**Improve Your Golf Score - 4 Tips**

A new golf season is just starting. Here are a few tips to improve your golf score and your enjoyment of playing.

Make sure your golf equipment is ready. Inventory your equipment and make any repairs or additions that are necessary. You may have forgotten that unfortunate incident last September when you heaved your 5-iron into the lake after a nasty shank. Sometimes we forget how long we have been using the same clubs. The grips might be worn or the grooves damaged on your irons. Check out the latest advancements in club technologies. If your clubs are marked "cleek" or "mashie niblick" you might consider an upgrade to the 21st century, or at least take your clubs to Antiques Roadshow for a quick appraisal. You might get a pleasant surprise.

A change in attitude. Golfers often talk themselves into playing badly, right from the first drive off the first tee of the new year. If all you can think about is how you always slice the ball on a particular hole, then that's exactly what you'll do. Forget about all the bad golf you played last year. Start fresh, with a clean mental slate. Golf pros train themselves to visualize the perfect outcome for each shot. We can all do that, on a modest basis. For most of us, thinking we'll shoot 65 at Pebble Beach isn't visualization, it's hallucination.

Be realistic in what you can expect from yourself. Recognize that your short game is a challenge for you and then practice to change it.

A change in golf buddies. Consider expanding your sphere of friends this year. If you belong to a club, invite one of the members you've never played with before to join your foursome. Meeting new friends on the course can make the conversation during the round more stimulating, and may even have benefits down the line in the form of new business contacts. Another benefit is that new golf buddies won't expect you to make the same old mistakes you always make.

A change in golf venues. Most of us aren't aware of all the great courses within easy driving distance of our homes. We tend to play the same familiar layouts all the time. Do an online search for courses in your region that offer discount greens fees. You'll save money and also be able to enjoy a fresh challenge and new scenery.

A fresh outlook, revamped clubs, new golfing buddies, and challenges new courses can make this the most enjoyable and best golf season you've ever had.

**Tips on Collecting Vintage Golf Equipment**

The game of golf is steeped in history. Golfers are appreciative of the game's history, and enjoy learning about the great players of the past, and the memorable tournaments. Just watch any major championships on TV: there are always segments about prior championships played on that course, who won, and what were the memorable shots. Golf's long history also presents the opportunity for an interesting and potentially lucrative hobby, collecting vintage golf equipment. Displaying vintage clubs or balls can add a lot of interest to any golfer's home.

Just as anyone who appears on PBS' Antiques Roadshow program can attest, it is tremendous fun to try to find bargains in antiques, and vintage golf equipment is no exception. Vintage golf items are relatively easy to find, and pursuing this hobby can be a way to learn more about the history of the wonderful game of golf, and how equipment has evolved and improved down the years. It's fun to grip an old hickory-shafted club form the '20's, set down a gutta percha ball, and imagine trying to actually play with this type of equipment! You quickly gain greater appreciation for today's forgiving clubs and juiced-up golf balls.

As with any other form of collecting, there are pitfalls, however. You need to make sure items you are buying are authentic vintage equipment, not fakes or replicas. For instance, new clubs can be distressed to look antique. If you are buying items with signatures from great players, you need to make sure the signature is authenticated. These types of collectibles, if authenticated, can enjoy great price appreciation over the years.

You can of course search for vintage golf equipment online. The mega-store eBay has an extensive "Vintage" golf equipment section on their site, often with more than 1000 items. Golf collectibles are not necessarily just clubs from the late 19th or early 20th Century. The original "Ping" putters from the 1960's are highly sought after collectibles. Items bearing the signatures of greats such as Ben Hogan or Byron Nelson also fetch hefty premiums. Prices for vintage equipment can start very reasonably, $20-$50, and be as high as several thousand dollars for certain rare items.

There are also online sites devoted exclusively to golf collectibles.

Antique Golf Clubs from Scotland describes itself as "the leading online resource for antique golf clubs and memorabilia from Scotland, the birthplace of golf." <http://www.antiquegolfscotland.com/antiquegolf/main.php3>

Niblickgolf.com offers clubs and balls from the 1900-1930 period, obtained from a private collection. [http://www.niblickgolf.com/antique.html] - A vintage driver runs around $125, a Mashie (5 iron) is $95 and a mesh-patterned golf ball in good condition is $75.

Before beginning your acquisition of vintage golf equipment, you should do some research. An excellent guidebook is: Antique Golf Collectibles: A Price and Reference Guide (Paperback) by highly respected golf collector and publisher, Chuck Furjanic. This book includes comprehensive information on literally thousands of collectibles: antique clubs and balls, autographs, signature golf balls, artwork, medals and trophies, as well as trading cards and other collectibles. With more than 500 photographs, this book is fascinating to read as well as an important price guide for would-be collectors.

