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OLYMPIC GOLF HAS FINALLY FOUND ITS PLACE



When golf returned to the Olympic Games in 2016 after a 112-year gap, I was sceptical. It wouldn't be a priority for players... A gold medal would never mean more than a Green Jacket or Claret Jug... It wouldn't be

supported by the biggest names in the game... When half the eligible field in Rio pulled out citing the Zika virus, my enthusiasm waned even more.

But after watching the men's and women's events in Paris this year, I have come full circle – Olympic golf is captivating! The men's final round at Paris National was one of the highlights of the year; maybe not quite as dramatic as the back nine of the US Open, but certainly on a par with the other three Majors, and arguably better.

Paris had everything – incredible shot-making, a course set up for scoring, nervy leaders falling away, home hero Victor Perez sending the crowds crazy, a Brit in contention, the World No.1 playing some of the best golf we've ever seen... and then welling up on the podium as his national anthem played and proving what winning an Olympic gold really means.

The IOC could still tinker with the format to make it even more exciting – it's crying out for a mixed event and a team matchplay element, rather than 72 more holes of individual strokeplay. But after a shaky start, golf finally feels like it belongs as an Olympic sport, and it's only going to get more popular.



Chris Jones, Editor



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Distributor Frontline

H BAUER PUBLISHING

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Calls will cost no more than 5p per minute from a BT landline. Calls from mobile providers and other networks may vary. All phone lines are open 8am-9.30pm Monday to Friday; Saturdays 8am-4pm.

Today's Golfer is published 13 times a year in the UK by H Bauer Publishing, a company registered in England and Wales with company number LP003328, registered address The Lantern, 75 Hampstead Road, London NW1 2PL, VAT no 918 5617 01. H Bauer Publishing is authorised and regulated by the FCA (Ref No. 845898). No part of the magazine may be reproduced in any form in whole or in part, without the prior permission of H Bauer Publishing (email syndication@bauermedia.co.uk). All material published remains the copyright of H Bauer Publishing and we reserve the right to copy or edit any material submitted to the magazine without further consent. The submission of material (manuscripts or images etc) to H Bauer Publishing, whether unsolicited or requested, is taken as permission to publish that material in the magazine, on the associated website, any apps or social media pages affiliated to the magazine, and any editions of the magazine published by our licensees elsewhere in the world. By submitting any material to you are confirming that the material is your own original work or that you have permission from the copyright owner to use the material and to authorise Bauer to use it as described in this paragraph. You also promise that you have permission from anyone featured or referred to in the submitted material to it being used by H Bauer Publishing. If H Bauer Publishing receives a claim from a copyright owner or a person featured in any material you have sent us, we will inform that person that you have granted us permission to use the relevant material and you will be responsible for paying any amounts due to the copyright owner or featured person and/or for reimbursing H Bauer Publishing for any losses it has suffered as a result. Please note, we accept no responsibility for unsolicited material which is lost or damaged in the post and we do not promise that we will be able to return any material. Finally, whilst we try to ensure accuracy of your material when we publish it, we cannot promise to do so. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss or damage, however caused, resulting from use of the material. H Bauer Publishing is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (www.ipso.co.uk) and endeavours to respond to and resolve your concerns quickly. Our Editorial Complaints Policy (including full details of how to contact us about editorial complaints and IPSO's contact details) can be found at www.bauermediacomplaints.co.uk.



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THE COMPLETE HAT-TRICK



Lydia Ko needed just one victory to enter the LPGA Tour Hall of Fame. She did it on the biggest stage possible in Paris, beating Esther Henseleit by two to become the first golfer in history to complete the Olympic slam. Since golf was reintroduced in 2016, only three players have bested the 27 year old. Silver in Rio, bronze in Tokyo, and now gold in Paris.

A few hours later, the Kiwi took to Instagram to announce that she will not be defending her title in LA 2028, having previously made it clear she will not continue playing into her thirties. With a gold medal around her neck, we're now inclined to believe her.

"I do feel like I'm a mythical character in a story," she said afterwards. "It really couldn't have gotten any better than I could have imagined. I've had so many fantastic things happen in my career so far, and this really tops them all. I couldn't have asked for anything more, to be honest."

Ko's storied career includes 20 LPGA Tour wins, highlighted by two Majors, three Olympic medals and two Player of the Year awards.



LOCKER ROOM CHAT



JONATHAN EDWARDS

'I REALLY DON'T LOVE THE RYDER CUP'

How did you get into golf?

There were two things I wanted to do after I retired – one was to go on a family skiing holiday and the other was to play golf. So I joined a golf club, became an avid player, and I played the Dunhill Links a few years after I retired. My first handicap was 13, then my son and I had consistent lessons throughout the winter and I dropped down to six. I just fell in love with it and now golf is my main thing.

Does your athletics background translate well to the course?

It's interesting because golf has become much more athletic rather than purely skill-based. You look at all the longest drivers and the way the guys are hitting the ball now with the use of ground forces.

The Titleist Performance Institute say that the biggest indicator of how far you hit the ball is actually your vertical jump performance. My vertical jump was never particularly good and I don't hit the ball massively far, but there is an athleticism there which should help the golf swing. But for me, the difficulty is that everything I did as a jumper was linear, and golf is rotational. I obviously have good athletic ability, but I'm yet to completely translate it into the golf swing.

How did you find your way into Scoring Control at The Open?

This is my third Open now. I did the flags on the crossovers at 7 and 11 on the Old Course at St Andrews in 2022, and then I've done Score Control for the last two years. It involves keeping an eye on the walking scorers, solving technical issues and controlling the displays on the big manual scoreboards on the 18th grandstands.

I feel part of the team now. We're like a family and have already planned Portrush next year. There's something special at The Open about having local clubs involved in pulling together the walking scorers, as opposed to using professional companies as you see on tour, and the club captain will probably do the final group on Sunday. It's one of the really nice things about The Open and of course, the manual scoreboards are an iconic part of the tournament.

Do you have any favourite memories from previous Opens?

Seve winning at St

Andrews in 1984 obviously springs to mind, and I'm a big Jordan Spieth fan. I got the chance to walk with him for 18 holes last year and I loved it. The way he gets up and down and talks to himself, berating himself, geeing himself up... I really like that.

Does being a world record holder ever grow old?

No. Not at all. I still have to pinch myself. It's amazing.

Is golf good for the Olympic Games – and vice-versa?

Funnily enough, I'm a bit of a traditionalist. I think golf in the Olympics is great but it's also not the most important golf competition. I understand why the Olympics want golf and actually, the Games give golf a fantastic platform with more than 200 countries competing.

If you take me and my Olympic medals – they were the ultimate achievement. But for a golfer, they would prefer to win The Open or the Masters. But with my development hat on, it is really important for the sport as you'll reach new countries you wouldn't normally reach, so I get it. But golf at the Olympics doesn't excite me as much as golf at Troon.

Would you prefer a see a change to the Olympics' 72-hole strokeplay format?

I like the idea of a different format for Olympic golf because it distinguishes it from the Majors. Maybe a matchplay or knockout format. Also, golf should be played on a links course in my opinion, except for Augusta. I just love links golf.

Do you think athletics would benefit from a LIV-style shake-up?

There is always negativity surrounding LIV, but there is something in what they are doing that I think adds to the whole makeup of golf. Look at cricket's IPL and how successful that is, despite being so different from traditional cricket. It's not for everybody. I mean, I don't love the Ryder Cup. It's too much and suddenly players become different from what we see for most of the season. I'm much more Walker Cup, walking the fairways, watching the amateurs play – I sound like an old man!

Jonathan Edwards is a Global Development Ambassador for The R&A.

INTERVIEW: ROSS TUGWOOD

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THE RULES

WINTER RULES REFRESHER

10 things you need to know about the big rule change returning next month



When are Winter Rules being introduced?

There is no set time, though the decision rests with the Committee who can introduce a Local Rule for preferred lies (also known as Winter Rules). Most courses in the UK implement a Local Rule from October 1 until April 30, but it's worth checking your club noticeboard for the status of the course before teeing off.

Where do Winter Rules apply?

Any part of the general area cut to fairway height or less. This includes fringes, aprons and even paths through the rough when they are cut to fairway height or less.

Do I have to mark my ball before picking it up?

When taking relief, you are not required to mark the original spot before picking and cleaning your ball. But it is recommended that you do so as marking the original spot helps to determine the reference point and relief area for taking free relief.

How far can I move my ball?

The ball or another ball must be placed on a spot no nearer the hole (and in the general area) within a zone specified by the Committee, normally within six inches. However, some clubs specify

a scorecard length or even a club length, so check in advance.

If I'm not happy with the lie, can I pick and place again?

Your ball is in play once the ball you've placed stays on that spot. If you pick it up again, you must replace the ball under the penalty of one stroke.

Am I entitled to free relief for an embedded ball in the rough?

Yes, you can take free relief for a ball embedded anywhere in the general area (bar the sand). This remains so regardless of whether Winter Rules are active or not. The relief area is one club-length from the reference point, which is a point directly behind where the ball is embedded.

Can I get a free drop from standing water?

As long as the water is not in a penalty area, you are entitled to free relief if it interferes with your ball, area of intended stance or swing, or your line of play when your ball is on the green. From anywhere other than the putting green, you may drop within one club-length from the nearest point of complete relief in the same area of the course where your ball lies, no nearer the hole. When your ball lies on the green, you may place a ball on the nearest point of complete relief.

GET THE FREE RULES OF GOLF APP

The Rules of Golf app makes the rules easier to search and is free to download on iOS and Android devices. You can learn the basics by watching the 10 'essential rules' videos and then use the visual search to help find a ruling quickly on the course or in the clubhouse. The 30 diagrams and 25 'how to' videos will also help you to proceed correctly.



May I brush away a layer of ice from my line of play?

Frost, much like dew, isn't classed as a loose impediment and as a result may be removed from the teeing area without penalty only when teeing off on that hole. In all other circumstances, you're not permitted to remove frost where it could improve the conditions affecting your stroke or stance.

Do I have to take relief from a temporary green?

Yes. Rule 13.1f requires you to drop your ball without penalty in the relief area of one club-length, measured from the nearest point of complete relief, no nearer the hole.

If my ball lies in a penalty area and is surrounded by leaves, can I move them without penalty?

You are allowed to touch or remove a loose impediment, including leaves, sticks, worms and insects, anywhere on or off the course without penalty as long as you do not improve the conditions affecting the strike. If a movement of the ball occurs because of your actions, it must be replaced on its original spot and you incur a one-stroke penalty. However, if the ball is on the putting green and it moves because you are clearing a loose impediment, there is no penalty provided the ball is replaced in its original position.

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YOUR GUIDE TO...

THE 2024 PRESIDENTS CUP

Six things to know about one of the most one-sided contests in golf

1 The Americans don't lose
The last time it happened at the Presidents Cup, Bill Clinton was still in office and Scottie Scheffler was barely two years old. Their record is so dominant that they've now won 12 of the 14 matches played, including the last nine in a row, dating back to 2005.

2 Jim Furyk's team is absolutely stacked
The Americans are big favourites for a reason. Ten of them are ranked inside the world's top 20 compared to just two (Hideki Matsuyama and Tom Kim) on the International side. There's also a good chance that Keegan Bradley will be a playing vice-captain.



3 Canada expects
There is nothing Canadians love more than beating Americans. In Mike Weir, they've got the country's best-ever golfer captaining the Internationals and a strong Canadian core bringing the energy. If it's anything like the Canadian Open, the atmosphere should be electric.

4 Home advantage offers hope of an upset
The Internationals have been one and two points away from winning the last two home Cups. They go again on the Blue Course at Royal Montreal, the oldest golf club in North America, where Weir beat Tiger Woods in the 2007 singles. If he can pull off another upset, it will be the greatest in Presidents Cup history.



5 Big names are missing
The PGA Tour have once again banned LIV golfers from playing in the event, hence Weir will be without Joaquin Niemann, Cameron Smith and Louis Oosthuizen, to name just a few. It also means Bryson DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka will be watching at home like the rest of us.

6 Scottie's struggles
We could pull out many stats which highlight Scottie Scheffler's brilliance, but individually rather than in team tournaments. He contributed half a point in 2022 and then failed to win any of his four matches in Rome's Ryder Cup. At least he won't be teaming up with Brooks this time!



THE KEY DATES

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Five fourballs or foursomes
September 28
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September 29
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IN PICTURES



Graeme McDowell missed LIV Golf Chicago after being suspended and hit with a \$125,000 fine for breaching anti-doping procedures by using a Vicks nasal spray.

To promote the Women's Open, the R&A unveiled the world's first playable billboard at Edinburgh Waverley Station – allowing fans to experience playing the 8th hole on the Old Course at St Andrews.



As much as we love Trump Turnberry, we were shocked to discover that from June 1 next year it will cost a whopping £1,000pp for non-residents to play 18 holes on the Ailsa Course before 1pm. And, in case you were wondering, it will still set you back £545 for a later afternoon tee time.



At the 89th attempt, Wolverhampton's Aaron Rai finally claimed his first PGA Tour win at the Wyndham Championship.



Walter Hall, aged seven, needed just seven holes to land a hole-in-one in his first-ever round of golf!



An emotional Scottie Scheffler celebrated gold at the Paris Olympics after making six birdies on the back nine to edge Tommy Fleetwood by one.

OBJECT OF DESIRE

THE IRON THAT THINKS IT'S A DRIVER

Callaway's new Ti Fusion blends titanium and steel in a gorgeous package

↙ To mark the 10th anniversary of the game-changing Apex iron, Callaway wanted to create what they consider to be the holy grail of irons. Step forward the titanium-face Apex Ti Fusion.

We know titanium irons are not ground-breaking; TaylorMade had the P790 Ti in 2019 and Callaway had their own tungsten and titanium Great Big Bertha iron decades ago.

But the material comes with some inherent problems. Titanium is super light, which is why it's been used in drivers for decades. However, full titanium body irons create issues for CG positioning.

Titanium and steel also hate being fused together, so until now it's been a major challenge creating titanium face and steel body irons that bring significant gains to the table. But that's exactly what the £1,999-a-set Ti Fusion does.

By patenting a new process for bonding titanium to steel, the Ti Fusion has a titanium face that behaves like a driver, along with a forged steel body.

The new construction offers great spin consistency across the face and throughout the set, along with

increased speed, great feel and additional stability.

Callaway say golfers can expect greater long iron speed and distance, a far superior feel and short-iron spin that is every bit as consistent as you get from one-piece forged irons.

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STAY AND PLAY

THE GROVE

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In a nutshell

Disneyland meets golf and gastronomy at the No.1 golf resort in England.

The vibe

The Lamborghinis and Bentleys hint at the kind of company you keep in this playful corner of Hertfordshire, which is a popular haunt among the rich and famous. Tiger Woods won the WGC at The Grove in 2006, while Tom Cruise, David Beckham and Kylie Minogue have all set foot on the 300-acre estate at one time or another. Being less than 10 minutes from Warner Bros. Studio also means they cater for lots of families who are taking a tour of the Harry Potter sets.

The hotel

Just 18 miles from London, the 18th century mansion sits on the crest of a mile-long driveway which takes you past huge swathes of parkland and away from the noise of the M25. There are 214 rooms and 12 suites in total, squirrelled away down

endless corridors across the old house and west wing. We stayed in a king size 'deluxe' room, which was tastefully decorated in a calming palette of neutral tones, with a small balcony overlooking the garden and golf course. Luxe touches came in the form of a free-standing bathtub, a 42-inch plasma and a touch sensor to operate the lights and air-con. The complimentary wine and handmade chocolates were an unexpected bonus.

The golf

Opinion varies on where The Grove sits among the pantheon of good and great parkland courses. Our Top 100 Courses Editor refers to it as one of the best inland layouts in Britain, while others – myself included – argue that some holes are a little too featureless and open to be particularly memorable.

After playing it for a second time my opinion still stands, but with the caveat that it's actually far more enjoyable than most championship courses. With so much space off the

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Below: A leader in sustainability, The Grove was named environmental golf course of the year at the 2022 Golf Environment Awards.

tee, it's not the kind of place where you're going to get beaten up or lose a ton of golf balls. You can even get away with hitting a few low scuttlers up and onto the green. That was my approach, anyway.

Off the Grove/gold tees it plays to 6,332 yards, which is far more manageable than the 7,160-yard slog off the blacks. The greatest test undoubtedly lies on and around the greens, which are as slick and true as anything I've ever putted on. The smallest sliver is used on the par-3 4th, where even the slightest miscue with a wedge will send your ball spinning into the lake or hopping over the back. Par salvaged, I bogeyed the next five holes due to several three-putts and a woeful attempt at replicating one of Tiger's approach shots on the par-5 9th (you can find three Tiger plaques within 15 yards of each other).

After building my own bap at the halfway house, I finally used something other than a driver on the par-4 10th – a 90-degree dog-leg – which set the tone for a fiddly stretch of holes hemmed in by trees, brooks and two par 5s under 500 yards. Short game well and truly tested, I took another four to get down on the 18th and searched for some excuses as I handed over my clubs and shoes to be cleaned. The immaculate condition of the course meant I couldn't find any.

A BLOW-OUT EXPERIENCE

The Grove have teamed up with Arsenal FC to offer guests a matchday experience this season. The offer includes a one- or two-night B&B stay in a classic double or twin room, plus seats in an executive box at The Emirates to watch a game of your choice. Prices start from £765 per person. Visit thegrove.co.uk/offers/arsenal-getaway for more details.

Service & facilities

This is the closest thing you'll get in the UK to a private club experience in America. The staff went above and beyond to give me and everyone else the VIP treatment. It started in the car park where, despite declining the free valet service, my clubs were whisked off to the clubhouse and placed on a rack outside, ready to be placed on a GPS buggy with built-in speakers. A very nice touch indeed.

Inside the clubhouse, I was given my own personalised locker for the day, as well as a goody bag and an invitation to take as many muffins as I could carry. Offer accepted, I was then reminded to download the Trackman app so I could track my stats while warming up on the range. The fact you don't have to pay for the balls or technology makes it just that little bit better!

Food & drink

The Stables Bar & Terrace is The Grove's take on a golfer's bar and offers a laid-back atmosphere and a wonderful Sunday lunch. But if it's choice you're after, The Glasshouse is the place to go for a bountiful breakfast of all things fried, fresh, baked and juiced. Come evening, the buffet transitions into an assault course of global eats, with live cooking stations, trains of sushi, salads and seafood, and some of the

best dumplings and roast potatoes I've ever tasted.

Completing the theatrical feast is a colossal chocolate fountain and an endless variety of delicate desserts which look like they have come straight out of Willy Wonka's factory. Add in the £80 tasting menu at their fine-dining Indian restaurant, plus the Asian-themed broths and poke bowls in the intimate Sequoia Kitchen, and you really are spoilt for choice. It's the main reason we want to go back.

Things to see and do

In the summer, the Walled Garden opens out to reveal a heated outdoor pool, as well as an urban beach (complete with sun loungers) and an open-air cinema at night. After passing up the opportunity to try axe throwing and laser clay pigeon shooting, I worked up a sweat on a Peloton bike in the impressive fitness studio and left my partner to enjoy the sauna, steam room and the black mosaic-tiled pool and Jacuzzi in the Sequoia Spa. She didn't return for three hours, which gave me enough time to work my way through a second pyramid of range balls. The food coma that followed was probably inevitable after all that!



The Glasshouse featured in Netflix's *Million Dollar Buffet* documentary.



Our deluxe room in the West Wing was light, airy and very spacious.



The Victorian Walled Garden conceals a private 'beach' and pool.



The 5-star hotel has previously been used as a base by the England men's football team. A full-size pitch can be found hidden behind the Potting Shed and games room.

'GOLF'S MOST CHERISHED TOURNAMENTS AREN'T ABOUT THE MONEY'



In the landscape of professional golf, where prize money and sponsorship deals often dominate conversation, it's easy to forget the essence and soul of the game we've all become so obsessed with. Every once in a while, a tournament takes place that reminds us of this essence. Notably, the events that resonate most deeply with players and fans aren't those offering the biggest pay cheques, but rather those played purely for pride, honour and tradition.

Competitions like the Ryder Cup, Walker Cup and, more recently, the Olympics strip the game down to its core and are a welcome addition to the golf calendar.

I was fortunate enough to be at the Ryder Cup in Marco Simone last year and it was a week incomparable to any other. It's an experience, an emotional roller coaster, a battle – not for money, but for the pride of your team and country. It's a competition where the world's best golfers, who are accustomed to playing for themselves week in, week out, suddenly find themselves playing for something much larger: a team, a continent, a legacy... and it comes as something of a relief to see just how much it means to them. Nothing could have prepared me for the atmosphere and experience of Rome.

The intensity of the Ryder Cup is palpable, and it's something every golf fan must experience at least once in their lifetime. The Solheim Cup, held last month in the USA, is not yet on the same scale, but the event at Gleneagles in 2019 was one of the best sporting weeks I have ever experienced, let alone in golf. I was standing just metres away when Suzann Pettersen holed that winning putt for Europe, and what a magnificent scene it was. Fans and fellow players streamed on to the green to congratulate her with tears in their eyes.

In both these events, the absence of prize money shifts the focus from personal gain to collective victory and arguably, this is the reason it

amplifies their experience. It's about the honour of being selected, the camaraderie with your team-mates, and the chance to etch your name into the history books for something truly meaningful.

The return of golf to the Olympics in 2016, after more than a century, was a significant moment for the sport. Unlike the usual tour events, Olympic golf isn't about the prize purse either. It is, however, another chance to represent one's country on the world's biggest stage – but this time as an individual, albeit playing for their national team.

It's also an opportunity to represent golf within the larger sporting ecosystem. For many players, the chance to compete for a gold medal, to stand on the podium with their national anthem playing, carries a weight that no amount of money could match. Watching Scottie Scheffler and Lydia Ko overcome with emotion as they stood on the top step of the podium in Paris, was a moment that seemed to stop every golf fan in their tracks.

Some have floated the idea of a mixed format in the Olympics, where one man and one woman come together to form a team to represent their country, perhaps in addition to the individual competition. I like this idea a lot and do think it would make for a great event that further solidifies the true emotive power of this game. Perhaps in Los Angeles in 2028,



IONA STEPHEN



Scan the QR code or head to today's-golfer.com for even more from Iona.

they will take that idea and run with it. Changing golf's Olympic format could forge stronger partnerships between the men's and women's games. It would be an incredible watch and we could see something very special in golf.

Closer to the grassroots of the game, the Walker Cup and Curtis Cup further celebrate golf in its purest form. Here, the game's values of sportsmanship, integrity, and respect are on full display, with no cash in sight. It's where the rising stars of the game learn their craft.

I covered the Walker Cup in 2019 at Hoylake, where I saw the likes of Alex Fitzpatrick, Harry Hall and Akshay Bhatia before they made the leap and became winners in the pro ranks. For the young amateurs who compete, the Walker Cup is a rite of passage, a moment when their love for the game transcends the pursuit of professional accolades. The absence of monetary rewards ensures that the focus remains on the spirit of competition and the deep-seated honour of representing one's country. Both the Walker Cup and Curtis Cup share the values of both the Ryder and Solheim cups.

For fans, these tournaments provide a glimpse into the true spirit of golf. They offer moments of raw emotion, incredible sportsmanship and unparalleled drama. When the pressure isn't about money, but about pride and honour, the stakes feel even higher. These tournaments showcase everything that makes golf great – a reminder that it's the love of the game and the bonds we form through it that truly matter.

Below: The Los Angeles Olympics in 2028 can elevate golf to an even higher level.





THE WORLD'S WARMEST BASELAYER®

More than a decade ago in Japan, Zerofit founder and passionate golfer Mr Koji Higashi began his quest to create a best-in-class baselayer that would keep him and millions of golfers warm even on the coldest of days out on the course. Developed by a passionate team of baselayer specialists, the award-winning Zerofit Heatrub Ultimate is the most technically advanced baselayer on the planet and completely different to any other product you've ever worn before.

WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD?

1. It's five times warmer than a standard baselayer

That is quite a claim, but it's a fact. Tested at the iconic Boken Institute in Osaka, the Heatrub Ultimate baselayer recorded a Heat Retention Rating of 0.78; a standard baselayer would have a rating of between 0.1 to 0.14. And for reference, a jumper would typically have a rating of 0.3. The Ultimate performs best in a temperature range of -10° Celsius thru 10° Celsius – so even in the coldest conditions, it has got your back.

