



PRO TIPS

BY KIMBERLY NICOLETTI

Overthinking will mess you up in any sport, but it's especially true in golf. Focusing too much on technique can stiffen up your body and literally interrupt your flow.

When you first start golfing again for the season, "it's best not to worry about mechanics, because people get very in their head, thinking too hard," says Vail Golf Club head professional Nathan Mead. "When people focus too much on the mechanics, they lose their athleticism."

He suggests taking a lot of practice

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swings without a golf ball in the beginning, when muscle memory is a "little bit lighter and more malleable," because it can prevent golfers from strengthening bad habits from last season.

"Practice swings are more relaxing," Mead, who was named Colorado PGA West Chapter teacher of the year

in 2019, says. "They allow people to make better swings without that stress of hitting the golf ball correctly."

During practice swings, focus on brushing the ground lightly. Lighten your mental load by adopting the same attitude you would when tossing a ball in a carefree game of catch.

“It’s more about the general motion. Imagine where the ball goes, feel it and become more aware of your athletic movement,” he says. “Do it until it feels good and you feel the flexibility again.”

This approach also helps golfers warm up their bodies, lessening the likelihood of injury.

Mead often illustrates how much practice swings can help by showing his clients videos of practice swings vs. hitting a ball, and says they realize that “if I were a little more relaxed, this would go better.”

Practice shots also help golfers find their rhythm.

“The tempo of your golf swing is so important for a successful golf shot,” says Blake Scott, director of golf at Gypsum Creek Golf Course. He teaches players how to find that sweet spot, where the face of the club impacts the ball most effectively.

As most players know, one of the challenges in golf is the fact that very minute movements can result in big misses: Long, high-speed hits that are just 1 degree off make a huge difference when the ball is flying 300 yards.

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Scott recommends downloading a training app called Orange Whip to focus on tempo and help improve your game. That said, both Scott and Mead encourage golfers to take lessons to focus on specific areas of improvement.

“When you receive tips from Golf Digest or GOLFTV, you have to realize it might not have anything to do with you. It’s so individual. It’s like trying to diagnose yourself on WebMD,” Mead says.

It’s usually time to turn to a pro after “what you’re doing stops working,” in

terms of practice swings and focusing on technique. “This can show you what your bad habits are, like a pattern of the ball going to the right, and then you can go to a PGA pro to figure out (the solution).”

Remember, it’s about progress, not perfection. Part of the allure of golf is that it creates a “craving to improve because it seems easy: The ball’s there, not moving. The target’s not moving, but it’s amazing all the

things that come between you and that goal,” Mead says.

The game calls for a balance of discipline and precision, as well as relaxation and agility.

“Don’t forget you’re playing a sport,” Mead says. “People forget and they become very static and very still because they’re thinking so much. Be an athlete. It’s an athletic achievement to hit a golf ball well.”

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Every golfer knows the dress code, but players who aren’t used to High Country weather should remember a couple essentials to bring, every day. First, without sunscreen, your face, arms and neck will fry in the high elevation; wear it even on cloudy days, as you’re more than 1 ½ miles closer to the sun than at sea level. Second, always bring a windproof and waterproof extra layer, even if it’s really hot when you start the game. It’s not unusual for the day to begin sunny, then turn to rain for a short time (30-60 minutes). Wind can also pick up in the afternoon. And, when the sun begins to dip, it gets pretty chilly, so prepare accordingly.

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