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Golf – The Play of the Game

Overview

Golfing has become an incredibly popular sport. Most who participate say it's rather addictive, to say the least. But it's also a demanding sport. You'll quickly learn the differences between the seven iron and the seven wood, when to use the one iron (or that you'll likely never use it), and how to extract yourself from a sand trap. But the sport has tons of subtleties as well, and the technical age has definitely made an impact. You can measure the "speed" of the course using a stimp meter and track your scores to establish your golf handicap using the latest software. You may even choose an interactive program to critique and help correct your swing.

You'll find people who make a living giving golf lessons and schools that will take you in for a week or more to break those bad habits and help you establish a better stance and grip. It's more than being able to drive – it's about putting, getting in shape and keeping your eye on the ball. It is, very simply, golf.

Golf, a Zen Experience?

Good golfers center themselves before each and every shot. While it may look effortless, there is a great deal going on. Remember the scene in "The Legend of Bagger Vance" where Bobby Jones steps up to the ball preparing to tee off. Will Smith tells Matt Damon to watch Jones's eyes, and how he sees the field. The eyes go soft as Jones takes his practice swings, getting his mind and body in tune with one another. His drive is as nearly perfect as a drive can be.

It may seem a bit farfetched, and some will object to the statement, for many will recognize the truth of this statement - Golf is a Zen experience. This is especially for the better golfers, no matter how they may joke around and seem to be goofing off.

This is what Zen is – being completely and totally in each and every moment at all times. Some people call it living life to its fullest, but that is something entirely different. Zen is more like experiencing every moment of life to its fullest and appreciating the moments for what they are.

Golf and Zen coincide on all aspects of the game. By being in the moment a golfer takes notice of everything around himself or herself. He or she notes the feel of the breeze as it is blowing across the course, recognizing its force and direction, but not actively thinking about it. He or she also notices the feel of the grass as they walk down the fairway, but he or she is not thinking about the next shot, not yet. Thinking about the shot will occur when the player gets to the ball.

At this time the player will note the distance from where he or she is to the green, the weather conditions and select a club. Avoiding distractions, the player will focus on how to make the next shot, again, though, without really thinking about it. Too much thought fouls up the mental processes causing the player to get tense and screw up the shot. Instead, the Zen golfer will trust his or her body, knowing the body and mind are in tune with one another and make the shot. For the record, no every shot will not be perfect going exactly where and how far the golfer intended. But, the major difference is the golfer familiar with, and practicing Zen, will not be adversely affected by a missed shot, whereas a golfer who stresses over every shot will.

The non-Zen golfer will get down on himself or herself, thinking how he or she is a lousy golfer and shouldn't be on the course at all. The negative thoughts will be invasive throughout this player's entire body as the body and mind are at odds with one another instead of being in a state of harmony. So, the end result is one bad shot is followed by another, and a good shot is looked upon as an accident, luck or a fluke.

Golfing in the Wind

Weather conditions play an important part in golf, and none more so than wind. While a wet golf course will prevent the ball from rolling as far after being hit, and can make it tough to get the ball in the air to begin with, the wind will have more bearing on the outcome of a round of golf than anything.

Why is this? Well, first the wind will affect the trajectory of the ball, taking it out of its intended course of flight, and dropping it somewhere the golfer did not intend for it to go.

Now, let us remember the majority of golfers, both men and women, are right handed or play right handed. The wind will be discussed from the right handed person's perspective. But, first, the golfer must be aware of which way the wind is blowing, even if he or she has no idea of how strong it is blowing. Of course, if a gale force wind is blowing on the golf course it really will not matter much how a golfer tries to hit the ball, unless the wind is behind his or her back. In such an event the golfer would want to get the ball higher and let the wind do most of the work, especially on a drive.

OK, so the golfer is in the tee box, the wind is brisk, blowing from right to left. He or she is looking at a par 3 hole about one hundred and fifty yards from the tee box to the hole. The flag is in the middle of the green. What can be expected? If the golfer attempts to hit the ball directly at the flag, he or she will be disappointed to see the ball being blown off to the left of the hole. Depending on the slope of the green, this can result in the ball rolling completely off the green, requiring a chip shot to try and save par. The smart golfer would take the wind into account and plan his or her shot accordingly.

Suppose the golfer is teeing off on a three hundred and eighty seven yard par 4 hole with a stiff wind blowing directly in his or her face. The smart thing to do would be for the golfer to alter his/her stance to keep the ball down low and out of the wind. By doing this, the golfer can get a decent drive.

The golfer must also take the wind into account on the approach shot, again setting up in his/her stance to keep the ball low. And, it would also be a good idea to pick a club one bigger than he/she normally would. So, if the golfer would normally use a seven iron to cover the last one hundred and fifty yards, with a stiff wind in his/her face, he/she should consider using a five or six iron.

Some Warm Up Tips

When it's time to warm up, some golfers think they need to hit the driving range with everything they've got. In truth, warming up to make your game as effective as it can be means that you work on a variety of swings and become familiar with the conditions.

For example, you golf differently on a windy day than if the air is still. You probably play at least a bit different on days when the temperature is raging than when it's cool. Here are some tips from those who hit the courses on a regular basis.

Driving is a good way to start, but start slowly. Choose a short iron for your first few drives, giving your muscles a chance to loosen up and to get the feel for the day. Work up to longer drives, but remember that the goal isn't only to see how far the ball will go – control is more important than distance and this is your chance to gather your skills to exercise that control.

Don't just drive. Some people make the mistake of thinking they've completed an adequate warm up once they've managed to make a few successful drives. Take time for some chipping and putting as well. Make the most of your swing and any recent lessons you've had. Remember that a round of golf is much more than teeing off.

One of the most important warm up tips is to get your mood and emotions under control. Smacking your frustrations out on a golf ball probably isn't going to help your game at all – though it might arguably be good for your frustrations. Take time to gather your calm, focus on your game and let the day's troubles fall away. Your mood – especially if it's a bad mood – can greatly impact your game.