2. Instant warmth the moment you put it on

A standard baselayer traps body heat between your skin and the material, so it takes a little time before you feel the benefits. With Zerofit, five separate fabrics, along with a patented knitting process, create instant warmth as soon as you pull it on. We don't engineer our products with compression for heat as a technology, unlike other brands. The unique fabric mix means you don't need the tightness in order for it to work, making it super comfortable too.

3. Fewer layers, greater warmth and freedom to move

The Ultimate is ideal for golfers who dislike traditional tight baselayers. Over the years, you may have 'layered up' to keep the cold weather at bay – however, bulky layers can lead to your swing becoming restricted which affects performance. This is where we are changing the game. The Heatrub Ultimate is so good at keeping you warm, you won't need these multiple additional layers. Fewer layers, yet greater warmth plus the ability to swing freely. Perfect!

4. Heating from top to toe this winter

Innovative 'Heat Threads' positioned on the inside of the garment gently rub against your skin as you move, which creates positive warmth across your body, and also means this instant heat is retained. We also produce Heatrub Ultimate Leggings and Heatrub Ultimate Socks that are made from the same material and work in exactly the same way, so you can have top-to-toe heating on the course or range this winter, warmth with Zerofit.

Five times warmer than a standard baselayer

No need for multiple additional layers – a game-changer



Instant heat the moment you put it on

Heating from top to toe

ZEROFIT HEATRUB MOVE - ADAPTABLE WARMTH ON THE GO

The Ultimate baselayer is perfect for the coldest of conditions, but it is complemented by the Heatrub Move (£40), which is twice as warm as a standard baselayer and ideal for golf in milder temperatures of between -5° thru 12° Celsius, conditions many of us will experience throughout much of the golfing year, especially on links courses. It features a 45% polypropylene construction on the inside of the baselayer and a hollow polyester shell that combine for 'Adaptable Warmth', keeping you cosy when you're at a standstill yet regulating temperature and ensuring you don't overheat as you walk the course. The construction removes sweat from the skin and evaporates it off the surface of the baselayer quickly, so that nasty feeling of 'cold sweat' never materialises.



Brian O'Driscoll, Zerofit Shareholder



Zerofit Heatrub Ultimate Baselayer (available in Black, White, Grey, Green, Navy and Red) - £59.95 ■ Zerofit Heatrub Ultimate Leggings (available in Black) - £59.95 ■ Zerofit Heatrub Ultimate Socks (available in Black) - £25 ■ Zerofit Heatrub Move Baselayer (available in Black, White, Titanium, Dayglo and Navy) - £40

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'D FORGOTTEN HOW TOUGH IT IS TO BE IN CONTENTION'

↙ I set the course record, had my best finish since coming back from injury, and there were so many positives. Yet when I walked off the 72nd hole at the Czech Masters last month, I was gutted, man. I had to have an hour on my own, gathering my thoughts and calming down, trying to get over what might have been.

Forty-eight hours earlier I'd been buzzing. In fact, three hours earlier I'd been buzzing. I was right in the hunt for the title as I reached the turn and then bang... bogey, bogey, bogey, out of nowhere. No horrendous mistakes, just those fine margins. But within three holes I'd gone from having a real hope of the win to needing to stop the bleeding and fast. It was such a tight leaderboard and there are so many quality players on the DP World Tour that every shot gained or lost was making a massive difference and I'd shipped three in three holes.

There's no doubt that anxiety and pressure played a big part. It's been so long since I've been in that position, playing in the final groups, contending for a win. I'd felt comfortable all week but suddenly it was like I'd been asked to stand up on a stage and speak to a huge audience. The awareness of the situation kicks in, suddenly you've got a lie that you're uncomfortable with and it's magnified because of the significance. Ultimately, every shot you play across the four rounds is equally important – they all count for the same. But when there's a tournament on the line, it just hits differently. That's where match sharpness and experience play such a key role. Having only been back for a few months, I know I'm not there yet.

It's probably different if you're Scottie Scheffler or Xander Schauffele and are used to being in that position multiple times per season. You can draw on experience and all those times you got over the line. But when you haven't been there for a while – I genuinely can't even remember the last time (Ed's Note: Beef's last Top 10 was at the

Mallorca Open in October 2021) – it's tough to do that, especially when you're not match sharp. I've played a few tournaments since my return, but I still lack competitive rounds, especially compared to a lot of the guys I'm up against.

I'm not stupid, I know golf is hard – I wrote a book called that for a reason! But for so much of the tournament, it had felt easy. I've been chopping and changing some things and for this week I decided to go left-below-right with my putting grip, and I stopped lining up the ball, going with more of a feel approach. I was solid in the opening round, but then Friday came and I felt like I couldn't miss – 15-footer after 15-footer going in. And not just creeping in or grabbing an edge and falling but dropping bang in the middle. I teed off hoping for a decent day to guarantee making the cut, shot a nine-under 63, set the course record and suddenly I was in the final group for the third round, just one shot back.

But golf's also weird. Everything on Friday felt great and natural, but when you're suddenly in a position you haven't been in for a while, it does weird things to your mind. Anxiety and pressure creep in. Everything gets 50% harder and the margins feel tighter. I didn't putt as well on Saturday, the cup felt smaller, but I put together a decent round. And the crowds were great – since coming back I've realised



ANDREW 'BEEF' JOHNSTON

Scan the QR below or head to todays-golfer.com to read more of Beef's thoughts on the state of the game.



Beef rues a missed, if unexpected, opportunity at the Czech Masters.



how much I missed that buzz of the fans cheering for you and hearing your name announced as you walk up the 18th.

I think that match fitness and mental fatigue played a part in the final round. The front nine was decent but I need to get used to those feelings and the intensity again, and learn to stay chilled and enjoy it. I wasn't 100% comfortable but the more I play and the more I get in the mix, the stronger I'll get.

I was really pleased with how I bounced back from those three bogeys. I knew the tournament was gone at that stage, but I reset, got one back and was on track for a T12... then I missed a three-footer for par on the last. Things were so tight that one shot cost me 11 places. That's a bit of a trend at the moment – I've gone backwards rather than forwards when it matters and that's tough because there's a lot on the line. I'm playing catch up, having missed a lot of events, and everything feels big from now to the end of the season.

But I've got to take the positives. I've been doing a lot of the right things. I do feel sharper with each week and I won't dwell. I'm feeling good physically and, unless anything changes, I'm planning to play nine in a row. There are some big events coming up and all it takes is a good couple of weeks to jump up the rankings and be in with a shout of making Abu Dhabi and Dubai at the end of the season. And when you consider that just a few months ago I didn't even know if I'd play this game again, that would be a fantastic achievement.

YOUR VIEW

GET IN TOUCH

As well as email (editorial@todaysgolfer.co.uk) and post (Media House, Lynch Wood, Peterborough, PE2 6EA), you can contact us using any of these social platforms...



TEED OFF!

LETTER OF THE MONTH
My friends and I are becoming increasingly frustrated that many clubs still insist on making us play off the yellow 'visitor' tees. We enjoy the challenge of playing off the white/back tees, but it appears this is still a rarity, especially across North Wales. It's refreshing to see that Aberdovey have scrapped the 'traditional tees' idea, in favour of gold, silver, bronze etc, which enables anyone to play off the tees that best suit their ability. Surely it's time all clubs adopted this approach? Imagine a scratch female golfer being told that, because she's a woman, she has to play off the red/front tees?!
Steve Lloyd, email

create more interest in events outside the Majors and we would stop a breakaway winner being effectively crowned on Saturday night.
Max Bigley, email

Ed's reply: The LPGA did run with a similar idea at the T-Mobile Match Play in April where 96 players competed over 36 holes of strokeplay. The low 65 players and ties then battled it out over another 18 holes of strokeplay, with the top eight qualifying for a matchplay knockout.

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

All I read about during The Open was players complaining that it was too tough. Really? Most amateur golfers play par 4s which are not reachable in two, not to mention par 3s which are barely reachable with a driver. I, for one, love to see these top players work for a living. Shame on you Shane Lowry and the other whingers. And hats off to Xander Schauffele and Justin Rose for taking the challenge in stride.
David Hayns, email

A SERIOUS ERROR OF JUDGEMENT

I was shocked to see that Angel Cabrera was allowed to compete in the Senior Open. In a time where we correctly revere our female athletes, how is a convicted abuser not prevented from entering the country, let alone play in a Major Championship? This is about golf standing up for what is right.
Kevin White, Yorkshire

PRICED OUT OF PLAYING

Visitor green fees for our best golf courses have increased exponentially over the past few years, with many at the top end now exceeding £250. We know that maintaining courses has, like everything else, been impacted by price inflation affecting machinery, materials and labour. But is there something else hidden in there, namely that our premium UK venues have been raising green fees by more than the rate of inflation to levels that can only be afforded by overseas golf tourists because of the weakness of the pound against the dollar? I would like to see our golf unions take up this issue with the UK's top-class venues and seek the introduction of a fairer, lower tiered green fee rate for EGU, Scottish Golf and Golf Ireland members or anyone who can prove UK residency. Otherwise, if the current trend continues, only tourists and high net-worth UK residents will be able to experience our own iconic venues.
Charles Mordaunt, London

Above: Aberdovey has the right idea with gender-neutral tees.
Below: A miffed Shane Lowry at the Open.



apoplectic. Suck it up folks – or play better! The WHS is not perfect... but then neither are golfers!
Lesley Crawford, email

MATCHPLAY PLEA

I was much taken by Iona Stephen's piece about matchplay in the August edition and in particular by the mixed format events. It made me wonder why the tours couldn't do an event where the first two days and cut were strokeplay as normal. Saturday would then feature a one-round shootout for paying places where the top, say, 20 qualify for Sunday matchplay. In the morning, places 11-20 would face off for the minor places and in the afternoon the top 10 would head out with the 'championship' match as the headline event. It would certainly

SOUR GRAPES

Thank you, Jon Deas, for bringing up the subject of high-handicappers being looked on with disdain by the usual suspects in any golf club (Issue 454). Some of us never had the talent, coordination and therefore the confidence of these critics, and when we occasionally get a win they are

Golfer TALKING POINT

WE ASK, YOU ANSWER

SHOULD A CADDIE RECEIVE AN OLYMPIC MEDAL IF THEIR GOLFER MAKES THE PODIUM?

Yes, a cox does in rowing
77.8%

No, they shouldn't
22.2%



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NO MORE MR SLICE GUY!

The definitive, step-by-step guide to ditching golf's most common mishit

IMAGES BOB ATKINS



Look, we've heard it all before. Whatever you do, nothing works.

You've tried... but you're stuck with it. The slice can do this to you. It is a worthy adversary with the power to make you doubt your ability, your resolve, even your potential as a golfer. But at *TG*, we don't see it that way. With the right approach, you CAN get on top of your

slice... and it's that approach we offer here. It starts with knowing your enemy, ends with knowing yourself, and between the two delivers the understanding and technical changes you will need to slay this particular dragon. You might well notice a different approach here; instead of throwing the usual anti-slice swing drills at you – you know

them, you've tried them, they didn't work – we are going to keep the focus on basics and the fundamental causes of that awful, arcing flight. It's efficient, it's simple and it works. So if you're serious about getting rid of your slice, work through this plan. But above all, keep the faith. Sure, it takes a little application; but you will get there. So let's get started.

YOUR COACH



GARETH JOHNSTON
PGA Head Professional
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#1 SLICE-BEATER

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

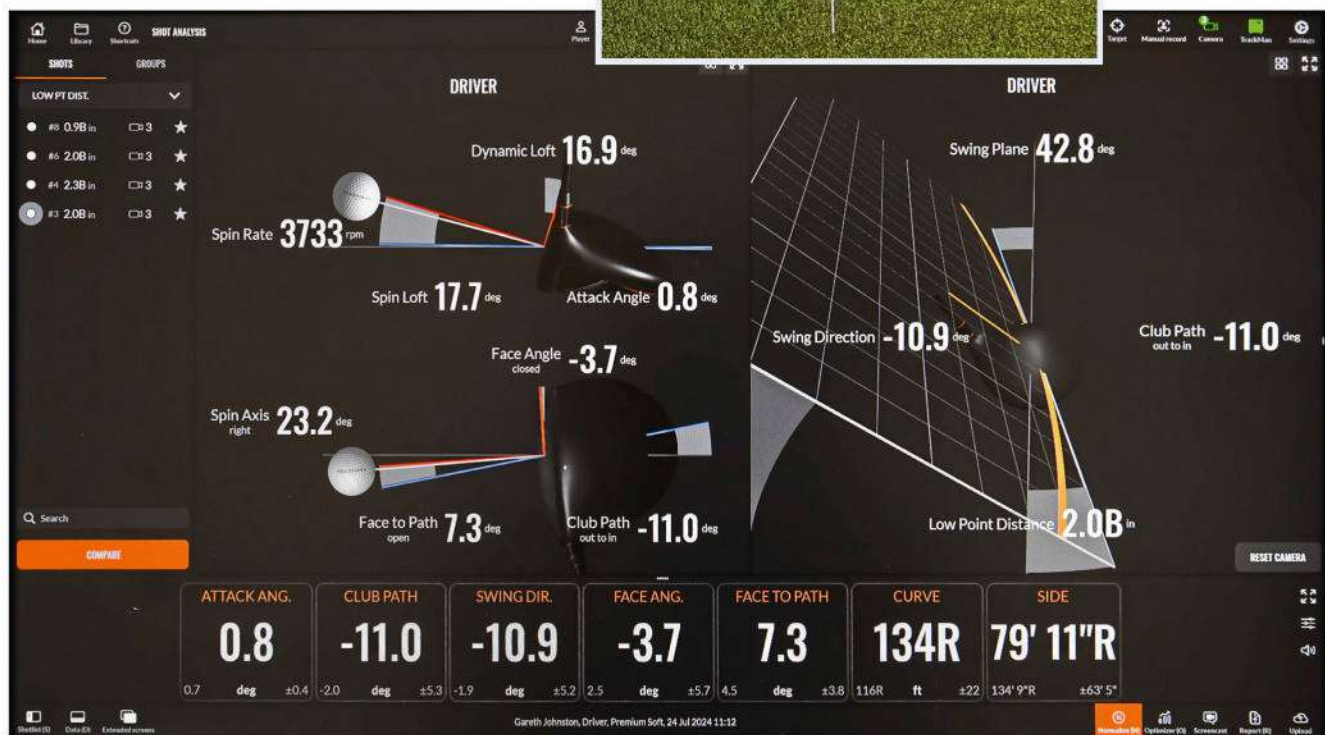
Let's start with a definition. For the right-hander, a slice is any shot where the ball arcs or curves excessively to the right, causing it to finish well right of its intended destination. Of course the leftie slice goes the other way, finishing excessively to the left. This may make it sound like a slice is just one shot. In fact there are arguably four slices, and by analysing all four via launch monitor tech, we can reach an understanding of what truly causes the ball to slice – the vital first step in bringing it down. Cue the TrackMan...



The classic slice

The classic slice sees the ball start left of target before cutting away to the right (right-handers). In this example, we see an overall curve of 134ft, though the fact the ball started to the left means it finished 'only' 80ft right of the target. The important elements to note here are:

- The club path is 11° to the left of target.
- The clubface is also aiming left of target at impact, by 3.7°.
- This leaves the face 7.3° open to the swing path.



The 'straight' slice

In the straight slice, the ball starts broadly on line before slicing off to the right (right-handers). It is maybe the most frustrating slice because it feels so nearly like a sound shot... yet even this one finishes 111ft or 37 yards right of target. When we break it down, we find:

- The club path is almost dead neutral, at just 0.4° in-to-out.
- The clubface is around 3° open to the target.
- Because the path is neutral, the face is also 3° open to the path





The 'push' slice

This is a shot that starts right of target for the right-hander and then cuts away. As we might expect of this 'double-cross', this is the most punishing slice, with the example above finishing 242ft – that's a massive 80 yards – right of target. The key ingredients here are:

- The swing path is in-to-out (2.6°)... the so-called drawer's delivery path!
- The face is wide open to the target (11.4°).
- The face is so open that it is also open to the swing path (8.8°).

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM ALL THIS

In this article we will leave the strike location slice to one side and focus on the other three. Here we find a range of swing paths – 11° leftward (out-to-in), virtually straight (neutral), and 2.6° right (in-to-out), and yet in every case the ball has sliced. This shows us that a slice can take place irrespective of swing path, and that working on your path won't in itself cure a slice. But the common

denominator here is the clubface. In each case it is open to the path on which the club is being swung at the point of contact. Also in every case, if we were able to get the face squarer to the path, the slice would diminish or even disappear. This is why every golfer who slices the ball needs to start by working on their ability to square the face. And in Step 2, we'll do just that.

The 'strike location' slice

Even when you deliver the club square to the ball on a neutral path, it's possible to hit a slice. On these occasions the shape comes from the point of contact on the clubface, a severe toe strike spinning the face open or a heel strike creating topspin through something called gear effect. The TrackMan data below shows this effect in action, the ball curving 112ft to the right even through face and path are pretty neutral. Though this type of slice is less common, it pays to remember that contact point has the power to override the effects of face and path.



#2 SLICE-BEATER SQUARE THE FACE



In Step 1, we learned that the slice rears its ugly head when we leave the clubface open to the path we are swinging on. So whatever swing path you have grooved, your first job is to get your clubface squarer to it at impact. With the grip controlling the clubface, it's time to take a closer look at the way we hold the club... and how it can help or hinder our ability to square up that face.

Grip: Think wrists, not just hands

When we talk about the grip, focus inevitably shifts to the placement and orientation of your hands on the handle. But here, I want you to think about the grip more in terms of how it affects your wrists... specifically the lead wrist; left for the right-hander.



Flexible friend

One of the most mobile joints in our body, our wrists are able to cock our hands up and down, rotate them or flip them forwards and back. Thanks to this mobility, our wrists can manipulate our hands into a position that squares the clubface... even from a so-called 'weak' grip that would tend to encourage an open face. More on that later, but for now let's focus on the mobility angle; because if our grip robs us of the freedom in that lead wrist, our ability to square the face is instantly compromised.



Sins of the flesh

The most common and damaging wrist immobiliser is a palmy, gloved-hand grip. In the fleshy palm, the handle can feel relatively secure and comfortable; however, it will completely lock the wrist up, denying you access to all that face-squaring flexibility.



Finger force

If you are a chronic slicer, your lead-hand grip is the first thing to check. Make sure you are holding the club in the fingers of the lead hand, not the palm. Use this image as a reference for your own positioning – a crooked little finger supporting the handle is a fantastic place to start.

HOW TO MANAGE THE FACE WITH DIFFERENT GRIPS

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need a perfectly neutral grip to play great golf. As long as it's in the fingers and that wrist mobility is there, you can learn to square the face from a variety of holds. We see this on tour all the time, the uber-'strong' grips of Johnsons Zach and Dustin working alongside the weak holds of Jon Rahm and Collin Morikawa... and all four good enough to win Majors. The important thing for you – and them – is to train the delivery that matches the grip.



'Strong' grip

In this hold, the lead hand sits more on top of the handle and the trail hand more underneath. Thumb/forefinger Vs point up towards the trail ear. It's a hold that encourages face rotation, so golfers who grip it this way need to access wrist moves that 'weaken' the face. In practice, this means a cupped lead wrist at impact. If this is your chosen hold, grip the club in the lead hand only and, in slow motion, 'present' a square face to the ball; it will help you feel the appropriate wrist action for the swing itself.

'Weak' grip

In this grip, the palms are very much to the side of the handle, with those thumb/forefinger Vs pointing up towards the chin. This hold will tend to deliver a weaker, more open face to the ball; so to square the face, golfers who use it need to employ 'strengthening' wrist moves. As elite players such as Collin Morikawa show, these tend to flatten or even bow the lead wrist and accentuate rotation. Again, deliver that square face to the ball slowly to feel the wrist actions that will square the face from a weak grip.



#3 SLICE-BEATER

BLEND THE CLUBFACE TO THE SWINGPATH



There seems to be a perception that to kill off a slice – an excessive left-to-right curver for the right-hander – you need to start moving the ball the other way, turning your shots into a draw. That isn't the case at all. An effective golf shot is one that ends up at or close to your target, and you can do that moving the ball both ways. But whether your natural shot bias is a draw (right-to-left for the right-hander) or a fade (left-to-right), you'll need to get your face aim and swing path working together to hit effective golf shots. Let's take a closer look.

The controlled fade: Calming the 'classic' slice

A perfectly straight golf shot may be seen as golf's Holy Grail, but in truth every golfer plays with a bias towards a certain shape. Even Jack Nicklaus, a fader throughout his career, called a dead straight shot "a fluke". If you are a slicer who has been told you need to eradicate an out-to-in swing path, think again. You can play great golf swinging out-to-in... so long as your clubface blends with that path.

Guidelines for a fade

Here I am at address, with three alignment sticks in front of me:

- The white one furthest from me represents the ball-target line.
- The white one nearest to me represents the swing path – as you can see, leftward of the target.
- Splitting those two, the orange stick represents the aim of the clubface... at address and, ideally, at impact.

The swing path is strongly influenced by the alignment of your shoulders, ribcage, forearms and hips. So if you want to play with a fade, picture a line from the ball to the near white stick and make sure your body aims parallel to it.



Fade impact: Rules of engagement

Note how those three set-up sticks set the clubface CLOSED to your ball-target line but OPEN to your swing path. If you want your left-to-right shape to remain an effective fade and not an out-of-control slice, this is very much a relationship you need to preserve at impact. Whenever you can, hit shots with these three guidelines in front of you. As you do, note:

- Your face aim needs to be open to your leftward swing path at the strike, but only marginally.
- As you do this, make a habit of placing your attention on your hands and wrists through the strike. Start connecting the result of the shot with how they felt at impact. As your awareness grows, you will begin to develop a feel for the ideal hand/wrist action that sets the face in that perfect split between target and path.

The soft draw: Killing the 'push slice'

As we saw with the 'push' slice in Step 1, the so-called 'drawer's' in-to-out swing path is no guarantee of avoiding a slice; all it takes is for the clubface to be wide open to that path at the point of contact. So just as with the natural fader, golfers who have an in-to-out swing path and potential draw bias must work on finding the right face/path combination to make sure they avoid this punishing shape.

Guidelines for a draw

Let's re-position those same three sticks to set the ideal impact conditions for a draw:

- This time, the white one nearest to me represents the ball-target line.
- The white one furthest from me represents the swing path – this time out to the right of the target for a right-hander.
- The orange splits the two and represents the ideal aim of the clubface at set-up and impact. As with the fade, we set and control the swing path through body aim. So picture that line from the ball to that far white stick and arrange your body looking parallel to it, your lead elbow looking more at the target.



Draw impact: Rules of engagement

Again, place your attention on the clubface aim and how it relates to swing path and target. This time it is OPEN to your ball-target line but CLOSED to your swing path. Again, try to hit shots with these guidelines in place in front of you, letting the club swing out towards the far white stick and working on squaring the face to the orange one.

■ Again, note how close the swing path and face aim are to each other. That face only has to be a touch closed to the path in order to hit that lovely, soft draw.

■ As with the fader, develop your awareness for how wrist/hand action affects the result of the shot.

Once you start to connect releases with outcomes, you can hone in on the one that delivers that ideal impact face aim – open to the target, closed to the path.



#4 SLICE-BEATER

GET ON TOP OF BALL POSITION



So far we have focused on the clubface, the swing path, and how they need to match up to replace that wild slice with controlled draws and fades. We now need to make a check on ball position in the stance, because it has the power to undo your good work done in Steps 2 and 3.



Forward thinking?

With drivers, golfers have been schooled in the idea of increasing distance through a high launch, and the notion of moving the ball forward in the stance. This image shows such a ball position, forward of the swing's low point, represented by the hoop and my hanging driver. Mimicking the club's swing arc, the hoop also shows how the clubhead would now be rising through the strike.



Forearmed, forewarned

There is nothing necessarily wrong with trying to increase launch angle through ball position, but you need to be aware of how it affects your alignment. Move the ball forward in your stance and your ribcage and forearms start to open up to the target, promoting a leftward path for the right-hander. This has the potential to promote a slice. If you want to play this way, shift your body's aim a touch right of your target.



Bottom of the arc

If you struggle with a slice, you would be well advised to simplify your approach. In this set-up, the ball is positioned opposite that inside lead shoulder, right on the swing's low point. This promotes a level attack angle, the strike right at the bottom of the club's arc. That's much easier to control than the forward ball position and upward attack.



Squarer path

But more importantly for a slicer, this ball position also promotes a neutral swing path, chest and forearms now square to the target line and the club swinging straight down the target line at the point of impact. When you are working hard to find the ideal match-ups between clubface and swing path at impact, this ball position gives you your best possible start.

