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*Improve Your Golf Game
Easily & Quickly*



Play “In the Zone” with Joan

GOLF PRACTICE

By Joan King

This has been an exceptionally hot (and humid here in Florida), summer around the country. Around this time in the summer, the desire to go to the range and practice wanes. If you want to improve your game, you need to practice. Unfortunately, most amateur golfers don't have a plan for efficient practice and wind up “practicing” their swing flaws.

For a consistent game, you need to practice consistently. It doesn't take any more energy to practice with a plan than it does to practice without one. Jack Nicklaus, considered the greatest golfer of all time, gave us valuable direction in his formula for success. As he looked back on the tournaments where he didn't finish strong, he determined that it wasn't his ball striking that has improved. It

was the way he managed himself under pressure. He became the game's best manager through diligent and consistent practice.

When he was at the top of his game, Nicklaus' name was not found in the list of top five for fairways hit, greens hit, long driver, or fewest putts. But he was number one in the number of tournaments and the amount of money won.

If you want to score lower and win more tournaments, you will need to practice the game as it is scored. For virtually all golfers the total score in a round is obtained by hitting 37% full shots (long shots), and 63% less than full shots. Shots that are less than full shots include; chip shots (just off the green), pitch shots, greenside sand shots, and putting.

Most golf instruction and practice is devoted to the full swing, even though it accounts for only 37% of your score! Of course, practice means learning the mechanics of the swing; the grip, stance, posture, alignment, back and forward swing, and the finish. The formula is to practice your long game (full shots) about one-third of your session. Avoid over-practicing one club and devote equal time to all the full shot clubs.

To shoot lower scores, put more practice time into your short game (100 yards in) since those shots are responsible for the biggest portion of your score. I would recommend spending an additional one-third of your practice time on chip, pitch, and greenside bunker shots. Then spend an additional one-third on putting. As your expertise in your shot game improves, it will take the pressure off your long game.

The myth is that you have to hit all the fairways and greens to play your best. Here are some statistics about how the pros shoot their scores.

Of the top 10 U.S. tour players, the average player hits only 9.6 fairways per round.

Of the top 10 U.S. tour players, the average player hits only 12.2 greens per round, which means he misses one out of three greens.

If practice isn't fun for you, than don't do it. The most efficient way to learn is when the process is enjoyable. If you aren't enjoying it, it will be a struggle and your brain will perceive that. If you practice for the love of it, then it will be easy and your brain will translate that into good shots.

If you are learning the fundamentals of the swing, or are learning a swing change, here is the process to use your brain for maximum efficient learning:

- Practice the fundamentals of grip, stance, posture and alignment off the golf course until you can do them naturally, automatically and without conscious thought.

- For the grip, look at the position of your hands on the club. For your stance and posture, look into a mirror to see how you look.
- Once you have “mastered” these fundamentals, you are ready to practice your swing, off the golf course.
- Learn how to swing the club before attempting to hit balls. Model a swing by watching a video or player. Then see yourself swinging as that person.
- Feel yourself swinging as that person.
- Practice the swing until it feels natural and balanced.
- Now you are ready to begin to hit balls. Trust your swing.
- The next step is to practice hitting to a target.
- Imagine a real on-course situation.

After you have learned the above, here are some additional tips on how to practice on the range for optimum efficiency:

1. Before you hit any balls, warm up your muscles. Stretch your muscles by swinging a couple of clubs together.
2. Begin by hitting short shots to loosen your muscles and feel your tempo.
3. Let go of all outside thoughts and focus on your objectives.
4. Breathe deeply to slow down your conscious, thinking brain so you can allow feedback from what you see, hear and feel.
5. Maintain your practice regimen until it is finished. Don't change because of free advice or other distractions.
6. Maintain your attention on each shot. Remember what Jack Nicklaus said, “I have never hit a careless practice shot.”
7. Pace yourself so you don't become fatigued either mentally or physically. Your proficiency will decrease when your attention-span needs a break. Take frequent rest breaks to give you mind and body a change to be refreshed.
8. When you hit a shot that feels good to you, anchor the shot into your subconscious mind by congratulating yourself and feeling the good emotion. If you haven't hit any good feeling shots, take the time to replay in your mind the shot that you do want so your brain will know how to direct your body.
9. When you have hit a perfect shot, STOP hitting that club. Acknowledge your success and anchor the great feeling. You have now put that memory into your subconscious and when you fire your anchor (the good feeling) later, your mind will retrieve it.
10. Practice the way you are going to play on the golf course. Put all the practice balls back into the bucket and take out one ball.
 - Put the ball on a tee.
 - Decide which “long shot” club to use.
 - Pick out a target. You might want to imagine a particular hole.
 - Go through your entire pre-shot routine.
 - Put the club back into your bag.
 - Depending on where you hit the first shot, decide on what club and shot to hit next. Play each shot until you would be on the green.

- Practice this several times and you will be ready to take your game to the golf course.

11. Write down what you have learned from your practice session.

Summer means daylight savings time which affords golfers extended hours to play. A good time to practice is late in the afternoon when it isn't so hot and the golf courses aren't as busy. If there is a hole that gives you problems, play it several times over to build your knowledge and confidence.

Here are some practice-play suggestions for playing alone under "match" conditions.

1. Play from a different set of tees than you normally do. Or, mix up the tees. Playing from a shorter tee will help your confidence, increase your course management, and allow you to hit shots from different places.

2. Play two balls in a scramble format. Hit the better ball of the two until you hole the ball out. This leads to lower scores and more confidence.

3. The opposite game is to play two balls, but you play the worst shot and hit two from there. Once on the green, you play the worst shot, but the putt must be holed in two putts to complete the score for that hole.

4. Play with only 3 clubs. This will help your creativity when you have to hit a short shot with a long iron.

Entrain Your Heart & Brain for Peak Performance

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