Another mistake many people make at the warm up session is to start practicing. This isn't the time to try out new clubs, new swings, or new information. This is a time to play your best game, just as you'll be doing shortly – at the first tee. It's okay to put in a few practice swings if you're working on something you want to put into play for this game, but don't get caught up in a practice session. One of the purposes of a warm up time is to build your confidence. You can't do that if you're continually making errors.

Use the techniques you're most familiar with and be ready to congratulate yourself on all your successes during the warm up.

If you are doubtful about the need for a good warm up period, just think back to a recent game of golf that you didn't warm up for. How was your first tee? How was the fourth? Did you spend the rest of the game making up for some poor strokes early on? The warm up is a chance to make those mistakes before they're being engraved on a score card. Take time to make yourself confident and you'll play a confident game.

Warming up for Safety

How important is a warm up? In a word – vital. The pros say this is one step that you can't afford to skip. But if you're in great shape, you play often and you're anxious to get right up to the tee, is it enough to take a couple of practice swings and then go for it? You actually may find that you are ready to play from the moment you step out of the clubhouse, but you also may find yourself injured or playing a poor game just because you didn't take those few minutes for warming up.

The cars of a few years ago always needed a warm up before you hit the highway. You started them without revving the engine, allowed all the fluids to circulate completely and then knew that the car was ready to go. Your body is the same, only there haven't been any major upgrades over the past few years – you still need that warm-up time. In fact, as you age you need it even more.

What constitutes a warm up period? You don't have to hit a whole bucket of balls on the driving range or do a full round of calisthenics. Take time to hit a dozen or so balls but remember that you need to start slowly. Hit a few short range first, working up to longer drives.

It's also a good idea to do some light exercising, even if it's only a bit of walking, before you start your round of golf. The reason so many people (mainly men) have heart attacks and other serious issues on the green is that they simply haven't prepared their bodies for the rigors of golf. And even if you're playing a relaxed game, golf makes some strenuous demands on your body.

If you don't play regularly, you should probably allow yourself at least a half hour to an hour to warm up before your tee time. That means arriving early or doing your warm up somewhere else. You may find that warming up on the course's driving range works best. Some golfers say they spend a bit of time practicing with training aids before they leave home and then park a good distance from the clubhouse, letting the walk be part of the warm up.

If you play often and are in good physical condition, you may not need as much time to warm up, but you should still have some time set aside before you make your first

swing. If you haven't, you may find yourself straining muscles that simply aren't ready to be used so rigorously. Pulled muscles will not only hamper the rest of your game, it may very well put you in the clubhouse for an extended period.

Some golfers say they use the warm up time as a chance to be alone and think about the upcoming game. Others say they make a game of warming up with partners and friends. Either way, save a bit of time to get yourself ready for the game. You'll play better, both for this game and for upcoming tee times.

Work on the Golf Stance – Don't Get Caught up in the Details

Start with your feet placed just so, your body turned slightly to the left, your ball directly under the logo on your shirt. Carefully line your body so that it's shaped like this... And the list of golf stance instructions goes on. In fact, some people get so caught up in the stance that they lose sight of the real purpose – a perfect golf game. Defining your perfect golf game is probably more important than the perfect stance. And if you're out to enjoy the game, getting caught up in the details can really be a problem.

So does that mean that you shouldn't work on your stance? Absolutely not. The pros say the stance and swing are at the heart of a successful golf game. You may very well be able to make a great drive from something less than a great stance, but perfecting your stance will allow you to play a more consistent game of golf.

Start by relaxing. This step may take some work, especially at first when you're trying to remember the myriad of rules that make a successful stance. Your arms, though fixed in position, should never be rigid. In fact, most pros and coaches say you should start with your arms relaxed at your sides.

The actual stance depends on several factors, including (according to many) gender. There's at least a general consensus that women need a wider stance than men. Remember that your golf stance is the basis of the entire swing and that balance is crucial. Add to that the fact that the hips and pelvis of men and women are naturally different and you'll get a basic understanding of why women often need a wider stance.

Because the male golfer's hips tend to be more rigid than of their female counterparts, his body reacts to the counter swing and the follow-through differently. A woman's hips are made to swing more easily and this can be a real advantage on the stance, as long as the woman compensates for that difference. Finding a comfortable standing position will likely take some trial and error, and some practice.

Finding the comfort zone is important, but you may need to be willing to compromise comfort in order to work on your stance. While you shouldn't be standing in a position that makes your body hurt, you may very well experience some discomfort while your body is adjusting to the position of a new or adjusted stance. Remember to loosen

muscles before you hit the course, and to practice for short periods during that adjustment phase.

The stance is only one part of the successful golf game, but it's very important. Coupled with the grip and other aspects of the swing, it makes up the ability to play a consistent game of golf. But before you get lost in the details of the stance, remember that golf for most people is meant to be fun. If the details of the stance are killing your enjoyment of the game, it might be time to take a good look at your definition of a successful game of golf.

The Perfect Grip – Or is It?

It's easy to say that those who don't have a good grip won't have a good game. And it's easy to say that a good grip is vital to a good swing. But what constitutes a "good grip?" How do you achieve it? And if you don't have one, where do you get it?

Unlike the latest gadget, the training aid that helped you stop that awful slice or even your lucky golf sweater, you can't find a perfect golf grip at your favorite golf supply place. And even more confusing, if you ask any fifty golfers – amateurs or professionals - to demonstrate The Perfect Grip, you'd likely get fifty slightly different demonstrations.

It comes to a variety of factors. Unfortunately for some (and fortunately for others), golf isn't an exact science. You can't put an equation on your golf grip. But there are some things you can do to make your grip better. Take a look at some of the tips offered by the pros.

