



EXCLUSIVE BY
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BE YOUR OWN COACH

ONE of the things which makes golf unique, even for the top players, is that they spend most of their time training on their own. In most team sports, the team is always observed and led by a coach during training, so the athletes are able to gain continuous feedback from the coach.

For golfers, we spend most of our time practising and playing without a coach and acknowledging that whatever we train we will ingrain, so practising correctly becomes essential. Practising correctly means that each session needs to have a purpose or aim and that each shot played during the session needs to be made with a strong intent in mind and an awareness of what you are aiming to achieve.

The reason behind this idea of intention and awareness is that every time we play a

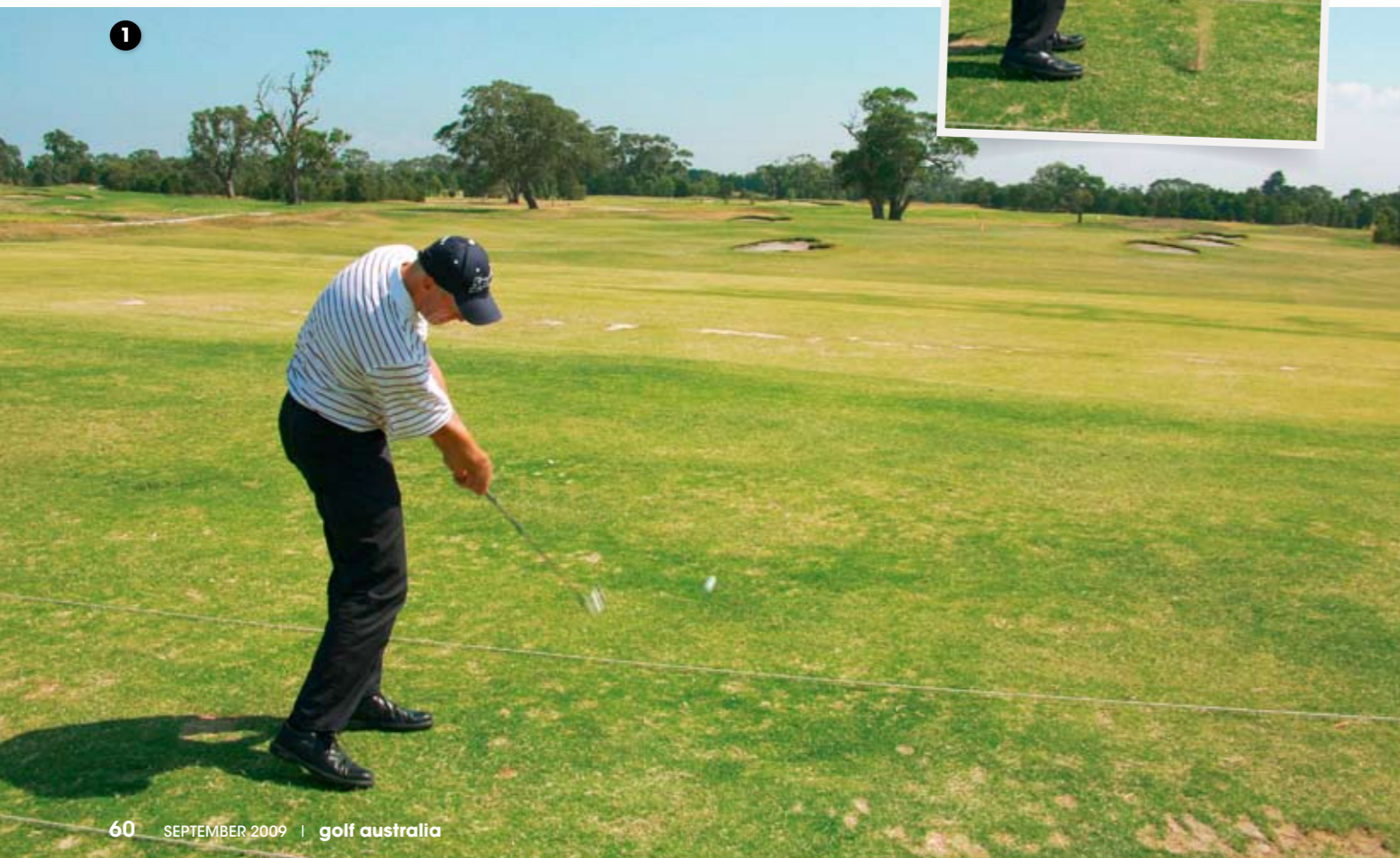
shot, our brain remembers the pattern for that shot, so it is critical that we do our best to make good quality swings each time. Not only does this reinforce a desired pattern, but leads us to shooting lower scores.