Building on the ball position checks we made in Step 4, Step 5 is a drill designed to help you develop an anti-slice attack by focusing on applying force. Here's how it works.

#5 SLICE-BEATER

DELIVER A HAMMER BLOW



Power lines down

Here is the classic over-the-top slicer's delivery. Does it look to you like an efficient way to apply force to the ball?! Striking down and across the ball with limited loft has only ever delivered short drives; simply seeing your strike in terms of applying force efficiently can help you develop an anti-slice delivery.



Nailing contact

Here, I've set up a stick at right angles to my target line and a curved second one to represent the club's attack path. Imagine the first stick is at the base of a wall, and the ball is a nail you need to drive into it with the golf club. How would you need to apply force to achieve that?



Hammer time

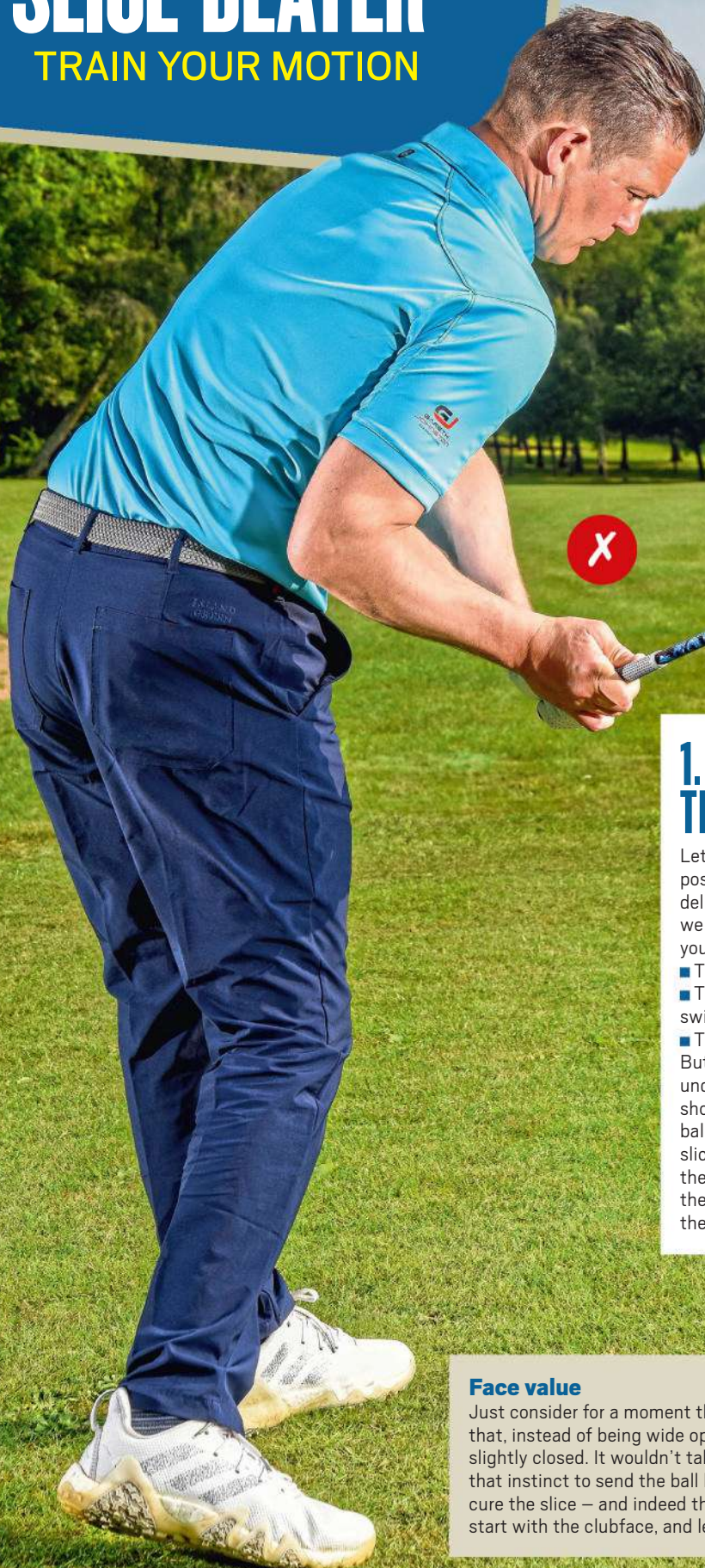
Clearly, the most efficient hammer blow is square and level. If you keep that as a goal for your strike, you will naturally gravitate away from the downward, across-the-line attack of the classic slicer and towards a much more powerful and effective delivery... shallow and up the back of the ball. Blend this concept with that low-point ball position and your efforts to blend impact face aim and swing path stand a far greater chance of success.

#6 SLICE-BEATER

TRAIN YOUR MOTION



In this article dedicated to helping you gain control of your slice, we have focused on fundamentals – grip, clubface aim, body alignment, ball position. These, without question, hold the key to taking the curve out of your drives. But while we are working on mastering these areas, we need to check we are not falling foul of the classic movement patterns that can promote a slice. Here are two pieces of advice that will help.



1. UNDERSTANDING THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Let's take another look at that classic slicer's delivery position. It sets up a steep, out-to-in attack that delivers weak, spinnny, slicing tee shots. It's a position we coaches see every day – and it's quite possibly one you recognise:

- The trail shoulder is high, the trail elbow bent.
- The clubshaft points well left of the target as it swings down past the hips.
- The clubface, wide open, faces the sky.

But while the position may be familiar, not every golfer understands that it originates from a desire to save the shot. Sensing an open face (the bad), we try to hoik the ball leftward (right-handers) to allow for the inevitable slice. In this sense, that over-the-top move is actually the good guy. But of course, it ultimately only increases the mismatch between face aim and swing path... and the slice gets worse (the ugly).

Face value

Just consider for a moment that you were swinging with a face that, instead of being wide open at delivery, was strong or slightly closed. It wouldn't take too many duck hooks to lose that instinct to send the ball left! This is why any attempt to cure the slice – and indeed this over-the-top move – must start with the clubface, and learning how to square it up.



2. DRILL: TRAIL-HAND DOWN

While you are working on face and path, here is an excellent exercise that will help you tackle that over-the-top move directly. Ideally, find something circular and roughly steering-wheel sized to help you.

Swing to the top

Hold your circular object on either side, and swing to the top. You should end up in a position similar to this one, the gloved hand near the top of the circle and the trail hand near the bottom.



YES!

In the ideal downswing move, the trail hand and elbow maintain their position below the lead hand and elbow in that move down from the top. This move keeps the club on a shallower path, helping you attack the ball more from inside the ball-target line. Work on this feel to calm that high trail shoulder and over-the-top delivery.



NO!

That classic over-the-top move would see the right-hander turning the circle anticlockwise – the gloved hand moving down towards the bottom of the circle and the trail hand moving upward – during the first part of the downswing. The attack becomes steep and outside the ideal plane or path.

#7 SLICE-BEATER

USE DATA TO MOTIVATE YOURSELF

At some point or other, every golfer who has struggled to banish their slice has wondered whether it is worth all the bother. Would your scores really be very different if your slice became a rare exception, as opposed to the common rule? Well, thanks to performance-tracking specialists Shot Scope (shotscope.com), we can form a pretty decent idea of how many shots this might save us – and we can use the information to fuel our mission to get on top of our slice. Here's what the numbers show:

The cost of a slice: approach shots-to-finish

We can understand the true cost of a slice in shots by looking at how many shots it takes us to complete the hole from various positions. Focusing on the mid-range handicapper (8-14), this graphic reveals these figures from three common approach distances – 120, 140 and 160 yards.

Rough versus trees

This is perhaps the most interesting comparison because it represents the difference between a fade that is more or less under control, and a slice that is not. We find the shot into the trees will cost you an extra:

- 0.9 of a shot from 120 yards.
- 0.75 of a shot from 140 yards
- 0.6 of a shot from 160 yards.

This basically means that if you were to find trees instead of rough four times a round, you could expect your final round score to be three shots worse.

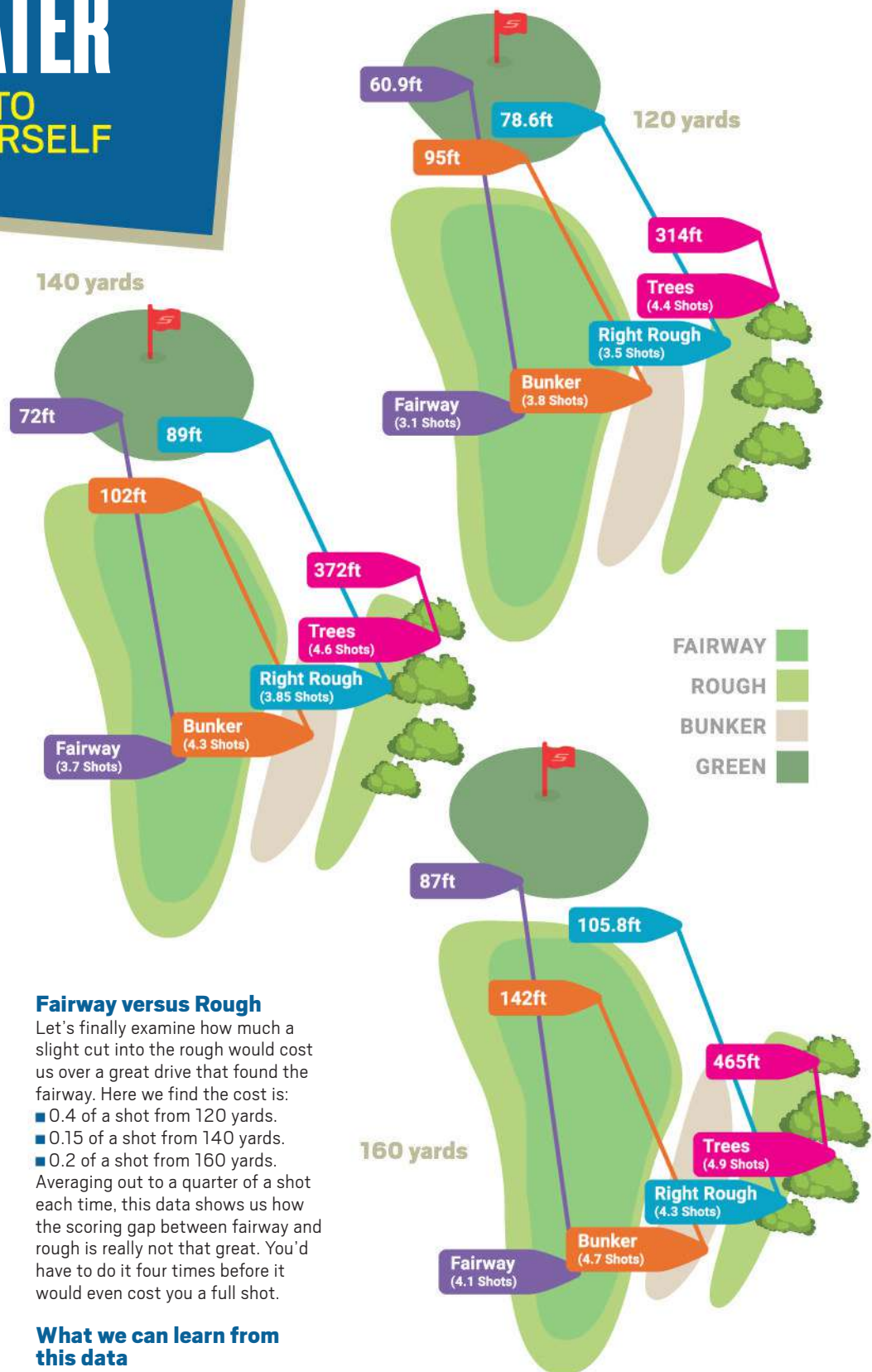
Fairway versus sand

In this scenario, we compare drives that find the fairway to ones that peel off into the fairway bunker. You can expect the latter to cost you:

- 0.7 of a shot from 120 yards.
- 0.6 of a shot from 140 yards
- 0.6 of a shot from 160 yards.

Again, if this happened four times a round you would be looking at scoring two to three shots worse.

8-14 HANDICAPPERS



Fairway versus Rough

Let's finally examine how much a slight cut into the rough would cost us over a great drive that found the fairway. Here we find the cost is:

- 0.4 of a shot from 120 yards.
- 0.15 of a shot from 140 yards.
- 0.2 of a shot from 160 yards.

Averaging out to a quarter of a shot each time, this data shows us how the scoring gap between fairway and rough is really not that great. You'd have to do it four times before it would even cost you a full shot.

What we can learn from this data

Put simply, a 'mini-slice' that finds some rough really isn't that much of a problem... and yes, you could live with that. But once your ball starts to find sand and trees on a regular or even semi-regular basis, it's a different story. This is why we have been focusing on getting that face

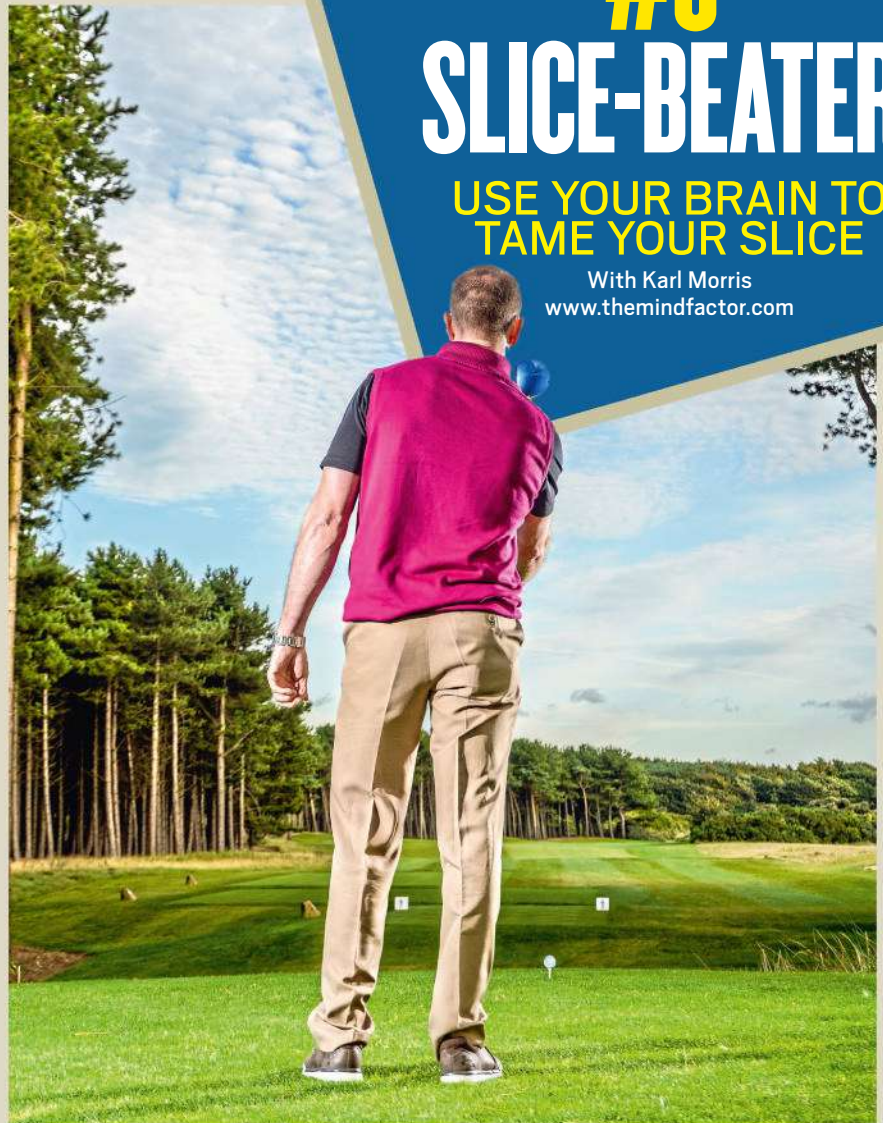
and path to align better: they don't have to be perfect... but the more they diverge, the more likely you are to find the bushes than the rough... and the cost really starts to pile up. These numbers don't lie: if you want to save shots, deal with your slice.

#8

SLICE-BEATER

USE YOUR BRAIN TO
TAME YOUR SLICE

With Karl Morris
www.themindfactor.com



CHANGE YOUR CONCEPTS

While the golf swing is a physical motion, it starts in our brain as a concept. In other words, we form an idea of how the swing needs to work to produce the shot we want, and this idea shapes the messages our brain sends to our muscles. But these concepts are not always helpful. If, for example, we believe the way to hit a straight ball is to swing straight down the target line as opposed to on an arc, we will actually send the club above its ideal swing plane – the perfect slicing swing shape! Poor concepts can see us slice, even when we are making the swing we want to make.

My advice here is to get back to the real nuts and bolts of the slice – the face and the path, and their impact mismatch. Absorb the launch monitor information about this on page 30, and start building new concepts based around what the face and path need to do to hit a soft fade, a straight shot or a draw. This fundamental starting point will help your mind give your body clearer, more effective messages of what you need to do to avoid excessive slice curvature... and then you really can start to make progress.

CHANGE YOUR IDENTITY

As golfers, we give ourselves identities. We are strong drivers, streaky putters, perennial slicers. Sometimes these identities are born from truth, other times less so; but in either case, they have the power to become self-fulfilling. We become the golfer we perceive ourselves to be. If that's a chronic slicer, we will start playing the game that way, standing more open to accommodate that cutting shape and seeing every shot slicing through the air.

OK, you may have sliced the ball for the past 20 years. You may have sliced your way around the course yesterday. You may be thinking there is no other identity you could give yourself. But think again. There is nothing to stop you creating a new set of stories that start to challenge and in time change that identity. Instead of labelling yourself a slicer, you could be a golfer learning to draw the ball... or at least learning to morph it into a soft, controllable fade. Use your new face/path understanding and better concepts to reinforce your perception that, in fact, you are not stuck with your slice after all. Confirm it by taking more notice of shots that fly straight or even draw, ideally marking them down in a notebook. Shot by shot, you can change your identity and, ultimately, your shot shape.

CHANGE YOUR ON-COURSE RESPONSES

As every golfer who has experienced a 'bogey hole' knows, your environment has the power to trigger movement. You can spend hours on the range nurturing a better face/path relationship, but out on your bogey hole – the one where you

always slice it off into the forest – your old motor patterns will reassert themselves and the old shot will emerge. This is, without question, a mental issue, needing a change not just in swing but also in mindset.

Try this: one quiet evening, go out on to the course, armed with some old, losable golf balls, and make for that tee where you always seem to slice it. Give yourself permission to explore what happens when you place your attention on those new face and path concepts. Exaggerate them. Do whatever it takes to get the ball moving the other way, even if it's a quick hook into the trees. It doesn't matter. All you're looking

to do here is break the spell – this slicing auto-response – that this shot has over you. Even a savage hook can be enough to disarm the hole's power to prompt that slice... and that's going to be so beneficial on your next proper round. You also write another chapter in your new story that says you are not a slicer.

If you play golf with poor concepts, a slicer's identity and unhelpful course-prompted responses, your mind will constantly work against all the hard technical work you put in to get on top of your slice. Change all three and your progress will be easier, faster and enduring.

Summing up

From psychology and data to the set-up and swing, we've thrown a lot of information at you here. But these eight steps have been placed in this order for a reason. As TrackMan has demonstrated, the slice is all about your clubface being open to the path of your swing at impact, so work on squaring that face before moving on to path, ball position and those swing-training exercises. But above all, keep your focus on the basics and never lose sight of that root cause. If you achieve those two things, your slice doesn't stand a chance. Good luck!





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Your guide to the
SOLHEIM CUP



THE REMATCH

Three days and 28 matches couldn't separate them in Spain. Now Suzann Pettersen takes her Europeans to Virginia for a winner-takes-all showdown. Can they keep their hands on the crystal? Your essential preview starts here

WORDS MICHAEL CATLING IMAGES GETTY

THE RECORD-BREAKERS

The history of the Solheim Cup can be told in one sentence: American dominance followed by a sustained European fightback. In the early years, Team USA won four of the first five matches, including the first event in 1990. They didn't lose on home soil until 2013, though the Europeans have had more than their fair share of highs since then. Under Catriona Matthew, they completed the home and away double for a second time in 2021, which means it's been seven years since our American cousins have got their hands on the Cup, their longest run without a victory. All the momentum is now with the blue and gold brigade, who are looking to become the first side in history to complete the 'fourpeat'. With a more settled and experienced team than their rivals, they might never get a better chance.



THE KEY HOLES



HOLE 9

Par 3 | 177 yards

The first of two stunning par 3s on Lake Manassas, this downhill tee shot plays about 40ft below to a peninsula green surrounded by water on all sides except the front. Large bunkers lurk either side, while any shot that misses a narrow back shelf will almost certainly bound into the lake behind. A back-left pin position is particularly daunting for that reason.

HOLE 11

Par 3 | 170 yards

Often compared to the 12th at Augusta because of the swirling winds, RTJ's signature hole plays over water to another peninsula green, with trouble on three sides. A steep-faced slope runs 30 feet off the front and left side down to the lake. A pot bunker short is perhaps the only thing that will save a misjudged tee shot from sinking without a trace.





THE RIVALRY

We'd argue that the Solheim Cup has overtaken the Ryder Cup as the fiercest rivalry in all of golf. The competition is such that just three points have separated the two sides in the last three matches. What's more, last year's deadlock was the first in 18 editions of the Solheim Cup. It does raise the question of whether a tiebreaker is needed, though you can bet several players will be treating this year's event like it is. The quick turnaround means little has changed in the make-up of both teams. Suzann Pettersen and Stacy Lewis will reprise the role of captains and call upon many of the same players who couldn't be separated in Spain. Those of a European persuasion will tell you this is the strongest group ever assembled and yet it is reasonable to suggest that America are blessed with three of the game's biggest stars in Nelly Korda, Lilia Vu and Rose Zhang. Home advantage means America are favourites to win the trophy back, but they have the scar tissue of letting slip a 4-0 lead in Spain. Those kind of disappointments do leave a mark.



THE CONTROVERSY

Think the Ryder Cup gets a little heated? Welcome to the Solheim Cup, where spice and rancour are never far away. Pettersen was at the centre of perhaps the most famous incident in 2015 after she enforced a penalty on rookie Alison Lee, who had wrongly picked up an 18-inch putt in the belief a concession had been granted. Europe went on to claim the point, much to the disgust of an American team who had their own Medinah moment, fuelled by the sense of injustice. Zach Johnson later branded Pettersen's actions "a disgrace to the sport". There have been other incidents since then, not least in 2021 when another rules dispute reduced Madelene Sagstrom to tears after she did not wait 10 seconds before picking up Nelly Korda's ball from the edge of hole. She argued that her putt was never going to drop in, but the on-course official sided with the Americans and they won the point. Thankfully, last year's event did pass by without any controversies, but you can guarantee American fans haven't forgotten about Pettersen's conduct all those years ago. It could make for a hostile atmosphere in Virginia if tempers threaten to boil over again.

THE VENUE

Of the 500+ courses Robert Trent Jones Sr designed, he referred to his namesake course as his "masterpiece". Located on the shores of Lake Manassas, the 850-acre site was discovered by chance while RTJ was doing a fly-by on another project. He spied a stretch by the coastline and was so taken by its setting that he described the terrain as "aesthetically perfect". "I don't think we could have done anything better anywhere," he said following its opening in 1991.

The PGA Tour were similarly impressed and have staged four Presidents Cup matches there, as well as the 2015 Quicken Loans National. The course itself bears the hallmarks of an RTJ design, with big fairways, split-level greens and white-sand bunkers clinging to the inside of dog-legs. Much of the jeopardy is reserved for the back nine, which dances along the shoreline to create a highlights reel of heroic approach shots. The risk and strategy involved means few holes are likely to be halved in pars – and you can guarantee a few balls will be lost along the way!



HOLE 14

Par 5 | 480 yards

The pick of the four par 5s at RTJ. Most tee shots will be looking to catch a speed slot, which skirts the two bunkers guarding the inside of the dog-leg. The safe play with the approach is to the right side of a split-level green, which is perched 6ft higher than the left. A ridge also runs diagonally through the centre, acting as a backboard to the left portion which sits over a pond. Anything long leaves a slippery chip coming back towards the water.