Make sure the grip on your club is right for you. Most people understand the role clubs play in a great round of golf. If you're not playing with your own clubs, you may find yourself playing a poor game of golf. But some people think that a new set of golf clubs are a wonderful gift without stopping to consider that the clubs may not fit the player. Just as a single pair of gloves wouldn't fit every golfer, golf grips are made for the individual. Take time to find what fits you best and don't settle for something else.

Comfort is another point. No matter which golf grip you prefer, you have to be comfortable with it. If you're spending all your time chanting a mantra – "right hand like so, left thumb goes here, push the left hand to here" – you can't think about anything else. While most golfers do have to spend some time practicing the grip, it shouldn't become the most time-consuming point of learning (or playing) the game.

If you aren't happy, try something new. If your grip is too uncomfortable or the grip on your clubs too large, fix it. Unless you're working with a professional coach who refuses to let you make any adjustments, take a look at your methods and your equipment.

If you do have someone pointing out a better method (and if your game is indicating that you need that help), take time to give it a good try. Any change in your grip is

probably going to result in at least some minor discomfort. Your body, arms and hands are accustomed to working in one particular movement and a change in your grip is going to mean that all those parts have to make some adjustments. That change probably isn't going to happen naturally in just a few minutes (or hours) or practice. Give the new grip a chance to become more natural and see if it helps. It's never too late to revert, but you should at least give it a proper chance.

The 10 Commandments of Golf Etiquette

Even if you are not a golf pro, being on your best behavior on the course will make you shine like a true sports star. As with any sport, there are a few rules of etiquette golfers should follow.

Rule Number One:

Be on time. Most courses require tee time appointments. Make sure to arrive at the course about 30 minutes before your tee off. This will give you time to park, get your clubs, take care of cart rental and warm up.

Rule Number Two:

Obey the dress code. If you don't know the dress code, make a phone call and ask. Some courses prohibit jeans. Some forbid shorts. Some require golf shoes without spikes. If you carry a cell phone, ask if they are allowed before you hit the course. While it is easy enough to change your ringer to silent or vibrate, answering your cell phone still requires you to talk – in some cases loudly. Leave it behind if you can.

Rule Number Three:

Set an order of play before you begin. Use the old coin toss method or simply decide, but have a plan.

Rule Number Four:

Be quiet and still when a golfer in your group in a group that is very close by is preparing to hit, especially when they are putting. Don't cloud the golfer's line of vision.

Rule Number Five:

Watch where you hit! Don't swing if you run the risk of hitting a fellow golfer with an erratic ball. Likewise, don't hit until you know your ball won't drop down into the group playing in front of you. While you may think it's common sense that players won't stand directly behind you when you're preparing to swing, check – just to be sure.

Rule Number Six:

Be protective. Protect the greens by replacing your divots and repairing all ball marks. Don't disturb sand traps any more than necessary and remember to rake them smooth before you leave. Here's another tip: exit a sand trap on the shallow side to avoid creating more damage to the trap.

Rule Number Seven:

Follow cart rules. If you are driving a cart, know the rules for the course. Carts may be prohibited on wet, rainy days. Some courses require carts to stay on designated paths. Always keep your cart a good distance from greens and tees and never park in another golfer's way.

Rule Number Eight:

No matter what movies or television shows portray, business deals are rarely cinched on the golf course. It's not easy to talk business on the course because the game requires concentration. Don't break a golfer's concentration on the game by trying to secure a business deal.

In another matter, it is recommended that any betting on the game of golf be kept nominal, or as a "friendly" bet. Anything larger creates stress and animosity – which is far against the goal of the game.

Rule Number Nine:

Here's a tip: Tip. If you are using a caddy or assistant offered by the course, remember to tip. Ask a "regular" at the course what the norm is and tip that amount.

Rule Number Ten:

Have fun and enjoy the sport!

Golf Courses – Same Course, New Game Every Time

One thing every golfer will agree on is no golf course is ever the same. While playing different courses is fun and challenging, playing ones home course, no matter how many times it is done, is always going to be different.

Yes, it is the same course, nothing has been changed, except for the position of the cup on the green, but no golf course is ever exactly the same two days in a row, or, for that matter, the same day.

Will Smith in the movie "The Legend of Bagger Vance" told his protégé how the grass follows the sun, which means a putt that broke one way in the morning will break in the opposite direction in the afternoon.

Another thing that makes the same course different every day is the weather conditions. Weather plays a big factor in golf, and how a course plays. A wet course will play slower and the ball will not travel as far after hitting the ground. On a dry course, the ball will roll farther after hitting the turf.

A course will also play differently in hot or cold weather. Colder weather keeps the ball from traveling as far, while a well hit ball will go further on a warm or hot day. Additionally, if an area has been dry for any length of time, the fairways, unless they are

watered heavily every day, will become as hard as concrete and provide extra distance once the ball hits the ground.

Then comes the golfer's attitude. Yes, the frame of mind a golfer is in will have a direct affect on how well he or she plays and reacts to the course. Golf is a game requiring a calm, focused mind, so the player can concentrate on what he or she is trying to do on any particular shot.

One other thing that will make the same course play differently is how the grounds are kept. If the fairway is allowed to grow a little long, balls will not be able to roll as far, whereas, if they are kept trimmed close to the ground, the ball will roll further.

The rough is a whole other problem, as are other obstacles on the course, such as sprinkler heads. The rough is always going to be thick and hard to play out of, but a heavy, wet rough makes it almost impossible for a golfer to do much more than simply attempt to chip back onto the fairway. Sprinkler heads, which are positioned all over the course, will have an adverse affect on a ball that happens to hit them.

Believe it or not, who a person is playing with, or if he or she is playing alone when he or she normally plays with someone else will affect the way the course is played. So, this only goes to show you how the same course, no matter how many times a person plays it, is never the same course twice.

Stimp Meters – How Fast Is Your Course?

If you are fairly new to golfing, you might not have even heard of a stimp meter yet. The average leisurely golfer might not ever need to know what a stimp meter is. But, since a stimp meter is important to the speed of a golf course, it doesn't hurt to know a little about it.