Making changes is inherently difficult because while our desire for change may be strong, our brains like to default to a previously learned way of swinging the club. This is mainly because it is what our brains have previously ingrained, so it is difficult to change. We can learn to change the pattern, but must do so with full attention to the task. This takes thought energy, which is tiring, hence another reason for the difficulty of change.

Our swings evolve over time. This may be due to advice we have followed or through trial and error. The important thing is that

the change is possible and does inevitably occur; it is better for that change to be deliberate and desired.

To establish some degree of automaticity, it is important to repeat the correct action hundreds or thousands of



time, each with your full attention on what it is you are trying to achieve. This is the only way to achieve sustained positive change.

There are plenty of ways we can coach ourselves when we are practising alone to learn good habits and establish strong patterns of movement which we desire in the process. This article will look at some of those things, which will enable us to continue working toward our own golfing goals.

ALIGNMENT

So many right-handed golfers misalign to the right of the target. When practising, always put a club on the ground to ensure you are aligned correctly. This will also enable you to develop your eye, so that you recognise what square looks like. A second club can be put on the ground at right angles to the shaft showing foot alignment. This second club is also good for ball position.

BALL FLIGHT

Learning the cause and effect of club path and clubface aim at impact is important in self-coaching. If you understand the things that cause your ball flight, then you are able to go a long way to helping yourself, especially on the course.

If the clubface is square to the path, then the ball will fly straight, otherwise it will have sidespin. If the clubface is aiming

right of the target the ball will curve to the right of the target. This will also cause the ball to start to the right of the target as well.

Experiment with hitting shots with the clubface deliberately aimed right (pic 1) and then with it deliberately aimed left (pic 2). Vary the amount it is aimed left or right to see the effect it has on the ball flight.

While the path of the club is curved, when the ball is struck, the path will either be travelling left, right or in line with the target. If you are hitting shots from grass, you will be able to see this from the direction the divot mark is pointing. Experiment with swinging the club on different paths through impact and see the effect it has on the shots.

Doing these drills with a combination of clubface alignment at impact and swing paths, you will quickly learn what causes a variety of different shot shapes. This will also enable you to understand what is causing your normal flight pattern and perhaps offer a way to correct it, if you need to.

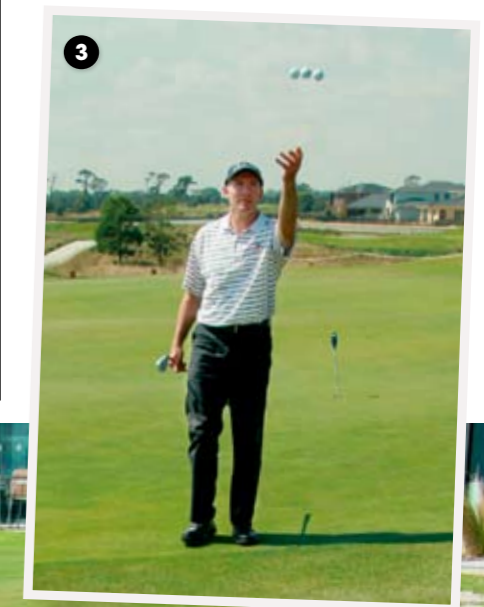
CHIPPING

When chip shots or short pitch shots are played, usually there is a very small divot taken or at least a mark left on the ground. All of these shots should be struck with a descending blow. To check this, make sure the mark on the ground appears after impact, on the target side of where the ball lay.