A few other tips:

1) Try to find items in as good a condition as possible. These are more likely to hold their value or appreciate. "Vintage" doesn't mean in beaten-up condition.

2) Putters are among the most popular collectibles.

3) When you begin collecting, stick with equipment items, clubs, balls, vintage golf bags, etc. rather than golf artwork, which requires more study in order to make informed decisions.

**How to Improve Your Golf Game - 2 Tips to Make Practice Time Count**

Most golfers realize that spending time on the practice range is essential to game improvement-lowering your score. But it's surprising how little time golfers devote to practice. Or maybe it's not surprising: compared to the fun and camaraderie of being out on the course, hitting a bucket or two of practice balls seems downright boring. Here are two tips to improve your golf game and make golf practice more effective:

Practice regularly

Have a goal in mind

Practice regularly. Just as going to the gym once a month and lifting weights doesn't build much muscle mass (and can result in injuries), a sporadic practice regimen is unlikely to significantly improve a golfer's game. The goal of practice is twofold: improving technique and building confidence. Have you ever gone out golfing for the first time after the long, cold winter and found that the club feels like a foreign object in your hand? A consistent practice routine helps you get the "feel" for each club in the bag. And playing good golf requires building a consistent, reliable swing, ingraining that ideal swing in your muscle memory so you can repeat it as needed when you are under pressure on the course. Many golfers mistakenly think they can "build" their swing during the round. The practice range is a better place to work on game improvement, because, you can his as many shots with one club as you need to gain consistency, whereas on the course, you only hit one shot with each club (assuming you advance the ball with each swing) and then use another club on the next shot.

Have a goal in mind. In between rounds of golf, pick up the scorecard from the round and take a few minutes to review how you played each hole. What part of your game is working well? Perhaps your drives were superior, or your chipping to the green was crisp and highly accurate. Then, think about where your swing let you down. Maybe you hooked too many iron shots and missed a lot of greens. After you do this review and critique, pick the worst problem areas and write them down. Then bring the (hopefully short) list with you to the practice range. Spend additional time on the problem areas, and work on your strengths just enough to keep those skills sharp. Good golf is mostly a matter of eliminating mistakes. Pros don't hit every shot perfectly, but they do know how to reduce the chance of scoring double boogies or higher.

Practice regularly and establish a goal for your game and you can improve your golf game.

**How to Keep Score When Playing Golf**

Golf is one of the few games where the lowest score wins in stroke play. It's also a game where players of diverse skills can compete against each other. To make this possible, each golfer earns what is termed a handicap, a number that is based on the scores a player has previously shot. That handicap number is subtracted from the gross score in stroke play. For example, if a golfer shoots a gross score of 88, and has a 12 handicap, his net score is 76. If his opponent had a gross score of 90, higher than his, and had a 15 handicap, the opponent's net score would be 75, and he would be the winner. Handicaps aren't considered in match play or in skins games. Signing the card when the score is wrong results in disqualification from tournaments if the score is lower than actually played or being stuck with a higher score if the error adds strokes.

Stroke Play   
Count every stroke the player hits from the tee box on the first green to the last putt on the 18th green. A stroke is when the club makes contact with the ball or when the player intends to hit the ball. Strokes where the player intentionally misses the ball or alters his downward swing to intentionally miss the ball do not count. Practice strokes do not count. However, if the player intends to hit the ball and misses or duffs the ball, the stroke counts.

Mark the number of strokes for each hole on the scorecard. In a recreational round of golf, each player keeps and marks their own scorecard. In competition tournaments, your playing partner keeps your score and you keep his.

Add in any penalty strokes if they're incurred. Penalty strokes are awarded for an unplayable lie, lost ball, hitting another player's ball, improving the ball's lie, having more than 14 clubs in your bag and quite a few other mistakes.

Total the scores for each hole. This is the gross score. Subtract your handicap from the gross score. This is the net score.

Attest to your score kept for you by your playing partner if you're in competition play.

Match Play   
In match play, the objective is to win more holes than your opponent, which means having a lower score on more holes.

You play the first hole from the tee to holing out the ball on the green. If you took fewer strokes than your opponent, you win that hole, expressed as one point, and are considered to be 1 up in the match at that point. Give your opponent one point if he had the fewest strokes on the hole.

Play the next hole. The player with the lowest number of strokes wins the hole and one point. The total number of possible points for an 18 hole round of golf is 18 points.

Give one-half point if both players had the same number of strokes on a hole.

Give the hole and the point to your opponent, if you incur certain penalties. This is different than in stroke play where additional strokes are assessed.

Total the number of points. The player with the most points wins. In some match play, the round is over when one player has won more points than there are holes left to play. In other matches, especially tournaments which continue over several days, all 18 holes are played. For example, in a 2-day tournament, you may finish round one 5 up on your opponent. You start round two with a 5 up lead.