If you play golf for any length of time, you will hear serious golfers talk about how the course is "stimping." This refers to how fast the courses are running and that speed can actually be estimated with a stimp meter.

A stimp meter is the device used to measure the speed of the greens. To get the stimp rating, a ball is rolled down a little ramp (the stimp meter) in eight different directions. The stimp rating is the average distance the ball rolls once it touches the greens. For instance, a course with a stimp rating of 12 is a course in which the ball rolled an average of 12 feet once it hit the greens. Most Professional Golfers Association courses run at a 10 to 12 stimp rating. The higher the number, the faster the course. Most municipal golf courses have an average stimp reading range from 7 to 10.

Why is it important to know a course's stimp rating? You probably won't ever care about it unless you play competitively (or play with other people who play competitively). A

stimp rating might explain why you've had a "bad" day on the course. For instance, when you usually score well on a course with an average stimp rating, you might not score as well on a course with a higher rating and faster course.

Another consideration in measuring stimp rate is the turf on which you are playing golf. It was once true that the rate difference was obvious between natural grass and artificial turf. Today, however, manufacturers take their artificial grass seriously. Many brands have developed special "natural bend" features that mimic the way real grass moves. There should be no discernable difference in the stimp meter reading these days on courses with artificial greens.

For golfers who like to practice putting at home, you can buy outdoor synthetic turf putting greens for your backyard. If you'd like to practice based on the course you will soon be playing, you can adjust the stimp rating on your practice greens to match that of the course you will soon play. As with any purchase, research the companies that sell such products, learn all the pros and cons of the practice turf and ask all relevant questions before you buy a system.

If the course doesn't have to travel particularly fast for you and you are content to get the exercise and relaxation that a day of golfing provides, you'll probably never need to know the stimp rating of the courses you play. But, if someone comes up to you and asks how the greens are stimping, you'll know what they're talking about.

Seven Iron – The Perfect Club

Anyone who has seen the movie "Tin Cup", starring Kevin Costner, will understand the importance of the seven iron – the perfect golf club.

A golfer can literally shoot par on just about any course using nothing more than a seven iron and a putter. Granted, driving with a seven iron will not get the golfer drives of three hundred yards, but, then again, this club was not designed to hit the ball that far. But, depending on how strong the golfer is, a good shot with a seven iron can be anywhere from one hundred and seventy five yards to two hundred and twenty five yards, and those are not distances to sneeze at.

Following the drive with the seven iron, the golfer would then make his or her approach shot. Depending on the length of the hole, the golfer will either want a full swing, or to cut their swing, thereby adjusting the distance the ball will travel. And, again depending on distance and weather conditions, the golfer may want to put the ball either in the front or back of their stance. This will give the ball more loft or keep it low, depending on which stance is taken.

As the golfer approaches the green, the seven iron can be used as a wedge to chip the ball onto the green. By closing the stance and hitting the ball in back of the stance, the golfer can flip the ball onto the green. Of course, the golfer will want to cut his or her

swing or they will fly the green, which will result in a lost stroke, possibly a lost ball, and almost definitely them losing their temper.

Once the ball has been chipped onto the green, the seven iron's usefulness is pretty much over, unless the golfer has incredible courage and wants to use the seven iron as a putter. This, too, was done in "Tin Cup", but isn't advisable for the average golfer.

On short, par 3 holes, the seven iron is again the perfect club to use. Once again, the golfer can tee the ball up and hit out of the back or front of his or her stance. Depending on the length of the hole, the ball could be teed higher for more loft and less distance. Granted, it does feel awkward to have both feet in front of the golf ball, but it also prevents the golfer from getting too much of a swing and flying the green. It will, however, allow the ball to be hit higher and with more control.

And, a well hit seven iron is a thing of beauty to watch. The ball takes off in a majestic arc, following a predetermined flight plan (if properly struck), flies beautifully through the air and lands gently on the turf, bringing the golfer one step closer to his or her goal – the cup.

A seven iron is also handy to have around the house, as it is long enough to allow a person to reach behind a couch, from one end or the other, and drag something out that is in the middle.

Learn to Putt

Many golfers spend an extraordinary amount of time learning to make an awesome drive. In truth, there's nothing prettier than the golf ball flying through the air and bouncing neatly onto the green – except the ball dropping neatly into the cup. While working on those longer shots is important, poor putting skill can literally lose the game.

Learning to put accurately every time can be a great expenditure of your time. Consistently getting to the green isn't going to do you a lot of good unless you're able to drop the ball once you're there. Take a few tips from the pros regarding the successful putt.

The "yips" are the bane of many golfers on the putt. This is simply a hesitation – rather like a hiccup – that causes you to get a less-than-smooth putt. A smooth stroke will always lend you better control over the ball.

When you're practicing your putt, pay attention to that accuracy. If you're having trouble controlling the line of travel, give yourself some help until you get a better feel for the game. You might find it helpful to make a mark on your club to clearly indicate the center of the putter. Marking the ball may also help you make a very solid swing. Chalk is a good way to make these marks, because it will easily wipe off after your practice session.

Try making yourself a mental picture of the pathway the ball should travel. If that mental picture doesn't help, try laying a piece of string along the ground between your ball and the cup. It may seem like a very simple thing, but watching the point that your ball veers can help you figure out what to do to correct the problem.

Too much spin on the putt can create some problems as well. Spin is one of the most difficult things to control, and the short distance at the putt is all about control.

If it's a long putt, resist the urge to put too much muscle into the swing. Avoid unnecessary loft. The higher your ball travels, the less control you have over it.

You also have to resist the urge to overshoot your target. Overshooting is a problem in many sports – not just golf. Imagine the number of times you've seen someone take a shot at a pool table only to have the ball ricochet off the back of the pocket and bounce back out. The same sometimes happens with baseball, football and basketball when the person throwing oversteps the amount of power needed to make a successful play.