One way to practise noticing where the club strikes the ground is to have practice swings for chip shots in a bunker. Mark the sand where an imaginary ball would be and make a practice swing. The mark in the sand should begin where the imaginary ball lay, never before it.

The shaft should lean slightly toward the target at impact for a chip shot, the grip ahead of the clubhead. Practise hitting shots with the grip ahead, over and behind the clubhead at impact and notice the results. If the grip is truly behind the clubhead, you will either hit the ground before hitting the ball or hit the ball 'thin'.

Another important aspect of chipping practice is to chip from a variety of lies. I always encourage students to toss some balls into the air from the side of the green (pic 3) and then hit the chip shots from where the balls finish (pic 4).



TIGHT LIE - SHORT GRASS

POOR LIE - SEMI ROUGH

GOOD LIE - SEMI ROUGH

PUTTING

The most influential variable in putting is face control. If the putterface is even four degrees offline, a putt will miss from two metres.

One way to gain better control of the clubface is to putt using a string line. Run the line from behind your ball to the hole on a straight putt. Start with the ball underneath the string and hit it to the hole. If the ball starts offline it will indicate where the putter was facing at impact.

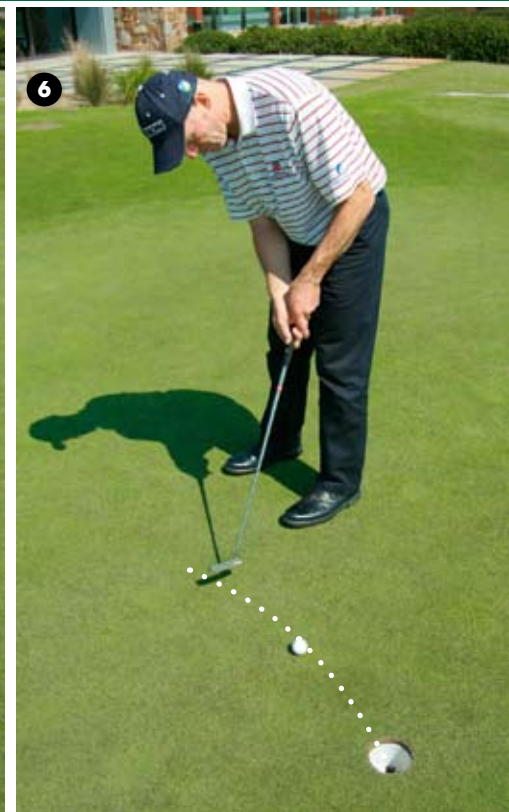
A means of monitoring path is to draw a line around the circumference of the ball and place the ball on the ground so that the line around the ball is aimed at the hole. When you hit the putt there should be no wobble of the line as the ball rolls toward the hole. If it does wobble, it indicates the putter face or path was incorrect.

Another thing to practise for shorter putts is to begin to recognise there are four ways for the ball to go in the hole, depending on the speed in which you hit the ball. Try hitting putts at different speeds, allowing for varying degrees of break for each. The firmer you hit the putt, the less break there will be (pics 5 & 6). By doing this, you actually have more of the hole to aim for on short putts.

For long putts, it is crucial to develop a good sense of feel for distance. Try hitting long putts with your eyes closed and then turn away (pic 7) as if to ask: "Where did that putt go?" After some practice you will find your long putts finishing close to the hole every time.

Using the ideas in this article as a guide you will begin to understand the cause-effect relationship between things such as where the ball goes after you have struck it and what might have caused that result.

This knowledge - and experimenting with the different variables - will help to make you more confident about knowing what to do when your game is not quite right. ●



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BRING ON THE GAME



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