

# Practice: Make the Work Worthwhile

by DENNISE HUTTON

**C**ONSIDERING the ball is stationary, golf has to be the most frustrating of games. To the casual observer any game with a moving ball, such as cricket or tennis, would seem to be inherently more difficult. Golf as a sport is not based on quick reactions, speed of footwork or physical endurance, it is about technique and application.

Golf is premeditated. Nothing need be rushed. As much thought as required can precede every shot. Perhaps then this is one of the dangers we face. We think about it too much.

Equally, as golfers we can all try to learn too many shots, too many variations of the one theme. I know when I turned professional one of my failings was I could play too many different shots.

Part of learning how to win is identifying your strengths and exploiting them. The low percentage and flashy shots, while they will sometimes produce a brilliant result, are in most circumstances not worth playing.

I firmly believe golf is a game of fundamentals. The basics of grip, stance and swing are essential for everyone. With these fundamentals in place the individual can play and improve almost as much as their desire and practice schedule dictates.

Before we identify the best methods to use when practising it is

important to note that by "practising" we mean the work we do off the course. Playing nine holes after work is not practising. It may be therapeutic, but when we are on the course we are trying to get the ball into the hole. The method of execution takes a back seat.

Practice then is the time we spend on the practice fairway, chipping and putting green developing a grooved and consistent method.

Before we address specifics, here are a few rules to follow when working on your game:

1 There is no substitute for practice.

2 Spend more time on your short game than your long game.

3 Half an hour a day is better than four hours on Sunday.

4 Perfect practice makes perfect. Find yourself a pro you believe in and have some lessons.

5 When making major changes, be prepared to take one step back before you take two steps forward.

Whether it be the local driving range, golf course or park, you need to find a convenient area to hit your golf balls. If you use your own, make sure they carry your identification mark, as often you will not be alone.



Work on your putting during practice, not during a competitive round



Chipping practice should be done with a variety of clubs and from different types of situations and lies

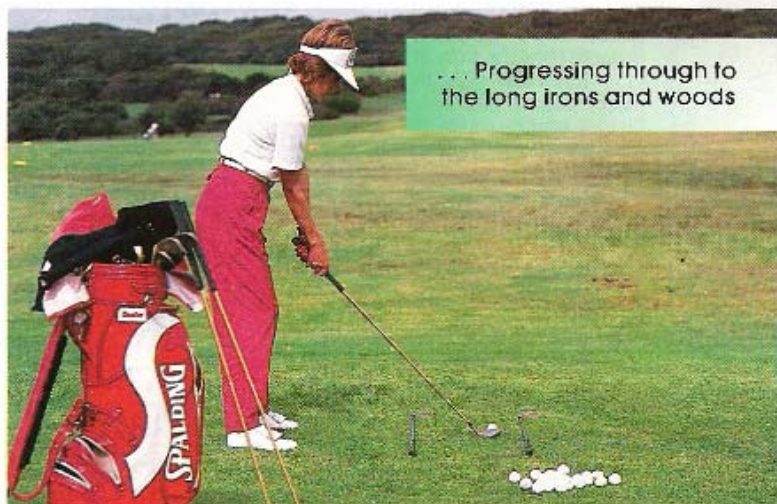
Start your practice sessions with the short irons



When I am at home away from the tour my practice sessions take up about four hours per day. While you probably cannot devote this amount of time to your practice, the important points to note are the routine and method I have adopted.

My practice starts on the driving range and comprises about an hour of hitting balls with a range of clubs in my bag. As with the warm up prior to hit off we start with the short irons before progressing to the long irons and woods. Inevitably I will be working on one or two points of my game which I will have previously identified on video. While concentrating on these areas for improvement I will be trying to maintain my tempo and rhythm — essential in any golf swing.

After this session, which never goes for more than ninety minutes, I adjourn to the putting green for an hour of work with the putter. During this session I am often working on my stroke. It is here during practice you must ensure your technique is as you require. Out on the course during a tournament round all you are worried about is getting the ball into the hole—the method, we practice on the putting green. It is also important for better players, to practice on a variety of greens to ensure that they can handle both fast and slow surfaces. At home I have two types of carpet in the house. Fortunately one is fast, one



... Progressing through to the long irons and woods

is slow. I can always have an extra half hour while the dinner is cooking.

Finally to complete our practice session we must work on our chipping and short game. This often-overlooked segment of our game will bring shots off our handicap with a minimum of effort. In the pro ranks the quality of our short game and putting differentiates us more than any other. If possible, find a chipping green rather than just a place in which to chip. When chipping to a green we can observe how the ball reacts when using a range of clubs and techniques. Try throwing the ball up, playing the bump and run with a variety of clubs and chipping from bad lies. The variety provides a great challenge.

I often break up my practice with

physical exercise and swimming. It is important for full-time golfers to maintain their enthusiasm for the sport and not just treat the practice as a necessary evil. For amateurs, no matter what your ability level, practice—and I mean proper practice—is the only real way to improve. Many of my pupils believe they can lower their handicaps just by taking a few lessons. While an improved technique will obviously help, to really improve over the long term we all need to spend time on the practice ground. While I understand that not many people can afford four hours per day, all serious players can surely find two hours per week. A couple of lessons and two hours per week. That's all you need. I guarantee it.

Good practising! ●