least not enough."

Even with all this knowledge, theory and firm grasp of the mental part of golf, Martin is frank to admit there are many days when he strikes the ball badly. How can this happen? "Because I'm an amateur," he responded.

Martin's book can be obtained by logging onto www.thumbsdown.info.