HOLE 18

Par 4 | 400 yards

Another sweeping dog-leg to finish, with a ravine and two bunkers lurking on the left. The angle and length of the approach is entirely dependent on how much players want to flirt with danger off the tee. The green plays downhill from the fairway and sits on the shore of Lake Manassas, just a few yards from the water. Left and long are no-go zones.

THE KEY STARS

THE POWER COUPLE

LINN GRANT & MAJA STARK

The Swedish superstars are almost certainly the first names on the team sheet for the opening foursomes. Pettersen asked them to hit the first tee shot in Spain 12 months ago and Grant believes they've only ever lost once in foursomes play, having won the European Ladies' Team Championship three times together as well as the Sunningdale Foursomes in 2019. Individually, they've also taken their game to new heights this season and have now notched seven titles apiece on the LPGA and LET in the last three years, more than any other European player in that period. They have the star quality to cause some major upsets.



THE YOUNG GUN

ROSE ZHANG

The phrase 'generational talent' gets overused, but in Zhang's case it probably doesn't do her justice. She broke so many records as an amateur that we'd need an extra page just to list them all. She won on her LPGA debut last summer and though she only contributed half a point in Spain, she's continued to impress in the limited starts she's made this season. She ended Nelly Korda's winning streak at the Cognizant Founders Cup with a record tournament score and currently ranks second for approach play, arguably the most decisive metric at RTJ.



THE FANS' FAVOURITE

CHARLEY HULL

It's still hard to believe that Hull was barely 17 years old when she thrashed Paula Creamer on her debut 11 years ago. She's been a mainstay ever since and while she didn't bring her best in Spain because of injury, her 62.5% win rate in the foursomes and fourballs makes her the MVP in this year's team. At her best she plays the kind of aggressive, free-flowing golf that gives her lots of birdie opportunities. If she can convert them, she could have a big role to play in silencing a partisan home crowd.



AMERICA'S GOLDEN GIRL

NELLY KORDA

You're probably bored of reading about her exploits, but it's worth repeating that Nelly Korda won six times in seven starts between January and May before her form fell off a cliff this summer. Her problems started with a quintuple birdie 10 at the US Open and spiralled with a second-round 81 at the Women's Championship, her third missed cut in a row. An untimely shank in the final round at the Olympics typified her inconsistencies, but there's something about wearing the stars and stripes that tends to bring out the best in her. She was excellent on debut in Gleneagles and currently boasts the best winning percentage of any American player available to Stacy Lewis. Expect to see her leading America off in Friday's foursomes alongside Allisen Corpuz.

THE MATCHPLAY SPECIALIST

LEONA MAGUIRE

Anyone who boasts a 74% win rate in matchplay contests from her last 14 matches needs to be taken seriously. Maguire won all five matches on her debut and kick-started Europe's fightback last year by putting the first point on the board alongside Georgia Hall. She's perhaps the only player who can say she's beaten Nelly Korda three times, and while she did lose the T-Mobile Match Play final against her in April, no one will want to face her in the singles. She needed 14 holes to beat Jennifer Kupcho in 2021, then scalped Rose Zhang 4&3 last time out.



THE SWANSONG

LEXI THOMPSON

When Lexi told Stacy Lewis she planned to retire at the end of 2024, she was informed there wouldn't be any ceremonial picks – she'd have to earn it. Her form of late means she's almost certainly done that. Two top 10s since June, including a runner-up finish, means she's arguably playing better now than she was 12 months ago when she claimed three points from four matches. The 29-year-old was entrusted with hitting the opening tee shot in Spain and showed her commitment to the team this summer by skipping the Evian Championship to join Lewis on a scouting mission at RTJ. "I definitely hit a lot of drivers," Thompson said of her practice round. "I didn't have too many wedges in out there." Her power should give her an advantage in Virginia, with Lewis admitting that the difficult set-up she's leaning towards should favour a player like Lexi. "Where there's a penalty for a miss, I think that will play into our players a little bit better," says Lewis. "I think we have a few more ball-strikers than they do on Team Europe."



EUROPE'S BIG UNKNOWN

CELINE BOUTIER

In one sense, the French superstar has experienced only success at the Solheim. On her debut in 2019, she was Europe's top-point scorer alongside Georgia Hall, who she partnered to success in three matches. Her record since then though has been scratchy at best. She didn't win a match until the singles in 2021, and then played so poorly in Spain that she was left out of the fourballs amid reports she refused to play with Hall or Maguire. How Pettersen deals with her this time may well define her captaincy.



'WE CAN MAKE HISTORY AGAIN'

Three weeks before finalising her team, European captain Suzann Pettersen sat down with Michael Catling over lunch in Oslo to discuss pairings, rookies, and the one scenario she never thought of

IMAGES GETTY

Let me take you back to Friday last year, after the foursomes. You'd just lost the opening four matches. What was going through your head at that time, because Laura Davies said she was thinking of damage limitation?

I imagined a lot of different scenarios but I never really prepared for a scenario of being 4-0 down. But at the same time there was no panic on my side. I didn't think the girls had played that badly. It can happen, sometimes you get outplayed. It was almost like a good wake-up call. A lot of Solheims in recent years have luckily gone our way and sometimes you think that is going to keep happening. I guess it made us roll up our sleeves and realise that it's not going to happen automatically.

I will say I felt a lot better standing on that first tee on Saturday morning than on Friday afternoon.

What did you learn about yourself and the way you managed the team?

That I can't be anyone but myself. If that means getting fired up and frustrated and letting people know that – for good or bad – then so be it. I

think a lot of players appreciated me finally showing my true self on Friday afternoon. I had some frustrations that I had to get off my chest on Friday night and I learned a lot from that.

Even though you retained the Cup, you didn't win the contest. Have you got unfinished business in that sense?

No, because I look at it this way. First you've got to win it; then you can retain it by tying the match. We won it outright at Gleneagles and ever since, all we've needed has been 14 points. So, I know it was a tie, but in our heads it was a win. We earned that and we did what we needed to do.

How hard is the task facing you this time, because away victories are increasingly rare?

It's only happened twice before. We've got a big challenge ahead of us. We are going to be underdogs, so the most important thing is that we are very unified going over there. But what's more fun than a big challenge?

Has the quick turnaround made your job harder or easier?

I think it's almost easier. Now I've got some experience. Being away gives me a lot less work and from a team perspective, it looks about 80 percent the same because the qualifying criteria have been overlapping. I think it would have been hard for a new person to come in and then turn everything around.

How did it compare to playing?

It was just exciting. I didn't know whether it would be going into it. I wasn't sure if I would have the same adrenaline, the same kind of excitement and the anxiousness. But I almost had more fun out there on the sidelines.

Luke Donald has spoken about the stress of captaining and how much it has consumed him. Have you had any sleepless nights worrying about things?

I don't have many sleepless nights any more. Since I retired, I don't have to grind over the game. And being a captain, you can't control what you can't control, right? As soon as I let the players out on the first tee, it's out of my hands. Yes, there's pressure, because if you win you're a hero and if you lose, it's all on you. But I like that, I think it makes us all a little sharper. A lot of the work is in the preparation, and I think that's what I do best. That was always one of my key elements as a player.



SOLHEIM CUP



THE RUNNING ORDER

WHEN: September 12-15
WHERE: Robert Trent Jones Golf Club, Virginia

THURSDAY:

21:30:
Opening
Ceremony

FRIDAY:

12:05-12:41:
Foursomes
17:05-17:50:
Fourballs

SATURDAY:

12:05-12:41:
Foursomes
17:05-17:50:
Fourballs

SUNDAY:

13:50-15:40: Singles
20:30 Closing
Ceremony



'A LOT OF THE WORK IS IN THE PREPARATION, AND I THINK THAT'S WHAT I DO BEST'

How granular do you get with the detail? Are you writing notes and messaging players every day?

I do all kinds. Everything from notes to meetings with the vice captains. I like to bounce my thoughts and ideas off somebody. I have a great admin team with the LET and I feel like we have control over all aspects.

Twelve months ago you talked a lot about taking risks and going with your gut on pairings. Will you be keeping that strategy?

I did a lot of pairings based on stats as well last year, and I'm going to maintain that. But at the end of the day, there has to be some element of gut feeling to it as well. Sometimes you can prepare and have all your pairings lined up, but then all of sudden you might need to go off script and make some

major or rapid changes if things aren't quite working. That's what I did last year. I try to be transparent and put the responsibility on the players themselves, but one thing I learned from last year is that players like to be told what to do.

Is there a practice trip planned in the run-up to the event?

We've already been there. I took a big group there in May for two days. We had a good team bonding and gathering, so I would say 70 percent of the team has already experienced the venue. Now I just need to finalise the 12 players.

You've been part of some wonderful Solheim Cup teams in the past. How does this current group of players compare to them?

Each team is a little different, but I would say there's a lot of

consistency, diversity and camaraderie within the team. We still have a lot of experienced players on our team who have already played in two, three, four or five Solheims.

I think Anna Nordqvist is the oldest member, but we have a lot of great talent in their early 20s, mid 20s, and that's fun to see. We do have some pretty good pairings that have been established in the last two Solheims and they might play together again or they might not. Last year we saw a lot of new friendships and bonds being made, and hopefully we can benefit from that this year.

Which players have surprised or impressed you in the 12 months since Spain?

I think Charley (Hull) has really stepped up as a truly world-class player. She's impressed me over the



believe in this dream of making history once again. And that's almost my easiest job. They're all fired up. They're all ready.

Do you maybe hold a psychological edge over the American team given how events played out last September and in the two previous Solheim Cups?

It's kind of funny how it always plays out. I mean, with all the golf that's played over three days, it normally comes down to one shot or a couple of putts dropping in our favour. Last year was extremely close again. But the Americans do have a very young team, I hardly know some of the players. It's like a new generation coming through and that's fun because it brings new challenges, new rivalries.

If you make history and lead the team to victory again, how would it compare to all your other career achievements?

I don't really judge everything on pure results, but I've really enjoyed

the journey and doing this captaincy. It keeps me in the game and that's what I love the most. I still have a huge passion for golf. When the time comes around, maybe I will start playing some senior events. But I call this a journey because it has a start and it has an end. Regardless of what happens, I just want everyone to enjoy it because I get excited just thinking about it!

We all know how competitive you are, so with that in mind, have you spoken to Catriona Matthew about emulating what she did in 2021?

I do dig into her brain every now and again. I did tell her she had to go for the three-peat, but she was satisfied with two. But, yeah, I do try and feed off experiences of past captains, both on the men's and the women's sides. I'm not a genius coming up with the solutions. It's very much a team effort, so this is not a solo show.

Can we assume then that you'll be staying on for another term if you're successful in Virginia?

I don't know, I haven't thought about it. I'm trying to complete this part first, then time will tell.

last couple of years. She's taken her game to the next level. Charley is the star on our team. She's got the experience and the personality, so she brings a lot. In terms of new players on the team, there are a couple of Germans who are performing really solidly. You have Alexandra Forsterling, who's won quite a bit, and Esther Henseleit looks a really good player. There's actually a bunch of rookies who are on my radar and who I keep looking at as potential picks.

This time last year you told me you had all the confidence in the world that you could win. So are you more confident now than you were 12 months ago?

I think the entire team is confident we can do it again and that's important. I need to get everybody on board. It doesn't help if I'm confident, I need the players to

Above: After giving the team some home truths on Friday night, Europe fought back to tie the match.

Right: Pettersen celebrates as Europe retain the 2023 Solheim Cup at Finca Cortesin in Spain.



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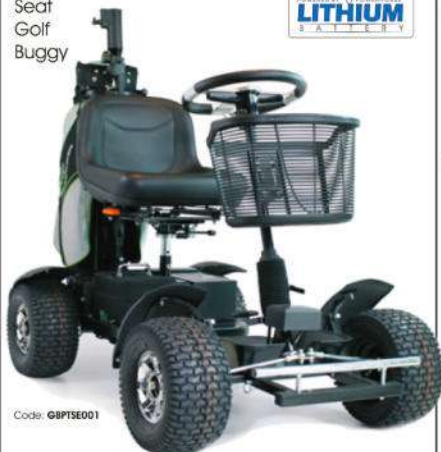
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SUSTAINABILITY IN GOLF



IN DANGER OF GOING UNDER

WHY SUSTAINABILITY IS THE BATTLEGROUND ON
WHICH GOLF'S FUTURE WILL BE FOUGHT

WORDS MARK MCGOWAN IMAGES GETTY

We've been banging the sustainability drum for a while now. But without the proper buy-in from every one of us, many golf clubs risk going under due to rising costs, new employment laws, environmental legislation and the ever-increasing desire to build new houses on green spaces. Over the next nine pages, we look at the biggest challenges facing the golf industry, profile two clubs that are doing things right in the UK, and reveal the part you can play in safeguarding the future of our courses.





CARBON NEUTRAL

Ahead of its 2025 Open Championship, Royal Portrush is in a race to host the greenest Major ever seen

When The Open Championship made its long-awaited return to Royal Portrush in 2019, the Emerald Isle was the ideal setting for what, at the time, would be the greenest Major Championship ever held.

After more than 100,000 single-use plastic water bottles had been consumed at Carnoustie a year earlier, the R&A responded by handing out 5,000 Open-branded, reusable bottles to fans to fill at the 19 water stations spread throughout the grounds at Portrush, as well as issuing each player and caddie with personalised stainless steel bottles.

But when The Open returns to the Causeway Coast again in 2025, it will be even greener and this time, it's the County Antrim club – and not the game's governing body – who take the lion's share of the credit for that.

The Covid-19 pandemic couldn't have come at a worse time for Royal Portrush, relieving them of 90 percent of their annual green fee revenue at a time when the club's profile had never been higher. But rather than bemoaning their misfortune, the club used the opportunity to focus on the goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2025, something that no Major Championship hosting venue has ever achieved.

“All of our equipment, our tractors, our lawnmowers, our buggies, as we replace them, we only buy electric vehicles,” says former Portrush Captain Ian Kerr, who made the announcement in 2021 that carbon neutrality would be achieved by 2025. “We're nearly through the entire transitioning of the fleet and we have a big fleet, as you can imagine.

“We've put solar panels on the roof of the clubhouse – they're very discreet, you can't see them because they're inset in the hollow of the building – and we're putting solar panels on the greenkeeper sheds which will enable us to power the equipment and the clubhouse as well.”



Solar panels have the ability to generate power, of course, but their value is not truly realised without excess electricity usage being eliminated.

"We've changed all clubhouse lighting to LED and it's now on movement switches," Kerr adds, before explaining that the 25-year-old boiler and heating system has been replaced by a new system that has cut emissions by 90 percent.

The temporary water stations that the R&A had installed for the 2019 Open now have permanent replacements at various points throughout the course and club members have been encouraged to bring reusable bottles with them. But with such a large volume of visitors funnelling through year-round, they've taken it a step further and wherever possible, have removed all single-use plastics from the premises.

"Our greenkeeping sheds are unbelievable," Kerr says. "You'd expect them to be a mess of grass and muck, but the machines are all cleaned because we don't want dirt going on the greens and all of that grease and oil – which you still have to have for pneumatic operations, even on electric vehicles – is all disposed of properly and taken off site. So, everything that we can possibly think of, we're doing to reduce our carbon footprint."

That path to carbon neutrality doesn't come cheap. But though Royal Portrush are funding the initiatives themselves, the R&A are fully behind the process and are able to lend a helping hand in a variety of different ways.

"They're absolutely backing it to the hilt," Kerr confirmed. "We're obviously funding it ourselves, but they're helping us with support on the agronomy side and we buy all our equipment from a supplier that

all The Open rota courses buy from as well.

"It is an expensive undertaking, but it's an investment in the long-term future of the club. There are a couple of government grants available to any organisation transitioning to green energy, but apart from that, everything is internally funded."

The Open in 2019 was the most attended Championship ever, and though the 150th Open at St Andrews in 2022 has since eclipsed that, huge attendances are again expected in 2025. With that comes a huge demand for refreshments and infrastructure, but as Kerr explains, the R&A are proactive in minimising emissions by shopping locally.

"Circular economy is one of the things we're currently working with

'IT IS AN EXPENSIVE UNDERTAKING, BUT IT'S AN INVESTMENT IN THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF THE CLUB'

them on by trying to ensure that materials can be repurposed and by using a local supply chain, keeping all the suppliers within a certain radius, particularly in regard to food supply, because the consumption is enormous," he says.

Though sustainability initiatives have significantly ramped up at Royal Portrush in recent years, we can trace their roots back to the course renovations in 2015 that were requisite to bring the actual golf course to the next level.

"With the R&A and Mackenzie & Ebert, we were really responsible in the way that we planned it and executed all of the work," says Course Manager Graeme Beatt.

"Everything is reused and recycled. Any turf that we could possibly lift and re-lay, we did, including the sand dunes and

marram grass. We were lifting nine-inch-thick slabs of marram grass with the diggers and relaying it, so we weren't disturbing the surface. It was expensive to do that, but environmentally, it was really the responsible thing to do."

While most vehicles are now electric, some heavy-duty machinery needed to remain using liquid fuel, but even that was a problem that could be navigated sustainably.

"We've switched the fuel to HVO – Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil," Beatt explains. "It's a biofuel and there are 90 percent fewer emissions with those compared to diesel. There was no switchover at all, you just ran the tank down with the diesel and then filled up with the biofuel. It's amazing – you don't even have to change the filters or

anything, which I was surprised about.

"I was a little bit nervous, so we started off with the oldest equipment, so that if it broke or blew up, it would be fine," he laughs.

As with everything, there is a cost involved, and HVO is approximately 10-15 percent more expensive than diesel, so making such a switch is not possible without the buy-in and complete support of the club management. In that regard, Royal Portrush again go above and beyond.

"The club is run by the members," Beatt says, "and anything like this is brought to management council and they have all been really supportive, really keen to make a difference and be seen to be leaders in sustainability."

The final reckoning has yet to come on whether carbon neutrality can actually be achieved by 2025, but two things are certain. Royal Portrush have done just about everything they could have done to achieve that goal, and the 2025 Open Championship will be the greenest Major we have ever seen.



TAKING A GREENER APPROACH

The GEO Foundation is a body set up to help golf clubs develop a greener, more sustainable approach. Here, Executive Director Jonathan Smith explains how the Sustainable Golf Pathway works and how your club can get involved



With partnerships across both the amateur and professional games, national governing bodies and non-golf organisations including government agencies and non-profit organisations, the GEO Foundation have a footprint in almost 70 countries worldwide.

“Our culture is very much like a caddie,” explains Executive Director Jonathan Smith. “The foundation set itself up to know the terrain, help navigate the course and to build a decent set of tools to support the golf industry’s leadership.”

There are several different forks to the GEO Foundation which can be broken down into four main tenets: advocacy, programs and solutions, innovation, and impacts. By helping to devise strategies and practices for such a wide-ranging collection of those within the golf industry, and then collating and curating all the data, the GEO are able to remain at the cutting edge of sustainability practices and be guided by first-hand experiences.

England Golf are one such partner and through the GEO Foundation’s Sustainable Golf Pathway, golf clubs, tournament organisers and other relevant bodies can access a series of programmes and tools that are vital resources in their transition to becoming more sustainable long-term.

“We develop it with partners and then, in a way, give it back to partners in golf so that their strategies are hopefully implemented more effectively and more credibly,” Smith adds.

Clubs that start on the Sustainable Golf Pathway feature on the online Sustainable Golf Leaderboard, and though GDPR restrictions prohibit exact data from each participating club being published, analysis of the data is published on the leaderboard as stories which help inform other clubs as to some of the practices that neighbouring clubs are implementing and serve as encouragement for them to do similar.

“With the data, we can analyse the industry’s performance on a variety of metrics including water, biodiversity, turf management, carbon emissions and things like that,” Smith explains. “That data is important for the clubs and for the industry, but it’s also important for governments and regulators and the outside world to know that when

golf says, ‘Hey, look, not only are we working to be more sustainable and better for the environment and better for communities, here’s some of the evidence that backs that up and backs up that journey’.”

When the GEO Foundation was first set up, environmental concerns were at the forefront, with the actual practicalities and financial concerns very much playing second fiddle. However, that doesn’t mean that there wasn’t a recognition that there were considerable cost saving measures involved as well, and many of the early adopters are already seeing their investments paying dividends.

What’s on the balance sheet is easily quantifiable, but it’s hard to put a price on goodwill, community pride and putting a club in position for long-term favour from local authorities.

“There’s so much goodwill in sustainable communities,” Smith says, “so many voluntary groups – when they see the club as a force for good – charity, nature restoration, beach cleans, things like that – it’s actually free marketing for golf clubs and it changes the way that the club might be perceived within the community. Going from a club that’s only thinking about itself to a club that is actually a real asset in the community creates pride in and towards the golf club.

“It can get local governments

‘THROUGH THE GEO FOUNDATION’S SUSTAINABLE GOLF PATHWAY, CLUBS CAN ACCESS A SERIES OF PROGRAMMES AND TOOLS THAT ARE VITAL IN HELPING THEM BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE’

leaning towards more favourable planning decisions and things like that for the club. It’s just repositioning your business as an asset and a force for good in the community, and it has a lot of indirect or less tangible benefits that are very important long-term.”

While some of the larger, powerhouse golf clubs have professional management teams, others are run by a series of volunteers who have the good of the club at heart. The GEO Foundation Pathway is particularly useful to those clubs.

By visiting the GEO Foundation website, any club can begin the step-by-step process which Smith likens to the rungs on a ladder. Step one is to make the sustainable golf pledge – a downloadable certificate which outlines a club’s

commitment to becoming a more sustainable golf facility, to foster nature, conserve resources, take climate action and strengthen their local community.

Step two is to start creating ‘club highlights’ – sustainable practices which the club feel they do well, which gets them onto the Sustainable Golf Leaderboard. And step three is to create an ‘On Course’ community – a cloud-based app which allows clubs to assemble a team and access industry best practices and guidance. Each of these three steps is entirely free of charge to the club.

Step four is to input their own data – waste generation, energy usage, water consumption, etc. Based on this, the GEO Foundation provide a Sustainable Golf scorecard (not to be mistaken for the Sustainable Golfer Scorecard included on page 63), plus a full carbon report, for the cost of £300, which Smith suggests would usually cost up to £8,000.

The final step is to have a third-party audit which, if the criteria are met, allows the club to become ‘GEO Certified’. They are then provided with marketing materials to present themselves as such.

“We’ve tried to make it a very inclusive pathway and something that can become very scalable across

the whole country,” Smith adds.

“Every time a club participates, it’s another leadership club for England Golf, it’s another best practice data point and it is content that England Golf can use to represent

the game as a national sport, to say that we are committed to sustainability, we’re taking action and here are the results that we’re driving for. Not just for golf, but for society as a whole across England.”

Jonathan Smith featured in our list of the Top 100 Most Influential People in Golf for 2023.





GOLF'S SILENT KILLER

Why coastal erosion poses the greatest threat to many of our finest golf courses

Links golf courses owe their very existence to the sea and the deposits it provides. Millions of years of sand being blown inland from the shore have created the towering dunes and firm terrain that have become the canvas on which these masterpieces are painted. But the sea giveth and the sea taketh away.

Coastal erosion is gradually eating away at the coastline, and this is a particularly pressing issue for courses situated on the powerful Atlantic Ocean where breaking swells can reach heights of up to three metres.

Alnmouth Village, Ballybunion, Formby, Fortrose & Rosemarkie, Lahinch and Royal Portrush, to name just a few, have all had their own issues. Earlier this year, Alnmouth Village reported that around 25 to 30 yards of England's oldest nine-hole links had eroded, with as much as 10 feet of sand having been lost beside its 2nd and 3rd tees.

Extensive rock armouring is the solution, acting as a barrier which takes the brunt of the tidal power and protects the sedimentary faces behind it, but the process is extremely expensive. It also requires planning permission from

COASTAL

the local authorities, something which Doonbeg and its owner Donald Trump were denied in 2020.

There's a temptation to make a Trump 'wall' joke here, but the situation is no laughing matter. The threat of coastal erosion won't go away on its own.

Royal Portrush have just spent £165,000 on extending their rock armour by 20 metres to add extra protection to the 5th green and 6th tee box on the Dunluce Course in an attempt to alleviate concerns ahead of the 2025 Open Championship. But where Royal Portrush have managed to shore up their defences, countless others lie critically exposed.

It's a desperate situation and, according to The R&A, the threats posed by global warming are "very, very real". The Climate Coalition, which represents more than 130 organisations in Britain studying the effects of climate change, said in a 2018 report that "only a small increase in sea level rise would imperil all the world's links courses before the end of the century".