Tips   
Penalty strokes in golf can get confusing. Keep the rule book with you when you play. Even professional players have questions about certain situations. For example, Dustin Johnson, playing in the 2010 PGA Championship, grounded the club behind his ball, not realizing his ball was in a bunker, where grounding the club is not allowed. That's a two-stroke penalty when in a bunker and resulted in Johnson missing the playoff.

**How Golfers Are Matched in Match Play**

Match play is a competition between two players or teams. It differs from stroke play in that the highest score -- winning the most number of holes -- wins the match rather than the lowest score, the lowest total number of strokes. Each hole is worth one point. The player, or team, with the lowest number of strokes on the hole wins the hole and the point. If no one has the lowest number of strokes, a half point goes to each team. Match play may be one player against another, one twosome against another, two foursomes against each other, or teams with more than four players competing. Match play is sanctioned by the USGA, PGA and LPGA. The Solheim Cup, Ryder's Cup and WGC-Accenture Match Play are well-known golf tournaments based on match play. How players are matched in match play depends on the format of the tournament, rules and skill level of the players.

**Basics**

Decide the format of the match play. Determine if players will be playing one on one, in twosomes or in teams of four or more. Designate whether the play will be for 18 holes or over 36 or 72 holes.

Set up the schedule of matches. A one-day tournament of singles is simple. Pair the players by handicap or by drawing names randomly out of a hat. A two-day tournament with singles matches, twosomes, and foursomes all part of the tournament is more complicated and takes some strategy. For example, the captain of a team of 12 golfers, may have to match players to participate in eight singles matches, two twosomes and four fourball matches.

Form the rules. In recreational match play, the match is won when one player, or team, is ahead by more points -- holes won -- than there are holes left. A putt may be conceded at the other team's or player's discretion. In more competitive tournaments, or with tournaments that have single matches as well as team matches as part of the event, every point is important for the total outcome, so the matches are played through all 18 holes.

Pair aggressive players against aggressive players. Match play rewards risks. The player, or team, who takes the lead early, has a greater chance of winning. In twosomes or foursomes, at least one of the team members should be aggressive with strong driving abilities.

Assign one player with a strong short game to each team. Getting to the green in the least amount of strokes is important. However, brilliant chipping and putting can win the hole.

Pair singles matches with individuals with the same playing abilities.

**Elimination Match Play**

Rank the players by their handicaps. Give each player a rank, or seed, based on that handicap. The lowest handicap would have the number one seed, the highest handicap would have the last seed. If 32 players were competing there would be 32 seed positions from 1 through 32.

Assign the highest ranked seed player to play against the lowest seed. So the first seed player would play against the 32 seed, the second seed player would play against the 31 seed, the third seed against the 30 seed player. The 15th and 16th seeded players would compete against each other.

Narrow the field of 32 players to 16 players based on the winners of the matches. The second round would eliminate eight more players. The semi-final round would be four players and the final round features two players.

**What Is A GHIN Number and How To Get One**

The GHIN or Golf Handicap Information Network is an online site for computing handicaps. The site is managed by the USGA, United States Golf Association, the ruling body of golf in the United States. To obtain a handicap, a golfer enters his gross golf scores -- before the handicap is subtracted -- at his home course or online. The network then calculates the handicap, based on the slope and difficulty of the course.

A handicap is calculated based on the average of the 20 best most recent gross scores played on a USGA rated golf course. The lower the handicap number the better the player is. The handicap is subtracted from the gross score at the end of the round. In this way players with varying skill levels can compete against each other on a more level field. For example, a 10 handicap posts an 95, the net score would be 85. A 22 handicapper posts a score of 95 the same as the 10 handicapper. However, his net score is 73. He wins.

The GHIN number allows access to a computerized database of thousands of courses -- and golfers. On their home course, golfers enter their scores or give their scorecard to be entered by a staff member. When playing away from their home course the score can be entered online through the GHIN website.

**Established Club**

Join a golf club that is a member of a State or Regional Golf Association and participates in the Golf Handicap Information Network. Many public courses offer a handicap only service -- you don't have to join any kind of club.

Complete the club application for membership.

Pay the initiation fee and club dues, if required.

Write down the GHIN number the club assigns to you.

**Form a Club of Your Own**

Form a golf club with at least 10 members and a set of bylaws if you don't want to join an established club or participate in the handicap only service of a public course.

Set up a committee that provides peer review and manages golf activities. Set up a Handicap Committee.

Establish a membership for the club with the State or Regional Golf Association.

Designate a home course for the club that is sanctioned by the USGA.

Issue GHIN to the members.

**Tips**

Post at least five golf scores through your club for a handicap to be calculated.

**Warning**

Only post scores from in season play. For example if the season for your course is from April to October, any play on that course November through March should not be posted.