It's human nature to overthrow. Guard against that at the putt. There's little more frustrating than to walk past the cup to the new putting position which is even farther from the cup than the last – all because your swing was simply too powerful and the ball passed over the top of the cup.

When you're ready to putt, take a moment and take control before you take the swing. Remember that the control is every bit as important as your aim.

The 7-Wood - The Best Field Wood

Of all the clubs in your golf bag, you may have overlooked the potential for the seven-wood. There are those who believe the seven-wood is the best field wood in a golfer's bag.

There are golfers who may not agree with this statement, but that's a matter of opinion. The seven-wood is as close to a perfect field wood as a golfer can have in his or her bag. This is because the seven-wood swings as easily as a six-iron, but gives the golfer more distance and accuracy.

Depending on the physical strength of a golfer, the seven-wood is a great club from about two hundred and twenty five yards in. First off, it is easy to get under the ball and get the necessary elevation to move the ball toward the green, which is where all golfers want to be in as few strokes as possible. Now, should a golfer have a seven-wood with a graphite shaft the golfer will have a better feel of the ball as compared to a metal shaft. The graphite makes the club more flexible and gives the ball a little extra lift upon impact.

Another great thing about the seven-wood is it is a near perfect club on a long par 3 or a short par 4 hole. Let's say a golfer is looking at a one hundred and eighty yard par 3. Sure, he could grab a three or four iron out of the bag and make the drive, and make a good drive. But, by taking the seven-wood out of the bag, the golfer has given himself a little something extra. He can tee the ball a little higher than he could by using an iron. This will help him get the ball up in the air faster and headed toward the green, especially if the drive is made with the ball slightly toward the back of the golfer's stance. This also reduces the power of the swing, so the drive won't fly the green, which is hitting the ball over the back of the green.

And, by making a slight alteration in his stance when the field, the seven-wood can help get around or over an obstacle. Say the golfer is about one hundred and sixty five yards out and has a tree about ten yards away, directly in front of him. By opening the stance a little and changing the position of his hips, the golfer can slice or hook the ball around the tree, but not have such an arc as to take the ball out of play. This type of shot still allows the golfer to get all the power he ordinarily would with his seven-wood, along with the elevation he expects, but without the negative consequences.

This particular shot, though, should be practiced on the driving range with the seven-wood long before the golfer attempts to make it on the course.

The Golf Traps

It's a nightmare – You're golfing along with a perfect swing, perfect stance and you've even managed to eliminate that slice that's plagued you. Despite doing everything right, even the best golfer will find himself (or herself) occasionally mired in the sand, knee-deep in grass or standing behind the largest tree on the golf course. If golf courses were all perfectly smooth with no bunkers, sand or water, the game would likely become boring for even the most dedicated golfer. Obstacles make golf a better game, and you'll be even more appreciative of these traps if you know the best ways to get out of the situations.

What are the odds that your golf ball will roll to a stop directly behind a tree? You have a couple of options. You can bore a hole through the tree large enough for your ball to pass through, but that's probably not going to meet the approval of either your fellow golfers or the course maintenance crew.

The option many golfers take is to sacrifice one putt to put the golf ball in a better position. Whether this is your best option depends on your ability as a golfer, and how much you're willing to risk on this one play. If there's another tree handy, a ricochet shot is sometimes an option, but it's too uncontrollable. You can't tell how the ball will react against the rough bark of the tree.

A better choice is to work on a curve ball before you get to this point, so that you'll be confident trying it when the time comes.

Sand presents another problem altogether. Many golfers choose the “whack and see” method. Just pull a sand wedge from the golf bag, whack the general area of the ball, then watch the sand flying through the air to see if a golf ball happened to take flight as well.

Consistency is the key to golfing overall, and getting out of the sand trap is no exception. Sand is a real problem when trying to control a golf ball. Golf balls don't roll well in sand and you're going to have trouble controlling a putt from the sand trap. Add to that the fact that you're often going to be dealing with an upward face of the trap before you're back on open course, and the only consistently reliable way to get out of a sand trap is to use the wedge and get enough loft on the ball to clear the face of the trap.

Choose your wedge carefully. Remember that you're looking for enough loft to clear the sand, but less loft is usually easier to control.

Regardless of the obstacle you're facing, controlling the ball, choosing the best club and setting up your shot are the steps that will get you back onto open ground.

The Must Have Five Iron

Aside from the seven-iron, the club every golfer absolutely must have, without question, is the five-iron. This is because the five-iron can be used easily, well and in a wide variety of situations.

Though not as versatile as the seven-iron, the five-iron is still a very versatile club. The angle of the club head allows the golfer to get plenty of elevation on his or her shot, while not being angled so steeply as to prevent the golfer getting a great deal of distance on his or her shot as well.

The five-iron is a great club from about two hundred yards and in. For most golfers the maximum range with their five-iron is about one hundred and eighty yards, no small distance on the links, and that is for sure. Yet, this club, this wonderful club is absolutely perfect for the distance. It allows the golfer to address the ball confidently, knowing if he or she strikes the ball properly it will hurl majestically through the heavens toward the promised land of the green.

The five-iron is also of particular use in getting out of the rough and back into the fairway, depending on how deep the rough is. If the rough is four to six inches deep, the best thing a golfer can do is grab a wedge and chip the ball back into the fairway. Sure, it will cost a stroke, but one lost stroke is better than several, and this could happen if a golfer attempted to power the ball out of the rough with their five-iron.

The five-iron is an easy club to control. Its length is just about perfect and the feel of the club is a wonder in itself. The five-iron is a marvel to swing. Why is this? This is a good question, and here is the answer. The five-iron is a mid to long range club for use two hundred yards and in, depending on how strong the golfer is and how well the golfer uses the club. Getting the reverse "C" of Arnold Palmer is a breeze with the five-iron and a golfer can generate a considerable amount of speed with the club head. The speed of the club head determines how far the ball will be hit, much like bat speed in baseball.