Steve Isaac, The R&A's Director of Sustainability, was also quoted in the report, admitting that rising sea levels, intense rain and increased droughts were "becoming

a huge factor". He added: "We are feeling it now with increases in unplayable holes, winter course closures and disruption to professional tournaments.

"Without cutting the carbon emissions driving climate change, sea levels will rise by over a metre and extremely wet winters will become the norm. Many aspects of our lives, including the game of golf, would struggle to adapt to such a changed world."

In Scotland, the threat is particularly pronounced as the Scottish coast enjoys significantly less armoured protection than the rest of Britain and Ireland. Investigations carried out in 2021 found that 109 golf courses in Scotland are suffering the effects of coastal erosion or expect to be in the near future. The Climate Coalition namechecked Montrose Golf Links, the fifth oldest club in the world, as an example of the "future threat" and how "more than 450 years of golfing history" was at risk of crumbling into the sea.

Research by Dundee University in 2015 even estimated that the North Sea has crept as much 70 metres closer to the course over the last 30 years. Rock defences have been put in place to tackle the

eroding coast, but even that has proved insufficient.

Back in 2018, high winds blew debris off the beach and covered the 2nd hole on the 1562 Course in hundreds of tons of sand, forcing greenkeepers to remove the compacted grains by hand after rain solidified it.

"As the sea rises and the coast falls away, we are left with nowhere to go," says Chris Curnin, a Director at Montrose Golf Links. "Climate change is often seen as tomorrow's problem, but it's already eating away at our course."

The club have already had to move three holes and that was before another three-and-a-half metres of land were lost in the second half of 2019. It's clear that we can't put the genie back in the bottle, but given the revenue that golf tourism – and links golf in particular – brings to the economy, this is a problem that extends well beyond golf courses and their members.

Sustainability in golf means protecting our greatest assets' shorelines, and economical sustainability mirrors that. Government intervention is needed before it's too late and large chunks of history are swept out to sea. Over to you, Prime Minister.

EROSION

'CLIMATE CHANGE IS OFTEN SEEN AS TOMORROW'S PROBLEM, BUT IT'S ALREADY HITTING MANY COURSES'



GOLF'S BATTLEGROUND

A new war is now waging on golf courses up and down the land and all across the world. Unless we start taking the threat seriously, we risk losing them forever

The very term 'sustainability' conjures up images of regulations, of being restricted and being told that there are certain things that you cannot do. But while it is true that certain practices are inflicting long-term damage on the game and the environment, sustainability practices are about finding practical solutions to problems rather than being focused on outright restriction. And the elephant in the room is the fact that the practices of yesteryear are no longer viable.

Centuries of fossil fuel burning, deforestation, urban growth, global population increase and chemical dependency means that genuine green space is at an all-time premium and pressure on the golf

industry is sure to increase as the need for food, housing and public recreational space is only likely to increase in the coming years.

Sustainability is not just the best way forward, it is the only way forward. The planet needs it, our rapidly changing environment demands it, and the game absolutely must have it if the golfers of the 22nd century are to continue to enjoy walking lush fairways and not be confined to indoor simulators that remain the only link to what was once the most intricate blend of sport, nature, companionship and enjoyment.

And sustainability is not just about the environment and preserving the natural habitats of the countless species that call it

home. It's about the survival of our clubs, about becoming cost-efficient, about the preservation of our playing areas, about warding off the threat of coastal erosion and about reducing waste and using renewable energy sources.

The Covid-19 pandemic didn't just bring in an influx of fresh players to the game. It brought with it an added awareness that, moving forwards, outdoor activities that provide fresh air, exercise, and mental and emotional wellbeing – with a little sprinkle of frustration thrown in for good measure – are on ever-increasing importance.

Above all else, sustainability is about the future and our future. And the future doesn't start tomorrow. It starts today.

'SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT JUST THE BEST WAY FORWARD FOR GOLF, IT'S THE ONLY WAY FORWARD'



Sustainable Golfer Scorecard

1. Bring your own water bottle.
2. Ask about local produce when grabbing a clubhouse snack.
3. Try out some recycled golf balls, or buy them second-hand.
4. Walk if you can, rather than using a buggy.
5. Replace divots to help prevent turf disease.
6. Volunteer for an environmental project or committee.
7. Encourage your course to get more involved in sustainability.
8. Car share with your playing partners.
9. If you can't car share, consider public transport.
10. Record and promote wildlife to help implement a habitat management plan.
11. Always repair your pitchmarks on the green.
12. Don't be a litter bug. Take your rubbish away with you.
13. Use sustainable bamboo or wooden tees.
14. Avoid single-use plastic packaging where possible.
15. Respect the boundaries of the course and try to leave natural areas undisturbed.
16. Playing casually? Consider ditching the scorecard.
17. Look the part in sustainable clothing and gear.
18. Take an interest in your club's community initiatives.





THE SPACE-SAVING NEW COURSE

At Spey Bay on the Moray Firth, design firm Clayton, DeVries & Pont have breathed new life into a course by transforming its traditional links into a fully reversible 18-hole championship layout. Here, CDP's Sam Cooper tells us why this back-to-front thinking has benefits to both the golfer and the environment

Does Spey Bay take inspiration from any of CDP's other courses?

We have another reversible course we've been working on, but that would be a new construction. In terms of taking an existing course, looking to improve it as far as possible while designing in an additional route to essentially provide two different courses out of one site, that is new for CDP. Most reversible courses have been created from scratch, so it may be a first in terms of creating something from an existing routing.

What environmental difference does it make to a project, having multiple courses on the same site?

It's an added benefit, for sure. It's

more sustainable to manage and maintain, economical in the land it takes up, but golf can also be wonderful for the environment. A good example here is clearing out the gorse and re-establishing the heathland across the site. This is a wonderful ecological feature of which few realise the significance.

What did Spey Bay look like before CDP became involved?

Quiet and understated. Overgrown with gorse and a little unloved. When the course hit the market in early 2023, a few different people reached out for an unvarnished opinion on its potential. The more I thought about it, the more I thought there was the

opportunity to create something truly special, something unique. A week later I was on a plane from Manchester to Aberdeen and walking the fairways.

What inspired the idea of a reversible routing?

The short answer is the 8th green. The slightly longer answer requires some context. I've been fascinated by reversible routings for some time. Of course, the most famous course of them all, St Andrews, once played in a different direction. It's not a novel concept but it is definitely having a bit of a resurgence. My colleague, Frank Pont, created a reversible course (Links Valley) in the Netherlands and he and I had spent a long time discussing the concept. That conversation was just before we began a different project and I thought a reversible layout could work well for that, too. So, walking the course again in February 2023, it was definitely in the back of my mind.

How difficult is that to accomplish?

Not every course can be reversed. Most will have an unsuitable landscape. Big dunes or long walks from greens to tee might prevent it working. It's normally possible to reverse one section of a golf course, and every reader could look back at the previous green as they play their next round and think if it would work on their course. But even on the places where the landscape does suit it, there will be a corner or cul-de-sac the routing will find itself in and struggle to get back out of. Fortunately, the landscape at Spey Bay is perfect for the concept. It isn't big sand dunes flanking holes like you might see in Ireland, but classic Scottish links land. But more than anywhere else, the contour and topography here is just so sharp and abrupt - it's a fantastic canvas for interesting golf.



Martin puts his best foot forward thanks to **Turmeric+ Gold**

Yacht master instructor and former footballer, Martin Musgrove, 62, tells how Turmeric+ Gold changed his life.

'I was a professional footballer before becoming a yacht master instructor and always loved to run.

'I used to love to keep fit running but unfortunately I had to hang up my running shoes twelve years ago.

'It was my daughter who does triathlons who recommended I take turmeric two and a half years ago. I was pretty sceptical, but she ordered Turmeric+ Gold on my behalf and it popped through my letterbox so I thought I would give it a try.'

Turmeric contains compounds called curcuminoids, the most notable of which is curcumin. Not only is curcumin responsible for turmeric's distinctive yellow colour but

it's also what makes it such a powerful spice.

However curcumin is difficult for the body to absorb so the scientists at FutureYou Cambridge used a patented Curcuma Phospholipid Complex formulation to make Turmeric+ Gold, 30 times more absorbable than standard turmeric.

They also added vitamin C, which contributes to normal collagen formation for the normal function of cartilage and vitamin D, which contributes to the maintenance of normal bones and maintenance of normal muscle function.

'My knees felt uncomfortable when I went to bed at night and in the morning I usually struggled



'I began to notice I felt more like my old self after taking Turmeric+'

to walk around easily, until they warmed up a little bit.' Martin explained,

'I began to notice I felt more like my old self after taking Turmeric+ Gold, so much so that six months down the line I wanted to see if I could do a little walk, jog, walk, to see if my knees could cope.

'They felt OK and I thought maybe I could do a little running as I really missed it.

'That was twenty months ago. The rest is history. I run 25K a month and I can run 5k in 30 minutes. I do park runs and local runs. My aim is to do a 10K run.'

'Our advanced formulation works by using plant-based lecithin to mimic the way the body naturally absorbs curcuminoids after eating turmeric cooked with fat,' explains Dr Miriam Ferrer, PhD, Head of Product Development at FutureYou Cambridge. 'But it delivers far more than you'd normally get from a meal.'

Martin continues; 'I've recommended Turmeric+ Gold to friends, and they can see the difference in me. It may not work for everyone; but as far as I'm concerned it's a great product that really works.'

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FutureYou Cambridge is offering you the chance to trial its premium joint health product, Turmeric+ Gold for 50% for the first three months; so you'll pay just £11.50 per box instead of £23.

Turmeric+ Gold is the company's most advanced and purest turmeric formulation yet, providing 100mg of curcumin delivering it using sunflower lecithin, for easy absorption. It also comes in an easy to

swallow capsule rather than a tablet.

Adam Cleevely, FutureYou Cambridge's Chair, explains: 'We want to support more people to become or stay active. We think Turmeric+ Gold can play an important role in that journey. We know that to give supplements like this one the best chance of success you need to take them for 6-8 weeks, which is why we're offering 50% off for the first three months.'



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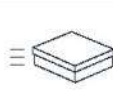
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 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur in the UK each year, but fewer than one in 10 of the victims (8.6 percent) survive.

WHOSE LIFE MIGHT YOU SAVE?

Support our golf clubs and communities by becoming a GoodSAM responder

If you've been following our Drive for Defibs campaign, you'll know that a sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) can be fatal without a timely response from first responders or emergency services. So, imagine our shock when we discovered that the average response time for an ambulance to attend a category one emergency in the UK was eight minutes, 16 seconds in May 2024. We know from various studies that death is likely if a SCA lasts longer than eight minutes without CPR, which is why we've teamed up with GoodSAM to support the NHS and keep our communities and golf courses 'heart safe'. We just need your help to do it!

What is GoodSAM?

Also known as Good Smartphone Activated Medics, the technology enables emergency services around the world to alert trained responders – via an app – to suspected cardiac arrests nearby.

How does it work?

If you are 18 or over and trained in CPR, you can download the free

GoodSAM Responder app and join a community of more than 300,000 volunteers. You'll then be alerted when you are in the immediate vicinity of a possible cardiac arrest, so that you can start CPR or basic first aid in the critical minutes before the paramedics arrive.

Why do we need you?

A study in 2022 revealed that GoodSAM could only send alerts out in 7% of cases in London and 23% in the East Midlands due to a lack of people nearby who were registered on the app. It has already been shown that a person's chances of survival double when a first aider responds to an alert. We just need more of them in the UK – which is where you come in.

How to qualify as a first aider

The Resuscitation Council UK offer a 30-minute lifesaver course, which gives you all the necessary skills to become a GoodSAM volunteer cardiac responder. You can complete the online training today for free by visiting life-saver.org.uk

REGISTER YOUR DEFIB

GoodSAM has introduced the world's first mobile AED registry. If you carry a defibrillator around in your car, simply click 'I have an AED' in the GoodSAM Responder app and both you and your defibrillator can be used as a resource by the emergency services.



How do you respond to an alert?

The app works through a push notification system on your smartphone and will make a siren sound. When you accept a GoodSAM alert, key information will be shared from the ambulance services, such as stand down messages and the casualty's address. A map will also appear, showing you where to go.

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You can register to receive alerts by text message if a push notification is not possible.

Do you have to attend an alert?

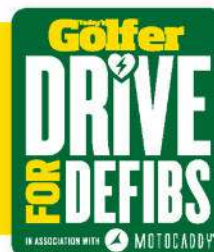
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SERGIO'S SECOND COMING

LIV star Sergio Garcia desperately wants to play in the 2025 Ryder Cup at Bethpage – and he's prepared to pay over a million dollars to do it

WORDS MICHAEL CATLING IMAGES GETTY

It is mid-afternoon at JCB Golf & Country Club in Staffordshire and Sergio Garcia is reminiscing about some of the shots he hit when he won the Irish Open as a fresh-faced teenager.

"I remember the birdie putt on 13, a par 4," he says, using his hand to demonstrate. "A nice, kind of longish, right to left putt. That was a good one. Then obviously I remember hitting the shot on the last, I think it was a 5-iron. There was water on the right and I hit it to five feet. An unbelievable shot. Yeah, I remember that one."

In truth, his memory is almost as impressive as the performance that saw him become the fourth-youngest winner on the European Tour at 19 years and 176 days. It's 25 years this month since that breakthrough victory and a little over two weeks since his last. It's a fact which hasn't gone unnoticed.

"I give myself a lot of credit for winning in four different decades," he smiles. "Not many people can say they have done that. I heard some stats that Jack Nicklaus, the greatest

player to ever play the game, won his first and last title 23 years apart. Mine is 25 at the moment, so that's got to mean something, right?"

While many of his contemporaries were battling the elements in The Open at Royal Troon in July, the 44-year-old was busy celebrating his first individual victory in LIV colours on a beach in Mykonos, 2,500 miles away. The bronzed tan suggests he made the most of his time off.

"We celebrated for sure, and the champagne was flowing," he says with a broad grin. "It was nice to relax with the kids, the family and some friends, and to just enjoy the moment because it's been a while."

Indeed, you have to go back to the Sanderson Farms Championship – when he was still a PGA Tour member – for the last time he experienced the sweet taste of victory, almost four years ago. A lot has happened since then, including bad breaks and big life choices.

Twice he has lost in a sudden-death play-off this season. Three times if you include LIV's Singapore

event last year. He swore to himself that he wouldn't make it four; he just didn't expect to follow through on his promise in such dramatic circumstances.

Trailing by seven heading into the final round of LIV Golf Andalucia at his beloved Valderrama, Garcia shot a five-under 66 to force a play-off with overnight leader Anirban Lahiri. And this time he wasn't to be denied. He rarely is at Valderrama these days. He has now won there four times, including three in his last five starts.

"It's funny, it's just one of those courses that for some reason suits my eye," he says, trying to make sense of it. "I love it, obviously. I feel comfortable there and things seem to happen for me. After losing a couple of play-offs this year, I was proud to give myself another chance. The cherry on the top was being able to win the play-off, on my favourite course, and with the Fireballs (his LIV team) winning too. It was just amazing, an unbelievable feeling. Hopefully there's more to come."

His popularity at LIV can be seen



by the number of players and caddies who have come up to congratulate him in the players' lounge. What made it extra sweet was the team's success, their fourth in the last 21 months. Garcia takes his Fireballs GC captaincy role very seriously and appears to be embracing the fraternal side as a mentor to Spanish duo James Puig and Eugenio Chacarra.

"Being a captain is something I've always enjoyed. I love helping the younger guys, in the same way Jose Maria Olazabal and Seve looked out for me. I try to help them and tell them my experiences because when you're 22, 23, 24, you think you know a lot, but you really don't. They are very talented, obviously very young, but they are impressive when they're in the right frame of mind."

He stops short of bigging them up too much. You sense it's for their own good. He has a big say on player transfers and knows he may be forced into a decision about whether to retain both men should they fail to finish inside the top 24 at the end of the regular season.

There's a lot to do and consider, which is why he's recently recruited a Director of Team Operations to alleviate some of the stress. He's got other projects on the agenda, like the opening of his first major course design - The Torre Course at Terras da Comporta - near Lisbon next June, and still needs to sit down with the Head of Design from Stuburt today to discuss styles and colours



Above: The partisan crowds at LIV Andaluía really wanted a Sergio victory... and their hero duly delivered.

for the Fireballs team next season (you can win this year's team clothing on page 72).

His own future as a LIV golfer is secure until the end of 2025, but everything points to him being in it for the long haul. He is excited by what the future holds and even talks up the possibility of a women's division and each team having their own headquarters and academies in a different city in the world.

"It is a lot of fun being involved in those kinds of conversations... and the good thing about it is that even after I've finished playing or when I'm 60, I can still be involved in the team as a non-playing captain."

An unexpected return

Retirement remains a way off yet and with two tournaments to go, it is reasonable to think he will pass through the \$30 million barrier in on-course earnings as a LIV golfer before the year is out. He currently sits fourth in LIV's individual

rankings, and while he can't now take the \$18m winner's prize, he could yet pocket a \$4m bonus for a top-three finish in the season-long Individual Championship, where only the top three positions pay out. He is understandably cautious about getting too far ahead of himself, though you sense he wants to prove a point after being cast aside by the Ryder Cup committee last year and refused an exemption into this year's Open Championship. He says he isn't bitter and is still holds out hope of forcing his way into Captain Donald's plans for Bethpage in 12 months' time.

Speaking on *The Rick Shiels Golf Show* last November, he surprised everyone by revealing plans to rejoin the DP World Tour this season in order to save his Ryder Cup career. Ultimately, he missed the November deadline to



He might have been on tour for a quarter of a century, but Garcia has lost none of his desire to win.

do so, raising doubts from officials about the seriousness of his intentions. He doubles down when we ask if he still plans on regaining his membership on the European circuit.

“Yes, definitely! I was going to apply last year but unfortunately the options that I was given were not very helpful. I mean, I was willing to pay my fines and all the money I had to pay, but if they are going to suspend me for, like, a year and I can’t play, then there is no point. Hopefully that will change. My plan is to apply for membership again, play the minimum number of events and then we’ll see if I play well enough and have a chance to qualify for the Ryder Cup.”

Whether he would be welcomed back with open arms is perhaps a conversation for another time.

‘I WAS WILLING TO PAY MY FINES, BUT IF THEY ARE GOING TO SUSPEND ME FOR, LIKE, A YEAR AND I CAN’T PLAY, THEN THERE IS NO POINT’

Multiple reports claim he still needs to pay off close to \$1 million in fines, as laid out in the Sport Resolutions verdict on players who breached the Tour’s regulations by competing in conflicting LIV Golf and Asian Tour events. The DP World Tour have refused to comment on the exact figure, but a spokesperson did confirm that he would need to serve a nine-week ban before he would be eligible to enter any events.

One thing that may help his cause

is that he is still close friends with Luke Donald, who sent Garcia a congratulatory message after his comeback victory at Valderrama. We make the point that an all-Spanish partnership with Jon Rahm would please a lot of fans, especially as they won all three matches together in Europe’s last away match at Whistling Straits. He responds in kind. “I’d love to do it again. I think Jon would love to after the conversations we’ve had... but it doesn’t depend on us.”

Armchair psychologists have long since concluded that team play brings out the best in El Nino. The passion that can often boil over doesn’t always endear him to fans or officials, but you can’t argue with a record which marks him out as the all-time record points scorer in Ryder Cup history.

He’s not about to change his ways any time soon.

“Well, I am Spanish,” he says, laughing. “We run on hot blood. People love the excitement that I show when I do something right. It’s difficult to be flat and to not show emotion all the time. At the end of the day, if I wasn’t the way I am I wouldn’t have as many fans. That’s the way they connect to me.”

Anyone who saw his reaction to being put on the clock during

THE \$50M JACKPOT

All 13 LIV teams will go head-to-head in Dallas for the Team Championship and a \$50m purse. A matchplay knockout format will take place over the first two days, with the top three teams receiving a bye to the semi-final. Each contest will consist of two singles and one foursomes match. The format then reverts to strokeplay for the final, where the top four face off. It’s live on YouTube from Sept 20-22.

Below: Garcia’s latest win came an astonishing 25 years after his first.

Final Qualifying for The Open at West Lancashire will know he has lost none of his fighting spirit or patience since his controversial move to LIV Golf two summers ago. Age, he suggests, has mellowed him to a point, though he remains relentless in his desire to win. Sometimes too much.

“Even though I’m not 25 any more and my body doesn’t move the same way, I still love competing and I practise really hard,” explains Garcia, who is set to make his 100th Major start at the Masters next April. “I definitely feel like if I’m in the right frame of mind and playing the kind of golf I did at Valderrama, I can have a chance at winning another Major.”

“At the US Open, I think I showed that and I felt like I competed really well. Even though I was three-over through four holes on both Saturday and Sunday, I still came back and had a really strong finish.”

In the past his putting has let him down in the big moments, but those who know him best say it is no longer the weakness it once was. He talks a lot about feeling more comfortable over the ball now and is excited by the prospect of gaming a smaller version of the Golfyr Maker putter he used at the start of the season.

It’s clear he hasn’t got it all figured out just yet, but recent results back up his belief that he still has lots to offer. Whether he can sustain his form for the next 12 months may well determine what kind of message he receives from Luke Donald next year.



WIN! FIREBALLS GC'S STUBURT APPAREL

Get your hands on the same gear worn by Sergio Garcia's LIV stars

When British apparel brand Stuburt became the exclusive on-course apparel partner for three LIV teams, fans were excited to have the chance to show their allegiances by wearing the same kit as their heroes.

With three very distinct looks that have already made Fireballs, Torque and Stingers stand out from the crowd this season, the Stuburt fanwear is already flying off the shelves – selling out completely at LIV Andalucia and LIV UK.

But fret not, because we've teamed up with Stuburt to give away four Fireballs GC Team Collection outfits, including a polo, hoodie and cap – as worn by captain Sergio Garcia, Abraham Ancer and Spaniards David Puig and Eugenio Chacarra.

Each of Stuburt's three LIV teams have a collection made up of polos, hoodie and caps designed in collaboration with its respective team captains: Garcia, Joaquin Niemann and Louis Oosthuizen.

The designs for each team are bespoke and incorporate their

individual DNA, featuring their logos and unique brand accents.

Each collection has a hero polo named after their captain, carries the same colours as the team collections and is inspired by the garments those players are wearing on Tour.

The Stingers' gold Springbok, Fireballs' motif and Torque's graphic patterns are used to great effect, alongside modern logo placements and fun prints. Expect great quality finish and fabrics combined with comfort and performance.

The LIV Stuburt fan collections are available to purchase direct from www.stuburt.com – or see below.

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BALANCE AND FOOTWORK



Ask a club golfer what they are working on and you can be pretty sure they won't say "footwork". It's a part of golf technique that gets chronically overlooked... and to our cost. The quality of our connection with the ground determines the quality of our movement, promoting or hindering all those other movements –

pivot, rotation, clearing the lead side – that golfers prefer to focus on. So here, let's put the horse back in front of the cart with some basic foot rules. While targeting three different skill levels, take a look at all of them; it will improve your understanding of how footwork affects the swing, and how to use the ground.



YOUR COACH



NEIL WAIN
PGA Professional based
at Keele GC, Staffs

1



2



BREAK 100
Build solid foundations



There are two elements to footwork every 100-shooter needs to master if they want to get down to double digits... and they are both really simple to get on top of. We'll tackle one at a time here, but as they are both set-up related, you should have no problem working on them together. Don't shift your focus to in-swing footwork until these two elements are in place.

1. Stance width

Every good golf swing is a blend of stability and mobility... and to a great extent, this comes from stance width. When your feet are too close together, you can quickly feel off-balance; when they are too far apart, you feel rock-solid but general motion and rotation take a hit. You can find the ideal compromise by setting your feet under the outsides of your shoulders. This stance width works for

most full-swing shots, though you can go slightly wider with the driver to help contain the longer club and wider swing.

2. Weight under laces

Probably the best guide for weight distribution is the so-called '50-50, 50-50' rule – in other words, evenly spread both right-to-left and also heel-to-toe. This encourages neutral aim, good posture and sets you up well for the weight and

pressure shifts demanded by the swing itself. You can work on both by rocking gently either side-to-side or forwards and back to help improve your idea of where your weight is, and how to settle it in those middle grounds. For another good drill, place an alignment stick on the ground and stand on it, ensuring that the tops of your laces are above the line. This has the bonus of improving your foot alignment at the same time.



BREAK 90
Flare the front
foot for a
better strike



For the golfer looking to shoot in the 80s, I want to focus on the lead foot, which is the left foot for the right-hander. Through its ability to encourage or thwart downswing rotation, your positioning of this foot can have a massive effect on your shot quality. Let's take a closer look at how this works.

