

Do You Have a Plan?

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ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT WINTER IN MINNESOTA is that it forces us to put the golf clubs away and creates excitement and anticipation for the start of the golf season in the spring. The new season brings dreams and hopes of playing more golf, hitting the ball farther, shooting lower scores, and having more fun!

With spring upon us, what are your golf goals for the summer?

Most of the golfers I encounter start the season wanting to get better and are excited to play. Unfortunately, the majority of these players never really get any better. They work hard on their game, but their scores remain the same.

Why don't golfers get better? The biggest reason I see is they don't have a plan. If you don't have a plan, your practice is really just a form of exercise. You are not addressing the areas you need to work on in order to shoot lower scores.

Creating a plan is similar to creating a recipe—a recipe for better golf. If you are baking a cake and don't have all the ingredients or don't do things in the proper sequence, the

cake won't turn out very well. The same is true of your golf plan.

HOW DO WE CREATE A GOLF PLAN?

Due to the many different aspects of the sport, there are few games more challenging than golf. The challenge is part of what draws us to the game. The different areas include equipment, physical fitness, driving the ball, the long game, wedge play, and putting.

To create a great improvement plan, it is important to assess each of these areas. As we analyze them, we can then decide what will have the biggest impact on scores and enjoyment level. Since many golfers have limited time to devote to practice, it is important to spend practice time on what is the most important.

EQUIPMENT

Ball flight and impact alignments are influenced by how a player's clubs fit. Golfers will make compensations in their golf swings if their clubs do not fit.

Factors that need to be considered

are the length of the clubs, the flex and material of the shaft, the lie angle, the loft (especially on the driver), and the size and material of the grip. The set make up—the combination of woods, hybrids, irons, wedges, and putter—is extremely important to ensure that the golfer has the proper gaps between clubs and that there is not duplication of the distances in different clubs.

By far the best way to evaluate your equipment is to use launch monitor technology such as TrackMan (www.trackman.dk). TrackMan allows you to accurately and scientifically quantify the differences between clubs. Optimizing distance, learning the gaps between clubs, and analyzing shot distribution of different clubs becomes much more efficient using this technology. Optimizing equipment is typically the fastest and easiest way to improve your game.

PHYSICAL FITNESS

Strength, flexibility, and balance have a huge influence on a golfer's ability to make a golf swing. A golfer's fitness

level has a direct correlation to swing errors, club-head speed, and endurance.

One of the best ways for a golfer to assess his/her fitness level is to be screened by a certified Titleist Performance Institute professional (www.myTPI.com). Titleist Performance Institute has committed a number of resources to the fitness side of golf. Their research has allowed them to correlate swing errors with a lack of strength, flexibility, or balance. Through an assessment, they will design a workout program that will positively impact a golfer's game.

DRIVING THE BALL

Driving the ball is the third most important factor in scoring. The distance that a player drives the ball and the ability to hit the ball in play influence a player's opportunity to hit greens in regulation. How far a player drives the ball is the single largest indicator of potential.

One of the easiest ways to improve driving is to make sure you have a driver that is optimized for distance and accuracy. To maximize distance, there is an ideal window of launch angle and spin based on a golfer's club-head speed. The biggest influence of launch angle is the loft of the driver and the combination of shaft and loft that influence the spin.

THE LONG GAME

The long game is all of the shots hit outside of one hundred yards that are not hit with the driver. The long game correlates to hitting greens in regulation. The more greens a player hits in regulation, the lower the score they shoot. Greens hit in regulation are the number one factor in scoring.

For mid- to high-handicap players, the long game is the area where deficiencies in a player's swing show up. Swing improvements and having optimized clubs can impact the long game tremendously.

Think about how you hit your own mid-irons, hybrids, and fairway woods. The slower a player's club-head speed, the more important these clubs become. Would you benefit from taking the 3, 4, or 5 iron out of your bag and replacing it with hybrids or higher-lofted fairway woods?

WEDGE PLAY

Wedge play is all the shots from inside one hundred yards and would include chips, pitches, and full and partial swings with the wedges. Good wedge play can dramatically impact your scores. Good wedge play saves shots when we don't hit in greens regulation (when the ball is on the putting surface in the expected number of strokes in relation to par) and increases birdie opportunities on par fives and shorter par fours.

How is your wedge play? Are you getting all of your wedge shots on the green? Do you hit chip and pitch shots close enough to one putt a high percentage of the time?

PUTTING


Putting is the number two factor in scoring. Improved putting is probably the easiest way to positively influence your scores. Putting is also the one area of the game where we can be as proficient as the best players in the world. It doesn't require great strength or athletic ability. It does, however, require practice! Of all the aspects of the game, I see people spend less time on putting than any other part.

On the PGA Tour the distance that players make more than 50 percent of their putts is just over seven feet. At what distance do you make more than half of your putts?

A great gauge of how you are putting is "putt par." To figure out your "putt par" for a round, take the number of greens that you hit in regulation and multiply by two. Add this number to the remaining number of greens. This number is your "putt par." For instance if you hit seven greens in regulation, you have 14 plus 11 (the 11 greens that you missed). Your "putt par" would be 25. If your total putts for the round were 25 or better, you had an excellent putting round. If they are 29 or higher you putted poorly.

THE PLAN

As you assess each area the plan will take shape. Emphasis should be placed on the areas with the biggest potential for improvement. Is your equipment optimized for performance? Will being stronger and more flexible make your swing more efficient or allow you to make a swing change? Do you need to minimize penalty shots from the tee? What aspect of the long game will allow you to hit more greens? Are your chips and pitches putting you in position to one putt? Are you making the most of your makeable putts and minimizing three putts?

Assess your game, make your plan, and practice those areas that will have the biggest impact. Make 2013 your best season ever! 



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