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By Adam Edwards

IT DON'T MEAN A THING IF YOU AIN'T GOT THAT SWING

BRUCE Forsyth has swung there, Anton Du Beke has been photographed there while Tess Daly's husband, the television presenter Vernon Kay, would rather be there than most other places. No, no, I'm not talking about Strictly Come Dancing but rather those of the cast who move their hips and tip their toes a few hundred yards from Harrods.

In a soundproof, windowless former squash court in one of London's fashionable squares the stars soft-shoe shuffle in front of the camera at the Knightsbridge Golf School, learning that a putting green really is called the dance floor in golf jargon and hoping that one day they will eagle as well as they arabesque.

This attendance by Strictly Come Dancing stars is not unique. The hoofers are just some of the famous names that have and still do attend this exclusive academy. The turf may be artificial and the fairway made of plastic netting (and the 19th hole a drinks vending machine) but the golfers at this VIP tee have included members of the wealthiest and grandest families in Britain, a pride of celebrities, scores of chief executives and a host of sporting heroes – in particular from the worlds of golf and soccer.

It is, for example, where Sean Connery first hit a ball when he was taught to play for his role as James Bond in the needle match against Goldfinger. Bryan Ferry learned to swing there, as did Diana Rigg, Anita Harris and Tania Bryer. Riverdance's Michael Flatley, entrepreneur Richard Branson, Kojak actor Telly Savalas and Moody Blues front man Graham Edge all found a sweet spot at the school. It was where Lord "lucky" Lucan learned his golf – a set of clubs he bought for his wife still sits in the basement. More recent pupils include Sven Goran Eriksson's ex girlfriend Nancy Dell'Olio, Spice Girl Geri Halliwell, the television hosts Ant and Dec and actor Hugh Grant.

This month the two professional golfers who teach at the school, Steve Gould and Dave Wilkinson, are publishing a book, *The Golf Delusion*, about their tried and tested technique and the well-known pupils who have mastered the swing in the tiny basement.

Steve, 50, and Dave, 56, teach the perfect golf shot with the aid of mirrors, machines and high technology cameras. It is the swing that was developed by golf teacher Leslie King when the school first opened in 1951 in the same basement it is in now. King studied the great players such as Harry Vardon, Bobby Jones and Ted Ray and realised that their action could be broken down into four parts. He built his model swing around these.

His system of teaching was so successful that in 1974 Gary Player had a week's intensive instruction with King and then went on to win the Open at Royal Lytham. That same swing was the one that Telly Savalas was seen practising with a crusty roll on the floor of an upmarket bakery a few minutes after he'd had a lesson at the school. "The manager politely asked him if there was something wrong with the bread," says Steve.

It is the swing that caused the police to interview Leslie King after the golf pro had written in a magazine that Lord Lucan had the strongest hands of any man he had known; the police wanted to know if it was those hands that strangled the aristocrat's nanny. And it is the same rotation that football superstar Gianfranco Zola made when smashing the mirror, a glass that had been reflecting aspiring golfers' efforts for more than half a century.

"We have to be very discreet about our customers," said Steve.

"Some of them don't mind the public knowing they are learning to play here. Others like to arrive on the golf course pretending they were born skilful golfers.

"We also have a lot of women customers who want to keep the lessons secret from their husband so that they can surprise them on the golf course.

"And then there are men who don't like to admit publicly that they needed lessons." According to Steve, everybody can hit two brilliant golf shots in every 50 which is the reason many golfers think there is a magic cure for their ills rather than working away at building a perfect swing with the help of an instructor.

"Everybody needs lessons," says Steve. "We have taught some of the greatest golfers in the world here and all of them needed an occasional expert's eye. The same holds true for amateur golfers however good or famous they are. Bruce Forsyth, for example, was cured of his 'Bollinger elbow'. His right elbow was lifting up on the back swing as if he was raising a glass of champagne to his lips."

The story of the Knightsbridge Golf School recently turned full circle when the American film, *The Greatest Game Ever Played*, was shot in England. The movie is about the 1911 Open when 19-year-old American amateur Francis Ouimet beat the then British superstars Harry Vardon and Ted Ray, the pair on whom Leslie King had based his teachings. During the making of the film the producers, without knowing the history of the Knightsbridge School, sent Steven Marcus and Stephen Dillane, the two stars, to the basement to learn to replicate the swings and mannerisms of British golfers.

While there they will have seen a letter of thanks from Hugh Grant. It reads: "Thank you for all the help you've given my father and me. It is hard to say which of us came to you the worst golfer, but you have done the impossible and turned us from embarrassing to respectable... Just like Mrs Banfield at my primary school, you can be strict, but it's for my own good and the results have certainly been well worth it. (And you never hit me with a ruler – or, at least, only once and I deserved it.) As they say in America, you guys are the best."

I The Golf Delusion by Steve Gould and DJ Wilkinson (Elliott and Thompson, £20, www.eandtbooks.com). The Knightsbridge Golf School is at 47 Lowndes Square, London SW1X 9JU. Tel: 020 7235 2468