1. Squared up

So many golfers set up with the lead foot very square, the toecap pointing forwards. And why wouldn't we do that? This is the foot's natural, default set-up position and unless we were told differently, we'd never realise it could cause serious problems.

2. Flip flop

But here is the problem with a square lead foot: it sets the knee and hip joint into an equally square position, making it harder to clear the lead side through the strike.

Weight shifts into the toes, further hindering rotation, and with our core locked we have no option but to flap at the ball with our hands and arms – a flippy release that causes all manner of miscues.

3. Solar flare

This deceptively serious problem has a wonderfully simple solution: at set-up, flare your lead foot a quarter of a turn or so. Feel the lead leg open out as you do this, with the knee turning out too in order to point in the same direction as the foot.

4. Clear advantage

Once that lead foot is turned outwards, the hip and knee are placed in a far better orientation to rotate and clear through impact. With the body now able to turn through the shot, the strike becomes more powerful and the clubface much more stable. Instead of that stalled core sending weight out into the toes, you should feel it more under the lead heel as you turn through... but this is something that we will look at in more detail with the 80-breaker, which is coming up next.

BREAK 80

Target heel bias for better rotation



Building on that 90-breaker advice, the would-be 70-shooter can turn their attention to footwork in terms of toe and heel bias. Literally at the centre of our swing, the backswing/throughswing pivot is built on our ability to rotate through our core. But if weight shifts into our toes, the leg muscles tighten to maintain balance and rotation is shut down. Here is a simple exercise to feel the relationship between rotation and foot pressure.

1. Butt joint

For this drill, set up so you can feel something resting lightly against your backside; an alignment stick is ideal, or you can use a chair or your golf bag. A balanced set-up means pressure under your laces, midway between the toe and heel, as we learned with the 100-breaker. Place your attention on the ground beneath your feet.

2. Swings 1-5: Heels

For your first swings, I want you to feel pressure under your heels: trail heel back, lead heel through. Swing at no more than 60% pace. This is only a practice drill, so exaggerate it... while remaining in balance of course. But note how, when you swing with heel pressure, rotation comes easily and your backside retains its contact with the stick behind you.

3. Swings 6-10: Toes

For the next five swings, I want you to deliberately and consciously sway out on to your toes, both back and through. Again, keep everything slow. This time your swing should feel awkward, unbalanced and restricted. Your rear end will also lose contact with the stick as you seek to rebalance... costing you your set-up posture and tilts.

Heeling power

After 10 swings, your awareness of how heel and toe weight affects the swing – especially your ability to rotate – should improve. Settle back into that reduced-speed, heel-oriented motion, keeping the glute contact with the stick. As it becomes more comfortable and your ability to maintain the stick contact improves, smoothly increase to full power.





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DEANA RUSHWORTH
Former England
International and Advanced
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BETTER GREENSIDE BUNKER CONTACT

The ideal greenside bunker contact sees the club enter the sand an inch or so behind the ball, on a shallow attack angle. It's a strike that gives us not just control of distance and spin, but also the confidence to play the shot with speed and commitment. Finding this strike need not be complex or technical; just follow these four steps and, with a little practice, your confidence will soar.



STEP 1: WRIGGLE TO LOWER YOUR BASE

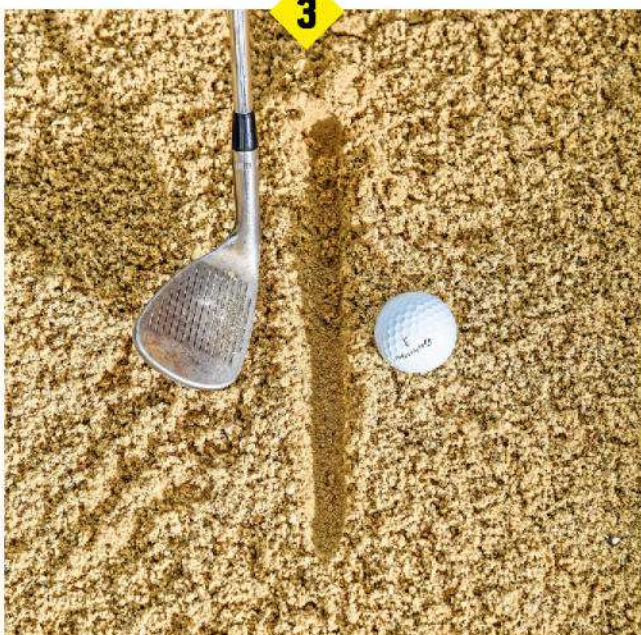
Of course we are taking the sand from under the ball, so the base of the swing needs to be lower than the ball itself. Take care of this at the start by wriggling your feet an inch or two into the sand.

As well as lowering your base, this gives your stance a firm foundation. That sense of security will help you commit to the shot.



STEP 2: SQUAT TO LOWER THE HANDLE

Stand a little further from the ball than usual and increase your knee flex. This sets the handle a little lower and the clubshaft angle a little flatter. It's a set-up that promotes a shallower attack by flattening the swing's plane. It also lowers the heel a touch, helping you work this rounded and forgiving part of the club into the sand.



STEP 3: FOCUS ON THE STRIKE POINT

Your brain will try to strike whatever your eyes focus on, so look at where you want the club to enter the sand, not at the ball itself. Keep your eyes soft for a calm focus. Of course you're not allowed to mark the sand during play, but visualising a line like this, club hovered behind to let you 'see' it, will help you adjust your sights.



STEP 4: CHEST TO TARGET

When you use your address to pre-set the ideal contact, there is no need for tricky swing gyrations. But a great thought is to get your chest over the lead foot, facing the target at the finish. It encourages you to use the big core muscles, which in turn promotes a full, free release; just what you need for that ideal shallow, committed strike.

CRIMEWATCH

SWAYING... AND INCONSISTENT CONTACT



We can define a 'sway' as excessive lateral movement – away from the target – during the backswing. While an element of lateral movement is fine – it promotes good weight shift and helps create momentum in the swing – we will quickly run into difficulties if we let it get out of hand. In this article we will take a look at how to recognise a sway and the problems it causes, before learning a couple of swing drills that will reinforce a stronger concept for you to build you motion around. Indeed, even if you don't classify yourself as a 'swayer', they will improve your backswing mechanics. Let's get started.



DRIFTING AWAY

Typically, a sway stems from the misguided concept that we need to get 'behind' the ball on the backswing... often related to the equally misguided idea that we need to help it up, into the air.

Instead of a rotational move the backswing becomes more of a lateral slide, the hips and pelvis drifting away from the target. The sway's big revealer is the trail foot, which starts to roll on to its outside edge, the instep rising from the turf. Aside from the problems with path and power caused by the limited rotation, the sway's biggest effect is inconsistent contact because it creates imbalance and pulls the swing's low point behind the ball.



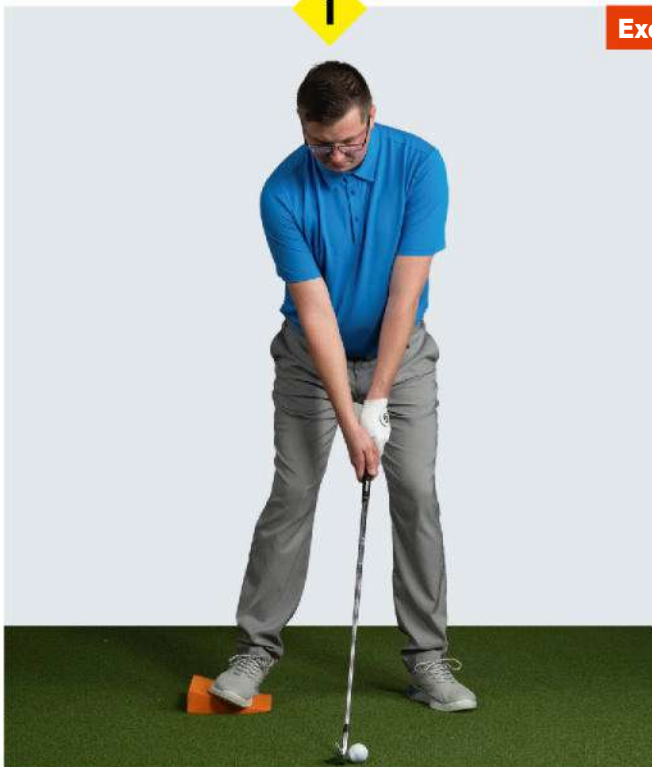
New idea: role reversal

The first step to dealing with the sway, then, is conceptual. Instead of thinking we need to get behind the ball and help it up, we need to hold the concept of turning around a centre point – which is more in the middle of the stance – and squeezing down on the ball. Sending the ball upward is not your job; it's the job of the clubface, which is lofted for that very purpose. Leave it to perform its role, and focus on yours.

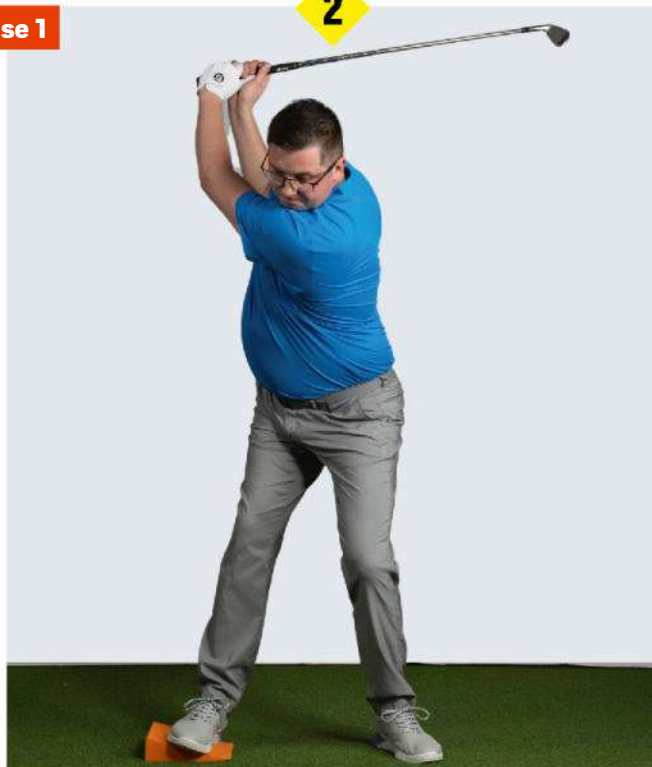
YOUR COACH



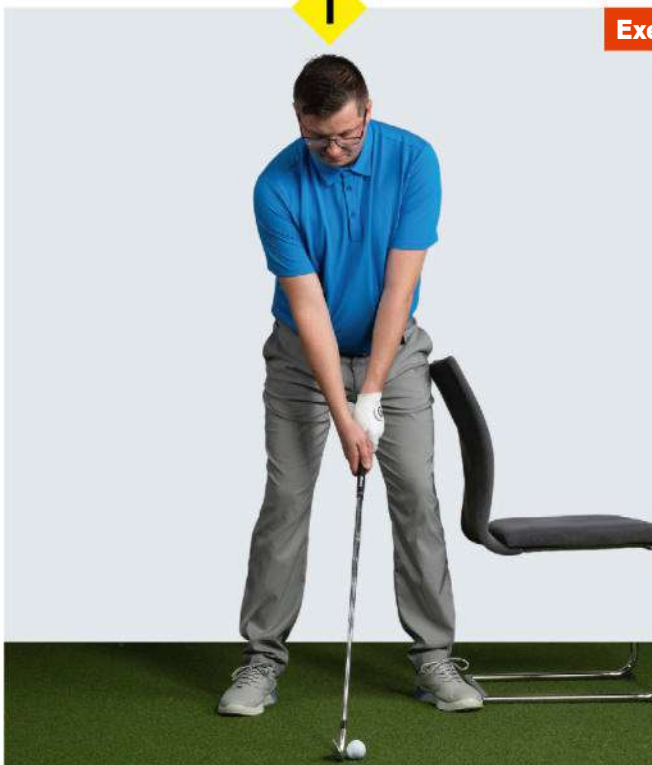
STEVEN THOMAS
PGA Fellow Professional and
Head of Coaching at 3
Hammers Golf Academy,
Wolverhampton
stevethomasgolf.com

1**Foot wedge**

Find an angled prop, similar to the orange wedge shown here, and put it under your trail foot as you take your stance. Anything that forces the instep to take your weight will do. With this new foot position in place, you will instantly note a resistance to any backward movement or sway, and feel primed to rotate more over the top of the ball.

Exercise 1**2****Stacked at the top**

Swing to the top. If you're an habitual lateral slider, this will feel awkward at first. But after a few backswings you'll feel more comfortable with the more centred, stacked backswing that rear foot wedge enforces. You should also feel signs of a better rotation; the trail hip moving more around behind you than drifting outwards.

1**Hip hold**

While Exercise 1 helps you to find and feel a better move, Exercise 2 moves things on by getting you to do it yourself. Place an object in front of your lead hip – it could be an old chair or even your golf bag – and set up so you can feel your hip against it. As you prepare to make your backswing, keep your attention on that contact point.

Exercise 2**2****Central station**

Swing to the top again, but keep that lead hip in contact with your prop throughout the backswing. With no foot wedge, you have to work harder to find this centred rotation; but achieving it means the swing's low point has held its position through the backswing. You'll find it so much easier to make consistently clean, powerful contact from here.

**CHEAP SHOT**

A 20-handicapper can expect to take a full shot more to get down from 60 yards than from 20 yards.

**TRUE PICTURE**

SCORE WITHIN 60 YDS



Whatever your skill level – or your clubhead speed – there will be times in a round of golf where the green is just out of reach. So what is the best strategy here? Should you target a specific area that appears to offer a safer route to the green? Or should you just go with power, taking your strongest option and bashing the ball as close to the green as possible?

Common sense will obviously colour your decision – there's little point going with power if a vast lake fronts the green – but when there is no big miss in play, we can use statistics to point us to the most shot-effective play. Let's see what the data from performance-tracking experts Shot Scope (www.shotscope.com) says about the effect of distance on scoring from 60 yards and in.

1 General scoring pattern

To understand the effects of distance on scoring, we can look at average shots to finish the hole from three different yardages – 20, 40 and 60 yards. If playing for position and leaving a longer pitch or chip was the better option in terms of score, we would expect to see the shots-to-finish figure lower at those longer distances... but it isn't. At every handicap level, the shots-to-finish figure drops as shots gets shorter. Clearly, when you are assessing that shot from back up the fairway, the power option is better for your scorecard.

YOUR COACH



DANNY MAUDE
Shot Scope ambassador and
host of a YouTube channel
boasting 1.2 million
subscribers.
Find out more at
Dannymaude.com



HARD YARDS

A 10-handicapper is just 0.09 of a shot worse than a scratch player at 20 yards, but 0.41 shots worse at 60 yards.



Retailing at £239.99, Shot Scope's V5 is a GPS watch delivering full-hole maps for 36,000 courses and more than 100 performance-tracking stats, including Strokes Gained. For more information, visit www.shotscope.com

2 Getting closer

Across all lie types, a 20-handicapper averages 2.56 shots to complete the hole from 20 yards, and 3.52 shots from 60 yards; so, if you play off 20, you can expect laying up just 40 yards shorter to a 'safer' spot to cost you almost an entire shot! Even at the other end of the scale, the scratch golfer's 2.25 average from 20 yards jumps to 2.79 from 60, costing half a shot every time. The 10-handicapper's data of 2.34 (20 yards), 2.94 (40 yards) and 3.2 (60 yards) typifies the value of getting as close to the hole as possible.

3 Less skill? More power!

To look at it another way: at 20 yards, the 20-handicapper's 2.56 average is relatively close to the scratch player's 2.25 and the 10-handicapper averages slightly better than the 5-handicapper (2.34 v 2.37). But skill differences matter more as the shot gets longer. At 60 yards, the 20-handicapper is now nearly three-quarters of a shot worse than the scratch player (3.52 v 2.79); the 10-handicapper goes from .01 of a shot worse to 0.4. Getting closer to the green is arguably more important for the less skilled golfer.

4 How good are you?

These figures are of course averages, and will help many players make better decisions on almost-driveable par 4s, out-of-range par 4s or short par 5s. But as benchmark performance figures by handicap, compare them to your own play inside 60 yards to assess your strongest and weakest distance. By all means follow the clear advice that when possible, closer to the green is almost always better, but compile your own stats at these scoring distances. Make your weak length your strength, and watch your scores tumble.

MIND GAMES

FORGET
INFORMATION:
TRY INSPIRATION!

Free yourself from data overload



By all accounts, the YouTube video-sharing platform is so vast and growing so rapidly that no one is able to give an accurate picture of how big it actually is. And yet, out of this content colossus, I have a clear favourite clip. It lasts 37 seconds, just long enough to show Seve Ballesteros rifling a long iron into the 5th at St Andrews in 1984, with playing partner Lee Trevino crooning, “Touch of class, baby,” in the background. I must have watched it at least 500 times.

OK, you’ve got me. I haven’t watched every video on YouTube. But even if we have another two or three pandemics and I somehow manage it, my favourite will not change. It’s hard to put into words why this particular video is so special to me, and I’m not sure what would be gained by doing so anyway. Suffice to say it stirs some deep emotions within me, emotions that bring my passion for the game right up to the surface. It inspires me.

Inspiration appears to be in short supply these days – probably because its value cannot be quantified or measured. But valuable it most certainly is. Inspiration helps us find solutions when we lose our way. It motivates us to make our best effort, it helps us put success and failure into their proper context and it moves the game from a dry, intellectual exercise into a visceral, emotional experience. In short, it enriches our relationship with the game. Canadian golfing savant Moe Norman would talk of the importance of “playing golf from the heart”. When you have inspiration in your game, this is exactly what happens.

Unfortunately for golfers everywhere, the modern currency is not inspiration but information. If you want to know how much weight a tour pro has on his lead foot at impact, or what the ideal spin/launch is for a 98mph swing speed, there are dozens of videos that will tell you. Of course information has its place, but its proliferation means we run the serious risk of it having it dominate our golfing

experience. Yes, it can be useful; occasionally, even interesting. But inspirational? Not a chance. And the game becomes thinner as a result.

I am certainly not about to advocate booting information into touch and going all-out for inspiration, but I do believe that if you want golf to play a fuller and more rewarding role in your life, some

redressing of the balance is in order. Here are four ways you can do just that.

1. YouTube (as previously advertised). Don’t just look for the next dry dissertation on ground reaction forces. Find some footage that appeals not to your head, but to your heart. It could be a montage of Sam Snead swings, a beginner holing out from a bunker or a three-year-old Rory demonstrating a child’s genius.

Anything that gets your golfing juices flowing. When you have these images in your mind’s eye, the game seems full of possibility. Its challenge becomes a joy instead of a chore.

2. Go deep. We know what it’s like during a round of golf... and in the clubhouse afterwards; we have surface conversations. We swap stories about football, what’s going on at work, the state of our backs. But could you be brave enough to open up something other the usual chit-chat, to go a little deeper perhaps? Imagine asking your comrades what made them fall in love with the game, the greatest round they ever played, what golf really means to them? If that’s sounding a little sappy or awkward to you, I understand... but if you can get down into the intensity, the emotion of the game, you can come away from that

conversation with some inspirational and rewarding stories that give you a better perspective on the game, and maybe even the push you need to take your game forward. You’ll create some deeper bonds with your playing partners too.

3. Study course design. The golf course is not your enemy... but its creator certainly is. The course itself is essentially a series of puzzles, created by the architect, for you to solve. So what are those puzzles? What traps have been set? And how might you overcome them?

When you become fascinated by course design, you see the game in a much more rounded and deeper context. Instead of hating that deep bunker in front of the sixth green, you start to understand its positioning, its depth, and that respect translates into smarter play. But moreover, because you are now trying to outwit the designer rather than bludgeon him to death with information, golf becomes a game again instead of some sterile pursuit, based on only logic and intellect.

4. Find yourself a real-life mentor. It could be someone in your town who was a tour pro back in the 1980s, the previous head pro who served your club for four decades, the current club champion or the 75-year-old who still plays off a 5-handicap. Whoever it is, seek out their company. Ask them about their story, the lessons they have learned, their relationship with the game. A video can be great... but when you find the right interaction with the right human, inspiration can jump to a whole new level.

YOUR COACH

**KARL MORRIS**

Karl has worked with multiple Major winners. Check out his *Brain Booster* podcasts for free on iTunes
www.themindfactor.com



TG CHALLENGE

SLEEVE PUTTING



If we were to write down a list of reasons why short putts are missed, 'poor aim' and 'poor focus' would be right up there at the top of the list. For this month's Challenge, I'm going to show you a fun way to work on both. All you need is a putter, a practice green and a sleeve of three balls. But don't throw away the sleeve; it's about to become your favourite training aid.



1. Line aid

Find a straight three or four-foot putt on the practice green. Empty the sleeve of balls and open both ends of the sleeve. Place it midway between the ball and the hole, making sure its length is aligned with the ball-hole path. This gives you a really useful visual for the ball-hole line, boosting your awareness of square and straight.

2. The Challenge: Win tunnel

As well as a visual aid for the putt, the open-ended sleeve also forms a perfect, ball-shaped tunnel for you to putt through. Your challenge is to putt all three balls through the tunnel – each one holed of course – without having to reposition it.

3. What you're learning

Take up this Challenge and you will quickly realise how the smaller target and higher tariff force you to focus harder. You can't just bang the ball at the cup any more; instead, you'll have to double down on precision and accuracy. Keep going until you get all three balls through an unmoved sleeve. Then remove it and strike the same putt; with your perception of line enhanced and your focus improved, your performance will soar.

YOUR COACH



SIMON PAYNE

UKCC Level 3 Coach and PGA Fellow Professional at Cowglen GC, Glasgow



Erectile problems can turn men's lives upside down – but a revolutionary new device could be the solution.

Vertica® is a life-changing device used at home that could help aid the erectile dysfunction condition and is now available in the UK

Nearly half of British men have experienced erectile dysfunction according to recent NHS research, yet many men who encounter difficulties with their sexual function often do not know how to cope. Indeed, most men suffer in silence and avoid seeking appropriate medical treatment.

“Vertica is a revolutionary idea and could be life-changing for men suffering with erectile dysfunction”

– Dr Fabio Castiglione, Urologist at King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Ohh-Med Medical UK has developed Vertica, a clinically tested new medical device to use from the comfort of your home for the treatment of erectile dysfunction. With over 5,000 devices sold so far, Vertica treats not only the symptoms of erectile dysfunction, but also the root cause – the aging of the collagen fibres in the penis and the escape of blood entering it.

The Vertica treatment is drug-free and suitable for home use, with users stating they are seeing results after only four to six weeks.

Clinically tested

Developed by urologists, Vertica is supported by efficacy and safety data from a pilot clinical study published by the peer-reviewed International Journal of Impotence Research. The results demonstrated an improved erectile function among participants, with an 85% success rate without any side effects.

The Vertica treatment is performed by the man himself, at home, and at his own pace. There is no need for a doctor's prescription, and the man can treat himself discreetly without sharing his condition with others, which may further feelings of embarrassment. However, seeking professional medical advice with any on-going health issues, is always recommended.

Best of all, Vertica prepares you to be always ready by restoring the physical mechanism that 'traps' the blood in the organ for a sustained amount of time and could subsequently improve performance for a lengthy period.



What customers say

“Vertica is simply wonderful,” said Graham, from London. “After just a few treatments I noticed significant improvement, and within a few months I was back to my old self. I got the results I wanted, and my life changed. The combination with ED pills is perfect too – a winning solution.”

Ben, from Germany, has also experienced life-changing results. *“I have been using Vertica for around six weeks now and I have to say it really delivers,” he said. “I can honestly say that Vertica saved my life.”*

Robert from Ontario, Canada, added: *“For the first time in 25 years, I have achieved a natural erection without the aid of pills. I am beyond ecstatic. Thank You!”*



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WHICH WEDGE?

How to choose the best for
your game from the multitude
of new options out there.



NEW IRONS: CALLAWAY

The Apex iron gets an
AI-powered makeover.



NEW IRONS: MIZUNO

The JPX replacements push
new boundaries.



NEW IRONS: PXG

The tech-packed 0311 GEN7
family hits the streets.



DRIVING RANGE TEST

Toptracer versus Trackman –
the verdict.

CALLAWAY'S AI-POWERED APEX MAKEOVER

A more consistent approach to better scoring

Since their first Apex iron laid the foundations for the players' distance iron category in 2014, Callaway's premium family has been renowned for offering some of the best irons available.