Because of the club's length, it is easy to control, unless a golfer is playing without gloves and has sweaty hands. Sweat will allow the club to turn in a golfer's hands, resulting in something bad happening. Usually the something bad is the club head turning as it meets the golf ball, with the ball careening almost one hundred and eighty degrees from the golfer. This is why golfers wear gloves.

A well hit five-iron shot will, in all likelihood, go where the golfer expects it to go, and can look like a shot seen on a televised golf tournament. It will also cover a great deal of territory in a short time, getting the golfer closer to his or her desired location, the green.

The Nine-Iron – What's This Club For?

The vast majority of golfers have a nine-iron in their bag. But many may wonder what, exactly, is this club supposed to be used for?

After all, the nine-iron can't be used if the ball is more than one hundred and thirty yards from the green. Any further back and the golfer would choose either a seven or eight-iron. And, while the nine-iron has a highly angled head, for a regular iron, it does not get the loft a golfer gets from a pitching, lofting, chipping or sand wedge, though the nine-iron does offer more distance than clubs in the wedge family.

Is the nine-iron good for anything at all? Does a golfer really need a nine-iron in the bag? The answer to both questions is yes. This is because the nine-iron is a good short-range utility club and does provide good elevation from the fairway to the green. The nine-iron can be used to chip with as well, and works well as a sand wedge should a golfer wind up in the bunker and not have a sand wedge handy.

Then again, should a golfer find him or herself one hundred and forty yards from the hole, the nine-iron can be used in place of the seven or eight iron. However, the golfer may want to think about intentionally blading the ball for the extra distance, though he or she would have to sacrifice elevation. There are times when such a shot is necessary on the course, as a seven or eight iron would be too much club for the distance in question. This will depend on the course being played and the obstacles the golfer is facing on a particular hole.

For chipping one hundred yards out or closer, the nine-iron is a good choice in clubs. By placing the ball in back of his or her stance, a golfer can get more elevation on the ball, while cutting the distance. If the golfer keeps his or her feet close together, he or she will not be able to hit the ball as hard and, therefore, will not fly the green. (Flying the green is a term used when the golfer hits a ball that carries over the green.)

In addition, the nine-iron is a good choice in clubs if the golfer is playing a short par 3 hole. Some courses have par 3 holes as short as one hundred yards, so anything more than a nine-iron will be too much club. Again, though, stance is important as the golfer does not want to drive the ball over the green. A closed stance, in this instance will help the golfer cut the distance the ball travels, while putting the ball back in his or her stance will help the ball get in the air faster. Properly struck, the ball should fly in a perfect parabolic curve, landing gently on the green with the ball, hopefully, rolling close to, if not into the cup.

So, to answer the question, a nine-iron is a good club to have around.

The One Iron - A Useless Club if Ever There Was One

Professional golfer Lee Trevino once said not even God could hit a one-iron. This was just before Trevino was struck by lightning. He survived. And, he may be right, God might not be able to hit a one iron, though He certainly proved He could hit Lee Trevino.

A one iron is, for the most part, a useless club. It is the longest of the irons and the hardest to hit, or be consistent with. For the average golfer, or even the majority of professional golfers, a one iron simply isn't needed and just takes up room in the all important golf bag.

In most instances where a golfer might choose to hit a one iron, a better choice would be to use a wood instead. For example, say a golfer's drive went two hundred and fifty yards on a par 4 hole, leaving him or her another two hundred and fifty yards away. Yes, a one iron could conceivably be used to hit a ball that far, but because it is so difficult to hit and control, the golfer would be better off grabbing his or her three wood out of the bag. The three wood is a good field wood and, depending on the golfer's strength, can easily be used to get the ball on the green in regulation play. The wood is easier to hit and control than the one iron, and would be the more logical club selection in this instance.

This is not to say a one iron is good for nothing. In fact, the one iron is an excellent club to use to try and retrieve a ball lost out of bounds in high weeds. The one iron can be used to beat a snake should one slither onto the course. Now, a snake on the course would likely have a negative effect on the golfer, and a smart golfer would simply let the snake continue slithering on its way.

But, golf is a frustrating game, and sometimes a golfer just has to hit something. In this case, a snake would do, especially if the golfer is having a bad round and nothing is going right. However, the golfer should remember, when having a bad round, it may not be the best idea to take out his or her frustration on a snake. One miss could result in getting bit.

Or, if a golfer sprained a knee or ankle, which is highly possible, then the one iron could be used as a cane, allowing the golfer to limp back to the clubhouse or the 19th hole for a little refreshment.

Then again, those times when nothing is going right and a golfer just has to wrap a club around a tree to work out his or her frustration – the one iron is the perfect choice. After all, it is a club that is hard to hit and primarily takes up space in the golf bag. So why not wrap it around a tree.

Take a Look at the Sand and Pitching Wedges

There are several types of wedges in the world of golf. You'll likely find several wedges in your own golf bag. For our purposes today, the topic of wedges will be limited to the pitching wedge and the sand wedge.

First, wedges have shorter handles and other clubs in the bag. This is because the golfer has to get closer to the ball in order to get the elevation he or she needs to make the shot. Wedges, especially the pitching wedge, are for short shots, usually no further than one hundred yards.

The primary use for a pitching wedge is to get the ball up in the air quickly. Distance is not as important as elevation, at least initially, but the golfer does want the shot he or she made with the pitching wedge to reach the green, preferably with the ball rolling close to the cup.

The sand wedge is primarily, though not exclusively, used to get golf balls out of sand traps, especially if the sand trap is close to the hole. Because of the angle of the club's head, the pitching wedge is for extremely short distances, say within fifty yards of the green. This club is designed to get the ball in the air in a hurry, but not to get the ball very far down the course. There are other clubs for that purpose.

