Reflecting on Your Club Swinging Practice

“In learning you will teach, and in teaching you will learn.” Phil Collins, a Singer.

The idea behind this document is to point out to Indian club swingers that it is possible to improve your own practice by carefully reflecting on and evaluating what you are doing. By observing what you are shown by senior instructors and observing how you put this into practice yourself will allow you to see how you can improve your club swinging practice. Use of a mirror will help in your evaluation.

There are a number of important points in reflecting on and evaluating what you are doing and how you are practicing, these are:

1. Correct Posture and Stance: There are several important postures and stances in Indian club swinging and it is necessary to make sure the different parts of your body are in the correct place before you start to swing the clubs. For the stances make sure your feet are in the correct place and your weight is distributed evenly or as required. Make sure your back is straight and that you are not stooping or bending forward during the swing. You should remain in charge of the clubs and not give way to their weight or momentum during a swing. Remain strong and straight as appropriate.

2. Direction of Swing: Make sure that you are swinging the clubs in the right direction and that both arms are making the appropriate movement in the same way. It is common for shoulders to be quite different and the way the clubs swing can be affected by this and also affected by any shoulder injuries. The ideal movement for a particular technique should be understood and should be attempted where possible but if injuries prevent this then you should be aware of the difference in movement between your shoulders at least and still be able to (a) teach the correct movement and (b) perform the correct movement with the ‘good’ shoulder.

3. Strength and Relaxation: Club swinging is an art form (like Tai Chi Chuan) which requires a degree of strength to get the club moving and to hold on to the club throughout a swing but relies on a great deal of relaxation to allow the swing to be smooth and flowing. However, it is not necessary and not desirable to be strong (and therefore quite stiff) throughout the movement as this will make the swing look awkward and ‘jerky’. Most commonly the launch of the club into a swing will require a degree of strength but the downward swing will require a degree of relaxation as you feel the weight and momentum of the club as it swings. The club will be gently guided in the right direction but in essence the arms will follow the weight and momentum of the clubs as they continue the swing. Thus, a whole swing will usually require a strong launch, a relaxation phase allowing the arms to stretch out, application of gentle guidance to the club, then a sweep up using the momentum gathered from the down swing part of the swing and a (re)launch with some strength into the next part of the swing. When using two clubs on alternate heart shaped swings you will find that as one arm is being strong and launching the club the other arm is being relaxed, stretched and guiding the club up to the next swing. Thus, the muscles are cycled through a strength, relaxation and stretch period such that some people may feel that they are being repeatedly ‘massaged’ by the movement. In addition, relaxation also refers to the relaxation of your mind and you should feel like you are involved in some form of meditation when swinging your clubs.

4. Coordination: This is absolutely crucial for complex swings and routines. However, most people have problems with coordination at some point in learning to swing Indian clubs. The great advantage of Indian clubs is that they improve your
coordination between the arms and body movement and stimulate certain brain activity as the clubs cross the centre line of the body. The arms and upper body should remain fluid and flowing and fully coordinated, with the right timing and distance between the clubs and arms/shoulders, with the clubs swinging and the lower body should engage in any static positions and any sophisticated stepping movements with similar fluid coordination. Basically if a club swinger looks fluid, coordinated and the clubs swing smoothly around the athlete then the club swinger is becoming quite expert at what they are doing. The goal is perfect harmony between all parts of the body in swinging the clubs.

5. Smooth Flowing Transitions: This has been covered to some degree on the additional document on ‘Transitions’. The club(s) should flow smoothly around the body to create the movement or combination. There should be no hesitation, wobble, stiffness or stopping the club during the movement or combination. In Tai Chi there is the idea of ‘joining up’ the movements and this is pretty much the case in Indian Club swinging except that the clubs, once moving, create a great deal of momentum that will ‘drag’ your arms and body in various directions during a swing. Some of these forces need to be resisted (e.g. by having a strong centre, straight back and stable foot placement) and others need to be properly accommodated by relaxing into the movement and allowing the arms to swing around the body in a flowing movement. When combining basic movements into a series of combinations the ability to guide the clubs in the required direction with apparent ease and without any awkward ‘joins’ is the mark of a ‘smooth flowing transition’.

6. Intent and Focus: Here we mean that the movement or technique is clear and the proper posture, stance, timing and flow are achieved. When this is the case the club swinging will adopt a smooth and expert looking movement. However, the ‘intent’ refers to making the movement you intended to make with the correct criteria observed for that particular technique. Often for beginners this ‘intent’ is missing and sometimes another technique will emerge or a technique will be missed in a sequence of moves. This brings us to ‘focus’ and this is where you need to focus your mind on what you are doing such that you think of the movement briefly just before you make the correct movement. Thus, a tired and unfit club swinger will lose concentration when swinging and look as though the swings are not properly controlled and mistakes will be seen in a sequence. However, a good strong athlete swinging clubs will look focused, clear and the techniques will look expertly performed with smooth flowing transitions to the next technique.

7. Balanced Movement: Here we mean that the club swinging looks balanced and all movements look the same on the left and right sides of the body and where possible balanced to front and rear of the body. Thus, when swinging or swinging and moving (e.g. stepping) the movements will be balanced left-right and back-front so that no part of the body is exercised preferentially or disproportionately.

8. Aesthetic Appearance: Basically your club swinging should look good. It should immediately demonstrate a degree of expertise obtained from long hours of careful and varied practice of the techniques you are showing. The techniques should be as near perfect as you can make them and all the features outlined above should be clearly demonstrated. If in a grading or competition you wear a suitable clothing (e.g. T-shirt and track suit trousers) these should be neat and tidy to allow all the movements to be clearly seen.

These points do not supersede the criteria for a good swing but are complementary.