Callaway admit their Apex 21 models didn't quite hit the spot in the same way as previous versions. But rather than rush out an all-new

franchise, the company took a step back to assess the market and analyse what sort of tech would truly help golfers play better.

Callaway wanted to understand why rival irons such as TaylorMade's P790 and Titleist's T150 have become so popular among decent golfers. They realised that, over time, too much emphasis had

been heaped on distance, whereas greater consistency plays a bigger role in helping golfers score lower, more frequently.

So they went back to the drawing board and came up with the hollow body Apex Ai200 and the cavity back Apex Ai300 (plus a titanium-faced iron we reveal on page 18).

Here's what you need to know.



THE SPECS

Callaway Apex Ai200

£1,199 (s), £1,299 (g)

Category: Player's distance iron

Forgiveness rating: 2.5/5

7-iron loft: 30°

Stock shaft: True Temper Dynamic Gold Mid 100 (s), UST HDC Recoil Dart 80 (g)

Callaway Apex Ai300

£1,199 (s), £1,299 (g)

Category: Game improver iron

Forgiveness rating: 3/5

7-iron loft: 29°

Stock shaft: True Temper Dynamic Gold Mid 90 (s), UST HDC Recoil Dart 70 (g)

Callaway Apex Ti Fusion

£1,999 (g)

Category: Player's distance iron

Forgiveness rating: 3/5

7-iron loft: 30.5°

Stock shaft: True Temper Dynamic Gold Mid Gunmetal 115 (s), Mitsubishi MMT (g)



SCAN HERE
FOR THE BEST
IRONS

THE INTERVIEW

EQUIPMENT EDITOR
SIMON DADDOW'S
VERDICT

FOUR DETAILS YOU NEED TO KNOW



Everything is forged

There's a real trend among the best player's distance irons right now to combine a forged face with a cast body or vice versa; features that trade off sound and feel for cost savings. Callaway wanted the Apex Ai200 and Ai300 to deliver tour level feel and sound, so unlike some of the competition, the hollow Ai200 has a soft 1020 forged chassis along with a forged 455 carpenter steel face (Ai300 is a forged cavity back), so golfers get super sound and feel along with a powerful speed numbers.



Refined and sophisticated

To get premium player's distance and the best mid-handicap irons into the hands of their target audience, irons need to look fabulous. That's why the Ai200 and Ai300 feature some refinements in shaping over previous models. The Ai200 features a thinner topline and shorter blade length than the Apex 21, a model which didn't have a hollow body, while the Ai300 targets game improvers with more offset, blade length and a wider sole and topline. Expect a sleeker appearance than the deep cavity back Apex 21 DCB.



Expect more consistency

With more and more companies talking up the importance of consistency across their irons, it feels like we're entering a world where scoreability is more important than flat-out launch monitor numbers. Callaway say they've seen competitor irons offering up carry distances with 10-15 yards of difference on shots that feel well struck, so the Ai200 and Ai300 have Ai Smart faces to target extra speed, but also to maintain launch and spin when shots don't hit the middle.



New naming rules

Part of the reason Callaway feel the Apex family needed some repositioning is because golfers didn't understand previous product names. This time, a new numeric naming convention means the models run in order of forgiveness, so the bigger the number, the more playable the model. The idea is also open to other models being potentially inserted at any point. The Ai200 falls into the player's distance category, while Ai300 is much more of a game improver's model.

Q Who are they aimed at?

It's not too difficult to spot who each of these new models is aimed at. The Ai200 falls into the player's distance iron category, so it's for reasonable players who want long distances without sacrificing feel and consistency. See it as a competitor to the TaylorMade P790, Titleist T200, Ping i530 or PXG 0311 P GEN6 and you'll be thinking exactly along the right lines. The Ai300 is much more of a game improver model, which will sit well in the hands of players who don't want to compromise on the look, sound, feel or consistency of their forgiving irons. See it as a forged rival to the cast Ping G430, TaylorMade Qi or forged Titleist T350.

Q What are the benefits of the Ai's 'Smart Faces'?

To counteract distance inconsistencies in hollow irons, the Ai200 and Ai300 have Ai Smart faces to target increased speed but also maintain launch and spin when shots don't hit the centre. It's refreshing to hear how the designers have focused on creating healthy ball flights with more launch, more spin and steeper descent angles, all points I and TG test pro Neil Wain have been promoting for years. The idea is based on hitting a distance number consistently with less variation, which of course can only help improve your scoring potential.

**'CALLAWAY WENT
BACK TO THE
DRAWING BOARD
WITH THE APEX AI'**

Q What's the story with the Ai Ti Fusion?

With 2024 being the 10th anniversary of the original Apex, Callaway wanted to create what they consider to be the holy grail of irons. Just like brands who create concept cars to showcase how innovative their engineering teams can be, Callaway made the Ai Fusion to try something new and make a product the company have never created before (see page 18).



MIZUNO PUSHES BOUNDARIES WITH NEW JPX925

Three models combine classic looks, sound and feel with brand-new game-improving tech

Mizuno are no strangers to a challenge. Two years ago, they released the JPX923, creating a family of irons that appealed to both the modern and classic golfer. But with an update now due, Mizuno went about exploring areas they've never been to in the popular series, to see how far they could push their technologies in pursuit of performance. And this is the result: the JPX925 Hot Metal.

With the success of the previous generation, there was always going to be a lot of carry-over from the 923 design. Chief among these is the nickel chromoly used across the face and hosel, which allows for a very high strength-to-weight ratio, so you can make the face thinner and increase ball speeds.

This high-strength choice has been pushed to extremes with the new CORTECH Contour Ellipse

face. A complete re-engineering essentially means the face is 30% thinner when compared to the 923. If you want an idea of what that looks like, stack 12 pieces of paper on top of one another and you'll be close to replicating the 1.2mm face.

With the new shape, which stretches from high toe to low heel, ball speed is retained across the whole face, aiding in pure strikes as well as mishits.



SCAN HERE
FOR THE BEST
IRONS

THE SPECS

Hot Metal

£150 each or £900 for six

Available: 4-SW

Category: Game-improver iron

Stock shafts: NS Pro 950 NEO / Recoil Dart ESX (plus 50 no-upcharge options)

7-iron loft: 28°

Hot Metal HL

£150 each or £900 for six

Available: 4-SW

Category: High-handicap / moderate speed

Stock shafts: NS Pro 950 NEO / Recoil Dart ESX (plus 50 no-upcharge options)

7-iron loft: 31°

Hot Metal Pro

£165 each or £990 for six

Available: 4-GW

Category: Player's distance iron

Stock shafts: NS Pro 950 NEO / Recoil Dart ESX (plus 50 no-upcharge options)

7-iron loft: 28°

FOUR DETAILS YOU NEED TO KNOW



What they share

For the first time in the JPX series, each iron has a multi-material construction. For the 925, this means tungsten has been brought into the long and mid-irons to lower the centre of gravity, increasing the sweetspot in the lower parts of the face, while increasing launch and height.



Hot Metal

This is the 'standard' JPX925. It has more offset and a wider sole to help with turf interaction, and slightly stronger lofts. The back of the head is the most uniform, with chrome across the badging. In our tests, it launched 0.8° higher and was 1.2mph faster than the 923 Hot Metal.



Hot Metal HL

Identical to the standard model for offset and topline thickness, the HL has weaker loft, to help players who need help to get the ball in the air. A slightly wider sole gets the club head back out of the ground faster to stop steep players digging the leading edge too much. It's built for better control.



Hot Metal Pro

Designed to sit on the fence between the game-improver category and a players' distance iron. With a slimmer sole and reduced toplines, this will appeal to the golfer wanting more help in ball speed but less in directional control. Less offset contributes to a more traditional look at address.



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ARE THESE PXG'S BEST IRONS EVER?

New GEN7 family incorporates all the brand has learned over the last decade

PXG changed the irons landscape in 2013 when they revealed the 0311 range, a hollow body, injection-moulded family that prioritised feel, forgiveness and fitting. Now, everything PXG have learned about irons has been incorporated into their newest family, the GEN7.

Five-times forged and then milled, the two irons (P and XP) feature the thinnest faces in golf, a mere 0.05in thick, combined with a new internal

polymer. This material is exceptionally lightweight and helps reduce the mass of the core, which allows more weight to be positioned low and to the perimeter of the back side of the clubhead, increasing the moment of inertia (MOI).

Combined with PXG's variable face tech, the idea maximises face deflection and delivers faster ball speed while creating an exceptional sound and feel. Here's everything else you need to know...



THE OPTIONS

GEN7 0311 P is engineered to deliver an ideal balance of workability and forgiveness. Developed for low to mid-handicap players, these player's irons feature moderate offset, a mid-size head design, a clean aesthetic and a surprising amount of forgiveness. GEN7 XP is created for mid to high-handicap players. A larger head with more offset delivers extreme distance performance and excellent forgiveness.



WEIGHT GAINS

An internal 20g toe weight balances the centre of gravity (CG) location in the centre of the face while boosting MOI to increase forgiveness. Precision Weighting Technology is employed near the CG on the back of the clubhead. This large weight is used to achieve the optimal swing weight during a fitting.

'COLLECTIVELY, THESE WEIGHTING ELEMENTS SUPPORT A PREVIOUSLY UNATTAINABLE COMBINATION OF DISTANCE, WORKABILITY AND FORGIVENESS'



BLACK OPS

The game improver Black Ops iron has a thicker top rail, larger face profile and increased offset. To boost MOI, a Dual Cavity Design takes mass from the club's centre and redistributes that weight around the perimeter. The inner cavity is filled with XCOR2, a lightweight polymer designed to increase forgiveness on heel-toe and high-low mishits.

PXG GEN7 0311
 £209 (chrome), £219 (Xtreme Dark) per club
 Category: Game improver (XP), Player's distance (P)

PXG BLACK OPS
 £139 per club
 Category: Mid to high-handicapper

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PREMIUM GOLF ACCESSORIES



STRIPE IT, WITH TAYLORMADE

Ever since TaylorMade launched the Tour Response Stripe in 2022, the company's ball team has been asked: "When are you going to make a TaylorMade TP5 Stripe?" Well, it's taken a while – but here it is. The size and shape of the 22mm band running around the equator is the same as that on the Tour Response. However, at the request of Tour players, the colour's been removed.

TAYLORMADE TP5 / TP5X STRIPE
£49.99 per dozen

BRILLIANT VALUE FROM BENROSS

The Delta XT woods and irons from Benross put an emphasis on modern technology – but at a (very) reasonable price.

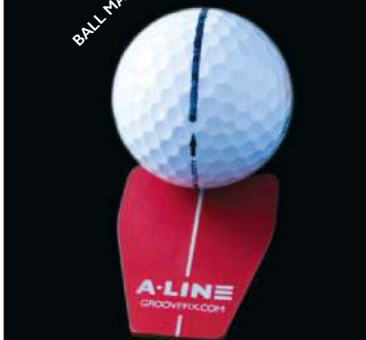
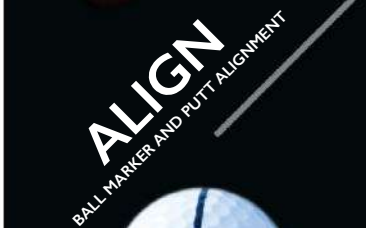
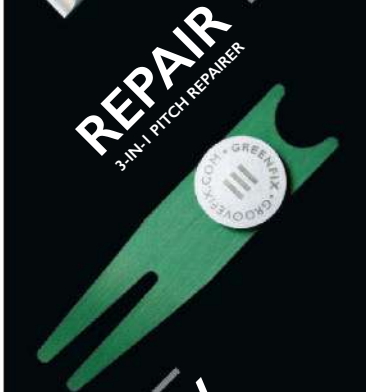
The £229 driver has an aerodynamic crown, a titanium face with a Speed Slot in the sole, a sliding, movable weight and an adjustable hosel. A matching fairway wood starts at just £149.

The irons have a two-piece hollow body construction with a thin, springy face, a fixed weight port to up forgiveness and a refined profile for a classy look at address. Both are available from American Golf.



DELTA XT DRIVER
£229
Loft: 10.5° (adjustable +/- 2°)
Stock shaft: Fujikura Ventus Red

DELTA XT IRONS
£499
Available: 5-GW
Stock shaft: KBS Tour Lite Steel



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LIFETIME GUARANTEE

TOPTRACER vs TRACKMAN

As new digital driving ranges open all the time, we've put the two main players

TOPTRACER RANGE

TOTAL: 40/40

Ease of use

Whether you download the app and scan the code (to access and save your data) or just want to play as a guest, it's very easy to navigate. The game modes are intuitive, quick to load and quick to display ball flight info. The screen is also fast and responsive. **10/10**

Game modes

Toptracer have 11 game modes and something for everyone. As well as options for beginners, including classic courses from forward tees, Toptracer also cater for serious golfers who want to get better. You can keep track of your stats on an app, too. **10/10**

User experience

Toptracer uses 3D graphics rather than the 2.5D found on most other systems. This is most evident in Virtual Golf, where the camera moves to follow the flight until the ball comes to rest. With other systems, the ball comes into view in static/fixed cameras at the end of a flight. Graphics are superb; playing the Old Course is super realistic and the drive on 17 over the hotel is still nerve-racking. **10/10**

The data

You've got all the numbers you'd get on a launch monitor: total distance, carry distance, ball speed, launch, curve, apex, hang time, offline

yardage... and you can have all that data for every club in the bag and every shot. It's all kept in the Toptracer app, too. You can analyse it to your heart's content, or just skim the top-line numbers. **10/10**

TG Verdict

We paid £10 for 100 balls at Woodhall Spa. That's more than you'd pay at a traditional range, but it felt like a much more involved, immersive experience. And you can't underestimate how much more fun it is having a real purpose to your practice. If there was a Toptracer near us, we'd go to it over a normal driving range every time, because they are just much more fun.

WHERE TO FIND ONE

With around 200 ranges now in the UK (and more than 1,000 worldwide), Toptracer is the dominant player in the market (75% market share). Visit toptracer.com/locations to find your nearest range.





SCAN HERE FOR THE BEST GEAR

RANGES: WHICH IS BEST?

head to head to find out which is most worthy of your time and money

TRACKMAN RANGE

TOTAL: 35/40

Ease of use

The iconic orange box is a familiar sight on tour ranges and fitting bays, but Trackman don't have as many UK ranges as Toptracer, with half as many locations. As with Toptracer, you really need to download the app to get the best from it. That will access your stats and let you play with other golfers, either at the range or all over the world. It's simple to sync, but not as slick as Toptracer's - game modes were a bit laggy at times. **9/10**

Game modes

Trackman have three game modes: Courses (virtual golf), Practice (data-driven) and Games (play alone or with others). It feels more geared to

seasoned golfers, but a lot of the data is similar, as is the quality of the graphics. If you want to improve, Trackman offers data on ball speed, launch angle and much more. And if you hit 'convert', it swaps numbers from the range ball into numbers for a tour ball. **8/10**

User experience

The graphics are superb. We played the front nine at Troon, moving the target on the screen to reflect the markers on the course, but it wasn't quite as intuitive as Toptracer's virtual golf offering. The games also weren't quite as comprehensive. Great for data and practice; not quite as good for fun. **8/10**

The data

Exceptional insight on every shot. We used the 'My Bag' function, where you can see a quick average yardage for each club in the bag. Of course, you can get into minute detail if you want to, and it's all kept on the Trackman app. **10/10**

TG Verdict

While Trackman's data is undoubtedly accurate, the user experience is not quite as slick as Toptracer and a little laggy in places. It still massively elevates the traditional driving range experience - but if we had the option of either, we'd rather buy a bucket of balls at Toptracer.



WHERE TO FIND ONE

There are half as many Trackman ranges as Toptracer locations currently in the UK. To find your nearest, visit trackman.com/locator



WHICH WEDGE IS BEST FOR YOU?

With a raft of new models this year and options to suit everyone, how do you choose? Let us guide you...



SCAN HERE
FOR THE BEST
WEDGES

Upgrading your wedges depends on a few factors that can include how often you play, course condition, groove wear and your practice habits. Generally, we'd recommend golfers look to replace their wedges every 60 to 100 rounds, which will give most golfers a two-year life cycle. And that neatly coincides with the launch cycles of golf's biggest brands, who all have new models out for 2024.

While the tech upgrades in new wedges might not be as headline-grabbing as they are with drivers or irons, there are still advantages to be found – shaper grooves, more grooves, deeper grooves, more forgiveness, more options...

And when you think about how many times you use a wedge compared to how often you pull driver, and the huge variety of shots and lies you use it for, it makes sense to get the best for your game.

CALLAWAY

CALLAWAY OPUS

£179

Lofts: 48-60°

Grinds: Four (S, W, C, T)

Finishes: Brushed Chrome and Black Shadow

WHO ARE THEY FOR? This new model boasts Spin Gen Face Technology, which can be broken down into three components, all working together to provide a tighter performance around the greens. Callaway still use what they claim to be the most aggressive grooves in golf, but in the Opus they've cut the distance between each groove, so there are more of them on the face. A high-intensity blast material containing quartz lets Callaway impart a deeper roughness onto the face to provide more friction, while micro grooves – shallow, laser-cut lines in between the larger grooves – have been placed at angles to help increase the grab on the ball even when the face is opened.

'PLATINUM IS WHERE CALLAWAY REALLY FEEL THEY CAN SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM OTHER BRANDS'

CALLAWAY OPUS PLATINUM

£229

Lofts: 54-60°

Grinds: Two (S and Z)

Finishes: Platinum Chrome and Platinum Blue

WHO ARE THEY FOR? Platinum is where Callaway really feel they can separate themselves from other brands, by producing a higher performance wedge using premium materials. Bonded tungsten (17g) helps to lower the ball flight in the higher lofts to create more predictable flights. The other area where Platinum sets itself apart is in the use of Metal-Injection Moulding technology, a first for Callaway. MiM construction is about injecting a mixture of core metals – in this case, a blend of materials that Callaway has created – directly into a head shape, allowing for more precise control on that shape and its profile with less hand finishing. The result is what Callaway refer to as premium feel, more in line with what you might expect from a forged product. The material also helps dampen sound, leading to a softer feedback and feel that all players will enjoy.

CALLAWAY CB

£149

Lofts: 48-60° (full-face grooves from 54°)

Grinds: One (Full Sole)

Finishes: Chrome

WHO ARE THEY FOR? We've proved in numerous tests that cavity back wedges can really help players who use cavity back irons, by offering a degree of forgiveness that tour-style wedges just cannot match. And this is Callaway's version. The CB has a larger head size and there are full face grooves from 54° upwards, making them really easy to hit. It's Callaway's first wedge to use Urethane Microspheres behind the face, to enhance feel and sound, along with aggressive 'Jaws' grooves, which are given a face blast treatment to increase their roughness and give extra spin. It all comes together to deliver extra forgiveness.



CLEVELAND

RTX 6 ZIPCORE

£159 (s), £169 (g)

Lofts: 46-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: Four (Low, Low+, Mid, Full)

Finishes: Tour Satin, Tour Rack (Raw), Black Satin

WHO ARE THEY FOR? Cleveland have been the wedge kings since 1979, fine-tuning each model over the years to produce more spin, more consistency, more versatility and even greater playability. The RTX 6 is packed with new tech and it starts with HydraZip, which uses dynamic face blasting and laser lines to maximise friction for improved

spin consistency in the dry and wet. We love the compact size, the straight leading-edge profile and the new super aggressive CNC-milled pattern on the toe, which brings full face groove levels of stopping power to a traditional groove model. In our big wedge test earlier this year the ZipCore hovered 300rpm above average levels of backspin. And from 100 yards out, our test pro's shots had a 9-yard drop-off (from longest to shortest) and a 4.9-yard left-to-right dispersion, with a shot area 37% tighter than our average. There's also a full-face version for 2024.

CBX 4 ZIPCORE

£159

Lofts: 44-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: Three (V-Shaped, S-Shaped, C-Shaped)

Finishes: Satin

WHO ARE THEY FOR? The idea that club golfers who use cavity back irons should also use cavity back wedges is a sound one, and the CBX4 is the best money can buy. As far as numbers go, this is a top performer for many reasons. Yes, it's beautifully milled and its laser-etched face produced 1.7% more back spin than our test average this year. But more importantly, that spin was

consistent. The CBX's beauty doesn't just lie in numbers, though. It looks good and feels great, is beautifully finished and many golfers will struggle to spot the differences between its slightly larger head and the tour-level RTX 6 at address. The icing on the cake is the ton of loft choices available to you, but also the lack of sole grind and bounce options – Cleveland only make it in their target audience's most popular specs – and in a full face version, too.



BENROSS

REV 2.0

£79

Lofts: 50-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: One (standard)

Finishes: Brushed nickel

WHO ARE THEY FOR? When you really need two or three wedge options in your bag to cover off different yardage gaps, some of the clubs here will set you back well over £500. Or you can have three Rev 2.0s in different lofts for less than half that... They're not lacking in performance, either. With a tighter groove pattern across all lofts and a CNC-milled face, there's bags of spin on tap. For the first time, the REV 2.0 wedges between 56-60° lofts also feature a full-face groove pattern, to impart more spin no matter where you impact the face. Available exclusively at American Golf.



PING



S159

£175 (s), £185 (g)

Lofts: 46-62° in 2° increments

Grinds: Six (B, H, S, W, E, T)

Finishes: Hydropearl 2.0 Chrome or Midnight

WHO ARE THEY FOR? Ping's previous Glide wedges never quite hit the spot with us. Even though the company talked up the brilliant hydrophobic finish tech, designed to neutralise the effects of damp conditions reducing spin, their blade lengths had a tendency to be a little long and look a little clunky to our eyes. But that's all changed in 2024. The s159 is one of the best-shaped and most desirable wedges we've seen this year. Its test numbers were impressive, too. With a backspin 300rpm above average, the s159 can really get approaches zipping across the green. It also posted the lowest backspin drop-off, which means you can expect good shot-to-shot spin consistency. If you're tempted by it, make sure you use Ping's superb wedge fitting app; there's a good selection of sole grinds, lofts and shaft options to dial into your ideal set-up.

PXG



0311 3X FORGED

£149

Lofts: 50-62° in 2° increments

Grinds: One (Versatile Sole Design)

Options: Chrome or Xtreme Dark

WHO ARE THEY FOR? Most modern wedges aren't forged. Brands like Titleist and Cleveland reckon it's possible to get the feel pros and amateurs want from a softer 8620 cast steel body. But PXG still see a premium in forging their new 0311 wedges, which are hit three times by the forge to compact the metal's grain structure. If you play premium forged irons, it makes sense to have a similar feel for short shots around the green, too. Full face grooves are CNC-milled so that each sits right on the edge of USGA geometry rules. To ensure consistent head shapes, sizes and profiles, the 0311 Forged (which doesn't have 100% milled heads) are polished by a robot.

SUGAR DADDY III

£279

Lofts: 50-62°

Grinds: Three (BP, C, S)

Options: Chrome or Xtreme Dark (£329)

WHO ARE THEY FOR? PXG were the first company to 100% CNC mill their wedges, back in 2017, doing so to ensure tighter manufacturing tolerances from club to club. This is the very latest version, triple forged and 100% CNC-milled. It features three innovative sole designs to allow players to find their ideal fit, including the high-toe BP with full-face grooves, as used by PXG founder Bob Parsons. A wider groove pattern also offers more control and consistency specific to trajectory and spin. PXG's Precision Weighting Technology, located near the centre of gravity on the back of the clubhead, can be adjusted in 2g increments during a fitting.



'PXG WERE THE FIRST TO 100% CNC MILL THEIR WEDGES, BACK IN 2017'

TAYLORMADE

MG4

£159

Lofts: 46-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: Three (Standard Bounce, Low Bounce, Tiger Grind)

Finishes: Tour Chrome Satin, Tour Matte Black

WHO ARE THEY FOR? Courtesy of its two cracking wedge families (the Hi-Toe 4 and MG4), TaylorMade always give us a tough choice to make when it comes to testing wedges. Of course, there are some definite benefits to using Hi-Toe wedges (including lower flying, higher spinning shots),

but you will need to love their shape and be happy using full face grooves. If you're the type of golfer who just wants a brilliant, traditionally shaped wedge with a familiar groove pattern, and your game will benefit from a ton of loft, sole grind and finish options, the MG4s will be right up your street. It was one of only three wedges in 2024 to create more than 8,000rpm backspin in the hands of our test pro. At 8,003rpm, the MG4 created 4.4% more spin than our test average.