The sand wedge, though, can be used to get a ball out of a tricky situation. Because of the angle of its loft, approximately seventy-five degrees if properly struck, a golfer can get the ball over trees and back onto the fairway. However, if the golfer in question blades the ball, all bets are off. Blading the ball is when a golfer does not get under the ball, but hits closer toward the middle of the ball. While the ball will get in the air, it will not go very high, and it will most definitely go further than the golfer intended. However, this is the same for all clubs, not just wedges. With the wedge, though, blading is more noticeable as the ball will fly the green, costing the golfer a shot.

The pitching wedge and the sand wedge can be used in the place of a chipping wedge, yet another in the family of wedges. Chipping is done when the approach shot is close to the green, but doesn't make it onto the green. Chipping can be done when the ball is as far out as one hundred yards, though this is a more difficult type of chip and the golfer may want to consider a different club altogether.

To use the sand wedge in the place of a pitching wedge, the ball should be fairly close to the green, say, within twenty five yards. This is because the shot should be softer, more for loft than distance, and with the angle of the sand wedge's club head, it is easy to get under the ball too much and get virtually no distance on the shot.

To use the pitching wedge to chip with is easier, as the club head on the pitching wedge is not as angled. Foot placement is important here, as the golfer must decide if he or she wants more loft than distance.

Leftie Golfers, Arise!

Let's face it the majority of the world is designed for right-handed people, with the lefties, or southpaws, virtually ignored. If a right-handed person wants to take up the game of golf, getting equipment is no problem. They can go virtually anywhere to find clubs. The same can't be said for the left-handed person who wants to play from his or her natural side.

Of course, there are those lefties who can, and do, play from the right side. This is fine for those people who can accomplish this feat. But for the majority of southpaws, the only real option is to play from the left side. (Actually, this is a misnomer as the leftie will be on the right side of the ball, while the right-handers are on the left side. Left and right, in this instance, is being used in terms of a person's dominant side.)

Buying golf clubs for those who play left-handed can be a challenge. Unless he or she lives in a reasonably large city with a good, hopefully, national golf supply store, he or she will most likely wind up having to order his or her clubs, whereas the right-handed person can walk in off the streets, make his or her selection and leave.

Most golf stores, though, carry a selection of left-handed sets of clubs, with some left-handed putters (this is important as well, because it is as difficult to putt from the subordinate side as it is to hit from there. Basically, it does not feel natural to the player, and this will result in poor putting.)

However, should the southpaw want to upgrade individual clubs, say go from a metal shaft to a graphite shaft, he or she will most likely have to order the club. The right-hander, though, will simply be able to walk in, select the club he or she wants and leave, unless he or she is looking for custom clubs and has to get measured, in which case the club will have to be ordered.

Because the majority of people in the world - 90 percent at last count - are right-handed, it only makes sense that golfing equipment would be designed for them. After all, this is where the money is, and golf is an industry as well as a game. But there are companies who realize the lefties of the world want and deserve quality equipment, and quality golf equipment for the left-handed player is available.

When on the golf course, the lefty can expect to be razzed by his or her right-handed counterparts and be told he or she is playing on the wrong side of the ball. There will likely be other jokes made about the person's left-handedness as well.

But, golf is a game that makes no exceptions as to a person's dominant side. Courses are designed to be challenging, and challenging they are to both right-handers and left-handers.

Some would argue right-handed golfers are better players, but this has no bearing in fact. A good golfer is a good golfer regardless whether he or she plays from the right or left side. Statistics, however, will show right-handers to be better, simply because there are more of them and the statistics are weighted accordingly.

Track Your Golf Handicap With Computer Software

If you're a professional golfer, you've probably got a well-documented handicap. Everyone's interested in your ability so everyone is keeping track. But for golfers who are something less than pros, your handicap may be a tedious piece of paperwork. Why not turn to technology to help?

There are several software and Internet programs available that will help you come up with your numerical handicap, and even help you track your scores to establish your handicap for tournaments.

You have options in these programs that range from online sources to purchased software packages. Prices also vary significantly and you can spend as little as \$10-\$12, or more than \$100. Remember that if you choose an online source to check the website's privacy policy and never offer up personally identifying information that could result in identity theft.

The extent of the programs varies as much as the price. You can find programs that do all the calculations for you, offering up a spreadsheet with all your stats, or choose a simpler program that merely gives you a numerical handicap.

Whatever you choose, keep in mind that your program and your figures is still only as good as your record-keeping practices. If you're one of those people who can't seem to find time for mundane tasks, you may find that you're also not able to get all the stats

entered to track your handicap. On the other hand, having a computer program for the golf handicap tracking may be just the motivation you need to keep better records.

One advantage of an online service over software is that you can stop and enter the information from any computer with Internet access. That means that you can get it done at the office right after you return from a lunch golf game, or even from the clubhouse right after you leave the course. You can also print out your records from any location.

There are many benefits to establishing and tracking your handicap. While the casual golfer may have little need of a regularly updated handicap, there's no doubt that tracking your handicap can often be the incentive needed to improve your game. While making better shots on the course is a good sign that your game is improving, there's nothing like a solid number to prove the fact.

Remember that the results of software programs may not be widely accepted. Before you spend the money for software and expend the time and energy to track and document your golf handicap, check with any tournaments you play to participate in. Ask if they accept any software programs and check into the rules of documentation.

If you're looking for tournament entrance, you should check the USGA's handicap rules. You'll find several online sources for obtaining your handicap, along with how to document those figures for tournament play.

Whether it's simply to improve your own game or to document your way into tournament play, it's important to get reliable numbers that truly represent your handicap. Otherwise, you may think you're making definite strides when you aren't, or even that you're not advancing your game when it really is.

Instructional Golf Videos – Where to Get Them and What to Look For

Instructional golf videos provide illustrated golf lessons and techniques that will improve your game. These lessons are shown in real time, slow motion and repeated as needed to insure the viewer is learning. Instructional golf videos can be purchased several different ways. The valuable lessons are diverse and functional and you will see your overall golf game improve considerably.

Given time any one can improve skills at any sport. No matter if you play golf on a regular basis or are just a novice, there comes a time when what you know limits the outcome of your game. Instructional golf videos will enhance your skills both mentally and physically by providing up to date information on technique.

Whether it's your swing that needs improving or the stamina of your game that is lacking, there will be helpful advice and instruction available to you. With every aspect of golf

laid out in these instructional videos to be scrutinized you will certainly find the one aspect that needs improvement in your game.

Golf is not only a sport where by you are challenged by other participant, the course also challenges you and the most challenge sometimes comes from within. Improving your game each time you play can only make the experience of golf more pleasant, less frustrating and always challenging.

Golf is a game of high expectation and regards both external and internal elements as key components to the magic of each game. Instructional golf videos are found to fit any budget and also to accommodate any degree of effective golf player. So whether you are into golf for the periodic relaxing game or if you wish to some day become professional there is no reason you cannot learn from instructional videos.

With new technology and enhanced imaging available you will be able to watch golf swings as they are being analyzed. Within this in depth view of an ordinary golf swing you will be shown the do's and don'ts for a perfectly executed golf swing. Learning a solid stance that will create and channel more power to the golf ball is another part of the instructions. Lastly but certainly not least instruction helps you by realizing there are many elements that make variations impossible to avoid. These are key reasons to believe you have something to learn from instructional golf videos.

You can find affordable high quality instructional golf videos online and in stores. Some of your favorite golf websites will also have free trials available so that you can make a better decision on which video will work for you. These are some of the obvious places you be able to buy instructional golf videos, if you were to think out of the box you would also find the library has media available for you to borrow. Don't delay your search for enlightenment, begin your optimal relaxing game of golf, and challenge that which becomes the fun of golf. With instructional videos you learn more about the game than you ever dreamed imaginable.

Golf Swing Analysis Software for Perfecting Your Game

When it comes to perfecting your golf game the style and technique of your swing may be the single most important aspect on which to focus. There are many instructional videos and software available to the general public that aid in perfecting a golf swing. Whether you are an amateur or a professional you can benefit from having your golf swing technique and style analyzed.

After all one main key to a successful golf game is your swing. The key to perfecting your swing is by analyzing your technique and style. Golf swing analysis can be achieved with the newest software available or with software that has been around and been proven time and again to create a better swing in all shapes and sizes of golfers.

Whether you are a serious die-hard golfer or a recreational weekend-warrior-type golfer there is golf swing analysis software that will help you discover where your swing might be going wrong. More importantly you will learn how to improve your swing so that your fullest potential will be met on the golf course.

With the newest technology available to you in software format there is no why reason you should not be playing golf like the professionals. With a little patience and some hard work, you will be the envy of your golf buddies with your amazing stroke power and gentle control as you ease your way from one hole to the next, with the grace and dignity that only comes from a solid golf swing.

Some software available will have instructions from your favorite golf professionals. Other software will use everyday golfers who are as eager as you to perfect their golf swing creating a notable difference in anyone's golf game in a matter of weeks. No matter which golf swing analysis software you choose to learn from the results will amaze even the most critical golf mate.

If you are looking for proven ways to improve your golf swing then look no further. Golf swing analysis software has brought golf lessons to your personal computer screen. With the help of your camcorder you will have an expert analysis of the critical key points that are involved in a single swing.

Software that improves golf swings with analysis information is user friendly in most cases and can even be found available as downloads. Free trials are frequently advertised, making the search for the perfect swing improvement tools easier to find.

Some of the incredible tools for imaging swings and readying those images for analysis are slow motion cameras and virtual comparison software. Seemingly endless technology-based analysis techniques are available to the general public. There is golf swing help for any caliber of golf participant and there is also software available for any budget.

Golf has gained in popularity in the last decade. This interest has grown due to the phenomenal participants in the public eye. Whether you have recently become a true fan of the sport or have always been a die-hard golf fanatic if you are ready to improve your golf swing, the latest technology software is the way to go.

Golfing Always Beats Working

No matter how well or poorly a golfer plays, one thing each and every one will agree on is this – a bad day on the golf course is better than the best day at work.

Let us take a look at this attitude. We shall start with golf being something that is fun to do, no matter how frustrating the game may become at times. All golfers know while

every shot may not be a thing of beauty, they are in a pristine setting and are not being bothered. Besides, they all know the next shot will look exactly like the ones the professional golfers make on television.

Then, there is work. Work is what all of us have to do to survive. We get up in the morning, many of us dreading what the day holds, get ready and head to our place of business, whether it is a factory or an office, regardless if the job is blue collar or white collar. Work is an ugly four-letter word.

Work is where problems are. The employees are expected to help solve these problems, or they will be out of a job. While unemployment would give a person more time to play golf, it would not give them a way to pay their bills, and let's face it, we all like to eat.

Work is also where the boss is, and a lot of people have, for lack of a better way to put it, lousy bosses. There are those bosses who are pleasant to work for, who help the employee and understand the needs of those who work for them. Some bosses even set up golf tournaments for their employees. But, there are the other kind. Those bosses seldom have anything good to say to any of their employees, are always complaining that the company is not making enough money, no matter what the profit and loss sheet says, and make going to work a miserable experience for everyone around them.

This is where golf is much better than work. There are no bosses on the golf course. A person's social or employment ranking means nothing on a golf course. The only thing anyone cares about is how well he or she plays, and whether he or she has a good time while playing.

And what is not fun about playing golf. First, it is a great way to get outside and get some exercise, especially if the golfer walks the course. Next, golfing is a good way to socialize with others and meet new people. Golf is also a good way for a person to work out his or her frustrations. Whacking a golf ball not only feels good, but the better the ball is hit, the more praise the golfer gets, even if he or she is playing alone. After all, who hasn't hit a ball well, stopped, watched it in flight and thought, "Man that was a great shot."

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, a bad day on the golf course beats the best day a person can have at work.

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