HI-TOE 4

£149

Lofts: 50-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: Three (All Terrain Standard, All Terrain Versatility, All Terrain C Grind)

Finishes: Copper

WHO ARE THEY FOR? In just seven years, TaylorMade's high-toe wedge design (the bigger profile offers up greater confidence) changed how golfers approach the short game. With the exception of Titleist, all leading manufacturers now make their own version. Now into its fourth generation, TaylorMade say the Hi-Toe 4 offers more confidence, more spin and more consistency.

Toe pads have featured on previous Hi-Toe wedge models but this time the design is more pronounced. With more weight higher in the head, the centre of gravity is drawn up the face, so shots launch lower and with more spin, exactly the sort of qualities Justin Rose craved from the original. Laser-etched Spin Tread groove technology (also found on the MG4) channels more moisture and debris away from impact, promoting increased friction and spin. Full face grooves (54-60) also mean that no matter where shots impact the face, maximum spin is imparted.



TITLEIST

VOKEY DESIGN SM10

£169

Lofts: 46-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: Six (F, D, M, S, T, K)

Finishes: Tour Chrome, Jet Black, Nickel

WHO ARE THEY FOR? If you're in the market for a new tour-level wedge in 2024, this should ping your radar. The head shapes are beautifully simple and unfussy, with the leading edges being quite straight in the lower lofts and slightly more sculpted in the higher lofts. It gives a sense of playability and versatility right where you need it most. Unlike most of the competition, the SM10s don't come with fancy full-face grooves, modern high-toe shaping or the promise of a lightweight heel pad to remove inefficient mass. In a world where almost every other brand is trying to sell you tech-laden wedges, Vokey are happy just doing what they've done for years: creating great wedges with mass-market appeal. Make sure you get fitted and utilise the new Titleist wedge app to determine your perfect set-up from the myriad options available.



MIZUNO

T24

£185

Lofts: 46-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: Five (S, D, C, V, X)

Finishes: Soft White Satin, Denim Copper and Tour Raw

WHO ARE THEY FOR? Unlike their competition, which are often cast, the T24s are forged from a similar material to Mizuno's irons, and this new generation have some subtle refinements to make them more attractive and higher spinning. Mizuno wedges have

had CNC-milled QuadCut grooves for a while, but the number of grooves on the T24s, and their shaping, changes depending on loft. You'll find 17 grooves on the 46-52° lofts, but from 54-60°, 15 wider grooves are more efficient at grabbing and gripping more ball to impart maximum spin on partial shots closer to the green. Additional laser-etched HydroFlow Micro grooves also channel away moisture, so there's less spin drop-off between dry and wet conditions.



S23

£185

Lofts: 46-60°

Grinds: Four (S, C, D, X)

Finishes: White Satin and Copper Cobalt

WHO ARE THEY FOR? The S23 attacks cavity back forgiveness and consistency head-on as, thanks to a centralised sweetspot, golfers should expect a better feel and greater spin performance. Our test data supports Mizuno's thinking. This was our fourth-highest spinning wedge of 2024, which should at least highlight the S23 as a force to be reckoned with. It wasn't finished there, though. Throw in a tied first for smallest carry distance drop-off (six yards) and the tightest shot area of all 20 (52° samples) wedges hit, and you've got a seriously good wedge on your hands. But before we go all gooey here, we do need to point out that at £185 a pop, this is one of the most expensive mainstream wedge families you can buy into in 2024.



WILSON

STAFF MODEL ZM

£145

Lofts: 50-60° in 2° increments

Grinds: Low, Mid and High Bounce

Finishes: Chrome

WHO ARE THEY FOR? Wilson Staff are effectively turning back the clock and going all heritage and timeless classic with their Staff Model franchise, and judging by the expanding line-up, the move is reaping rewards. The Staff Model ZM sits nicely at address, with a compact but high-toe feel about it. Wilson say the new ZM grooves turn this new model into a serious spin machine. In our tests it didn't post the very highest spin numbers, but buying wedges is all about feel, reliability and confidence, and the ZM certainly gave our testers those traits in abundance.

'WILSON STAFF ARE TURNING BACK THE CLOCK AND GOING ALL HERITAGE AND TIMELESS WITH THE ZM'





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THE WINTER SUN RANKING

Use our comprehensive travel guide to get the
most from your sun-kissed October-March trip



Regular readers will realise I regularly change the way our Top 100s are presented. This is not done on a whim, but based around what I think is the optimum way to give the most information to you.

This month, I'm doing it as a series of travel features with the ranking following at the end. The list itself is naturally important and will hopefully be a helpful guide to planning a trip to one or more of the countries covered here, all of which are perfect winter sun destinations. But because they are a little further afield and might be roads less well-travelled for some readers, I thought that a sense of what to expect from these areas and countries would be useful. I have been to 61 of the 80 courses ranked, with my biggest gaps in Tunisia and some of the lower-ranked Egyptian courses. There is very little I haven't seen in the Middle East and Morocco, so I'm writing these guides from a position of some experience.

I love this part of the world. Clearly, it varies a lot – from the idyllic beaches of Saadiyat Beach to the hustle of Marrakesh, and the skyscrapers of Dubai to the dreamy Red Sea coast of Egypt – but the common theme is outstanding golf.

As a guide to the quality of the courses, I'd say the top 30 of this ranking would get in the Continental European Top 200. Therefore, although these courses are generally fairly new and in countries with minimal golf pedigree, they are very good indeed.

While my widespread experience of the region meant

I was a strong voice in terms of the ranking, I had plenty of input, notably but not exclusively from Paul Dennis, Lloyd Walton, Paul Lacey, Fergal O'Shea, Steve Thomas, Tom Buchanan, Shane Peacock and James Motley.

I hope you enjoy the guide, and get in touch if you have knowledge of the courses in these areas.

Chris Bertram, Top 100 Editor

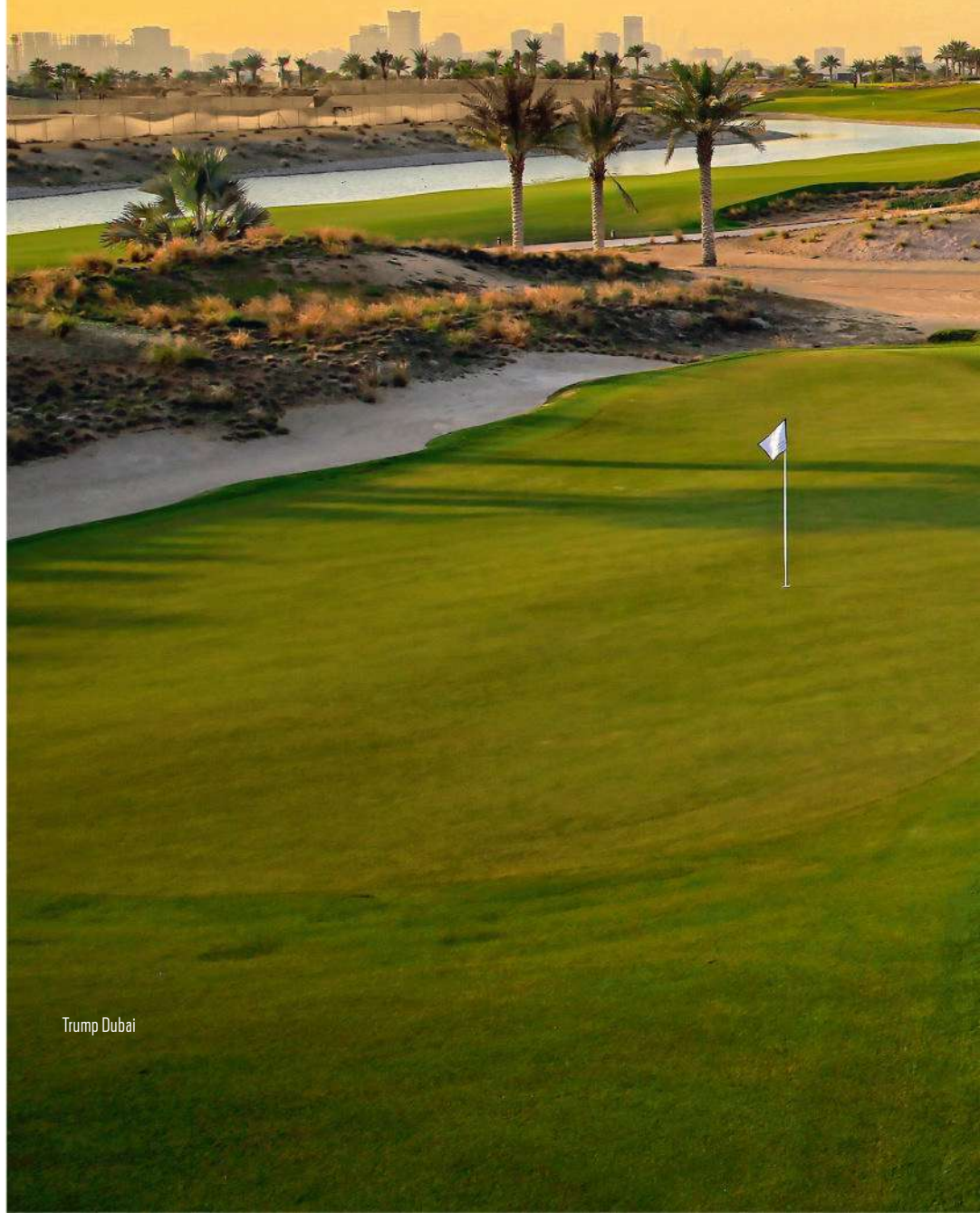
Ultimate guide to DUBAI

The liveliest of the United Arab Emirates is also the one with the largest number of golf courses – as well as many of the best.

Visiting it is possibly an intimidating prospect to some, given factors such as its size, prices and reputation as a busy, party city. There is no reason to be wary of it though and hopefully our guide will take away any concern while showing you can plan a trip on a decent budget yet enjoy incredibly high quality.

Dubai is super safe, populated almost exclusively by friendly ex-pats, and easy to get around whether in a hire car (take it from someone who has drive around the city a lot) or cheap taxi. It is undeniably busy though, so if a lively atmosphere isn't for you and you want to avoid traffic, look elsewhere in the Middle East.

I don't necessarily want a 'buzzy' atmosphere and never relish battling through traffic, but I definitely wouldn't let the thought of either of these elements put



Trump Dubai

you off; Dubai is the chameleon of the MENA region and can give you absolutely whatever you want from your stay.

And, without question, its range of courses is the best in the region. The **Majlis course at Emirates** is the best known by virtue of it hosting the Dubai Desert Classic each year.

It was not just one of the first courses built in the region but also one of the first big developments, as that famous picture of a course and little around it from the 1990s will always remind us.

It is a Karl Litten design with an emphasis on traditional architectural values rather than an explosive American style. It is characterised by nice elevation changes, mature trees, neat shrubs and of course

THAT view down the 8th. It's a true 'I was there' picture for every golfer visiting Dubai.

It was the clear No.1 in Dubai for many years but now has stiff competition, notably from **The Els Club** and Trump Dubai. The former is laid out on an undulating topography of wide fairways, waving wispy rough and minimal trees and foliage.

You need a good short game here because the greens are huge and are four-putt territory when really quick, while there are lots of acute run-offs. It's noted by locals for its exceptional conditioning.

Gil Hanse's cerebral design at **Trump Dubai** splits opinion a little. Some absolutely love it and would have had it in the top three comfortably, but some stronger players seem less keen on its

emphasis of wide fairways and angles of approach.

The celebrated American architect has certainly produced a typically clever and nuanced course, one characterised by short grass – with greens running seamlessly into the next tee – and sandy waste areas, which look as natural as you would expect they would on a desert course. I personally find it fun, entertaining and playable yet stimulating and unquestionably challenging.

Jumeirah Golf Estates (Earth), home to the DP World Tour Championship, is everything you would expect from a big-budget championship course.

This Greg Norman design has fairways punctuated by white-sand bunkers and





Emirates Majlis

framed by deep-red ochre borders, mature trees and shrubs. It is a serious test.

Dubai Creek opened in 1993 and like Emirates GC, has an iconic clubhouse, its design mirroring the sails of an Arab dhow boat.

It has hosted two Dubai Desert Classics and its location overlooking the creek and marina means it was difficult not to end up with a fairly spectacular course. The creek is in play on four holes and the climax is arguably the best stretch in the whole region.

Dubai Hills is the most recent addition to the emirate and I would definitely put it in the top tier along with the Majlis, Els, Trump, Earth and Creek.

Created by Gary Johnstone of European Golf Design, it manages that rare feat of challenging the strong player while remaining playable for higher handicaps. An all-world view of the Burj Khalifa is your constant backdrop as you play the 5th.

The **Fire** is regarded as the No.2 at **Jumeirah Golf Estates** but there is not loads in it and at least one panellist likes it more. Another very solid modern test, it starts strongly and is a little more forgiving than the **Earth**.

Arabian Ranches was originally extremely tough, set down with paspalum grass that bounced your ball into the rough or the desert a lot if you missed its fairways.

That has now been cleaned out so it is not so exacting or time consuming now. It has a 'linksy', flattish look. For me, it's the leader of the next tier of courses here.

Emirates (Faldo) opened in 1996 and was originally nine holes named 'The Wadi' - from the Arabic word for 'valley' - but it was re-designed significantly in 2005 by Sir Nick, hence the name. The wadi runs the length of the course and is in play without being classified as a hazard.

Address Montgomerie is the most forgiving course in the UAE. There isn't much rough and it's there to enjoy and flatter rather than flex its muscles. It does finish with a strong par 5 though, asking you to drive over water off the tee, while the other notable hole is the par-3 13th that has an island green (sitting in one of 14 lakes) in the shape of the UAE.

Track Meydan is another nine, this time set among the race course. It's floodlit, not expensive, and very close to downtown. There are nice views of the race track, it is in good condition and has a bit of water and enough trees to provide some definition.

And **Jebel Ali** is yet another nine-holer, this time designed by locally-based Peter Harradine. He had a limited amount of land to work with, so it has smallish fairways and smallish greens, but it's not punishing on yardage. The players have long stayed here during the week of the Desert Classic.

Your off-course guide

Where to stay

Here are two great options that will cater for every type of traveller; a super hotel,



Trump Dubai

Radisson Damac Hills, and an apartment sourced through Staycae UAE.

The Radisson is based 20 minutes inland from the famous Palm and Marina areas, and as it happens, so was our apartment – but Staycae UAE have properties to rent in other parts of the city too.

The Radisson was a faultless base, and it's not often we can say that. Whether it was the varied breakfast, the rooftop pool, the comfortable rooms or the friendliest staff in a city of friendly staff, it put a big tick in the box.

Its rooms are spacious and comfortable, there is a well-equipped gym and open-air sports on a huge LED TV in the garden. You'll eat well here, with the Fire Lake Grill House offering dishes as succulent as its name suggests, Hessa Street Kitchen serving Pan-Asian dishes after its terrific breakfasts, and tasty burgers and snacks at the Pool Deck.

It's a 4-star affair but feels closer to 5-star standard in European terms. Oh, and it overlooks Trump Dubai and is convenient for all the key courses in the city.

www.radissonhotels.com

If an apartment with a self-catering element appeals, check out **www.staycae.ae** Our apartment also had a superb view of Trump Dubai and was chic, spacious and well equipped. It is perfect for families who want to stay together and while you may well want to eat out in the evening – you're on holiday after all! – breakfast and lunch is easily prepared in the kitchen and enjoyed on the balcony.

Even a one-bed apartment felt spacious, with room for a sofa bed in the large living area, a high-end kitchen, main bathroom and a WC. It also has lots of off-road parking and a gym in a neighbouring block. We rated it very highly.

Where to eat

You simply can't eat poorly in the UAE; whatever your budget or taste, you are



Radisson Damac Hills

exceptionally well catered for.

Cheap eats, delicious sushi, amazing pizza, fast food you've only ever seen on TikTok, specialist vegetarian restaurants, incredible Lebanese meats and falafel... it's all here and more.

If you want a British pub experience with amazing food and sports on TV, head to Mr Toad's Pub & Kitchen (there are several branches, we went to Dubai Investment Park as it is close to Radisson Damac Hills). They are attached to Premier Inns but, trust us, this is a long way from the carvery equivalents in the UK, because the food is absolutely superb.

Tuck into BBQ chicken wings or pulled pork sliders to start then move onto a steak, peri peri chicken, one of their burgers or a truly sensational chicken pie. The brownie

is essential to finish – and they'll be showing whatever sport you want to watch on one of the many TVs.

The milkshakes are also out of this world and you've got a good choice of 'hops and grapes', as they say in the UAE.

**'DUBAI HILLS IS THE
EMIRATE'S MOST
RECENT ADDITION
AND SITS IN THE TOP
TIER OF COURSES'**

Where to have fun

Atlantis The Palm's waterpark is not cheap at £80 entry, but it's worth a blow-out if you're travelling with kids. It can get very busy so a fast pass is worthwhile, or you

can just wait 'til 5pm, an hour before closing, when people are drifting away, and blitz seven rides in short time!

We also loved TopGolf Dubai, which felt even more non-golfer friendly than the UK versions. It could be the warmth of the night-time air temperature or the dazzle of the skyscraper backdrop, but it just felt more glitzy and glamorous to whack balls at the neon targets on a balmy evening. It's so inclusive for non-golfers and is guaranteed fun for everyone. And if everyone in your party is a golfer, it will get brilliantly competitive!

The service is superb and we ate here too, and were not disappointed. All of our group – only half of whom were golfers – wanted to go back for a second evening.

The low-down

Heathrow, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow fly direct to DXB, but consider a change in Istanbul with Turkish Airlines for a better price.

If you take our accommodation advice, research deals at courses and book ahead with flights and car hire – it can save hundreds of pounds. A hire car is not essential though – taxis are very cheap.

Mid-June to mid-September is seriously warm. October to December and mid-February to May are perfect. January is still warm but it can be cloudy and relatively cold at 18C.



Your guide to ABU DAHABI

Abu Dhabi is sometimes thought of as the quiet neighbour of Dubai, but that is only relative. There is plenty going on in 'AD', as befits the capital of the United Arab Emirates.

You won't get traffic jams here and you can have more of an authentic experience if you want it – in Dubai there are few Emiratis, whereas in AD 20 percent of the population is – but if you want a fun night out, it's also waiting for you.

There is loads to do away from the golf course, ranging from Ferrari World adventure rides to Yas Waterworld, or visiting the Louvre museum to cycling round the F1 track (which is free of charge).

Abu Dhabi has the best beaches in the UAE – on Saadiyat Island – as well as idyllic stretches of sand downtown along the corniche. This beautiful long promenade hugs the coastline and is free to spend all day on.

Brunch culture – an all-you-can-eat-and-drink session from 1pm to 4pm on a Saturday – is a bit different from Dubai, where liquid refreshment takes precedence. Here, the food is more important. And here, the food is exceptional.

Yas Island is home to a lot of the off-course attractions and hotels, as well as the course that currently hosts the DP World Tour event. Saadiyat Island, meanwhile, has some of the UAE's best

hotels plus Mamsha Al Saadiyat, a great beachside promenade perfect for coffees and lunch, then evening dining at the exquisite Italian restaurant Antonia.

They are both very tempting options as a base, but don't dismiss the downtown city. You get its hustle and bustle, loads of fabulous cheap eats, a range of hotels and you can get to golf at Saadiyat Beach in 10 minutes and Abu Dhabi National within 20.

There is impressive consistency across the three 18-hole courses here.

Yas Links was designed by Kyle Phillips and is a fixture in our World Top 100. It is a winning combination of a terrific location – its many Gulf-edge holes are visually majestic – maximised by an excellent

design. There are several all-world holes – from breathtaking par 3s and sporty two-shotters to some very demanding par 5s. As a guide, they would threaten the upper echelons of our GB and Ireland Top 100.

Saadiyat Beach has some holes that match Yas in terms of setting.

This Gary Player design mixes strong, exceptionally well-bunkered holes among residences along with spectacular seaside ones.

An abundance of wildlife accompanies your round, with 150 gazelle and over 100 bird species. And its Gulf-side stretch includes one of the most breathtaking par 3s I've ever played.

'IN DUBAI, LIQUID REFRESHMENT TAKES PRECEDENCE. IN ABU DHABI, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FOOD – AND THE FOOD IS JUST EXCEPTIONAL'



Abu Dhabi (National) lacks the coastal thrills of the other two – rather than sea views, the backdrop to the holes are more akin to the skylines seen in Dubai – but it is a first-class technical course that was a fine and long-standing host of the European Tour event. It also has a floodlit nine-hole to extend your day.

This Peter Harradine design winds around seven salt water hazards punctuated by palm trees, shrubs, 90 bunkers and drystone walls, with its epic finish in front





of the iconic falcon clubhouse.

There are two nine-holers too.

Downtown **City Golf** is AD's oldest course, beginning life as a sand course in 1976 before being transformed into Abu Dhabi's first all-grass course in 1998 by British designer Ian Scott Taylor.

In contrast, **Yas Acres** opened only last year but – as our ranking illustrates – has made a very good impression. It is a Fry-Straka design characterised by a meandering ridgeline that bisects the site.

A lake and stream also flow throughout, with water in play on four holes.

Your off-course guide

Where to stay? On Yas, go for Crowne Plaza, with a superb pool area, excellent sports bar (Stills) and beach access. On Saadiyat, the peerless Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi is immense, with one of the world's great beaches 100 yards from the hotel plus beautiful rooms and a truly epic breakfast. Downtown, head for the Southern Sun for

a lower budget option, but spectacular Emirates Palace if you want a stay-of-a-lifetime – it has my two favourite brunches in Abu Dhabi in Art Deco-inspired Broadway's classy menu as well as elegant Sand & Koal, set right on the beach.

Getting there: The brand-new Abu Dhabi airport is more of a hub than ever, with direct flights from Heathrow and Manchester.

When to go: Mid-June to mid-September is seriously warm. October-December and mid-February to May are perfect.

Your guide to **AL AIN**

Al Ain is part of Abu Dhabi but is about 90 minutes from the main city and feels distinct from the bustle of downtown and the white sand and turquoise waters of Saadiyat Island.

Here, roads are lined by beautiful hanging baskets of flowers rather than skyscrapers. For some, its sedate rhythm of life will be absolutely perfect.

We stayed at Al Ain Rotana, which has excellent rooms, an epic gym and a super pool area perfect for lazing around with a cool drink in hand. At night, it transforms into a lovely spot for al fresco dining with fairy lights and a feeling of a Greek taverna.

There is more than enough to do here, too. You can get up close to camels in the camel market, drive up Jebel Hafeet mountain for epic views, walk round Al Ain Oasis (UAE's version of Kew Gardens) and visit the fort.

The golf course is part of the bewilderingly well equipped **Al Ain Sports Club**, home to a plethora of activities.

The course (left) was a proper revelation. It's not a big name in the region, but it deserves to mix with the big names in the region. For a start, it was beautifully conditioned when we visited; categorically one of the best-presented courses I've played in the Middle East.

And secondly, it is playable, entertaining, forgiving and fun. Water lies in wait for the errant shot but you don't face penal consequences if you don't hit your absolute Sunday best. It's there to be enjoyed rather than endured. But in case you think this is just a playground for high-handicappers, think again. Al Ain is a strong enough test to be the host of several satellite tour events and delivers an interesting challenge throughout.

Its mix of holes also impressed; the landscape is similar throughout but the design means you never feel like you're playing the same hole twice.

Your guide to MIDDLE EAST – BEST OF THE REST



Royal Club of Bahrain

Dubai and Abu Dhabi might dominate the Middle East scene in many ways but there are some exceptional golf trips waiting to be enjoyed outside the UAE.

Oman is certainly one, with a more authentic Arabian experience than in the UAE allied to epic off-course attractions and some terrific golf. It blows you away with Wadi Shab (a beautiful river canyon), Bimmah Sinkhole (an amazing well the size of a circus ring that you can swim in) and Jebel Akhdar (a truly breathtaking mountain range). You can snorkel in the famous Daymaniyat Islands, luxuriate in the fabulous Kempinski Al Mouj, and take a day trip to sub-tropical Samanah.

On the course, **Almouj** is so good it could easily be the No.1 course in this list, mixing a spectacular ocean setting with the most enjoyable Greg Norman design I've played.

It is far from a single-course destination though, with **La Vie** (formerly Muscat Hills), **Ghala** and **Jebel Sifah** the back-ups.

You can actually drive to Oman from Dubai rather than flying there, but while

that is a fairly long trip south-east, taking a hire car due east from Dubai and taking in Ras Al Khaimah and Ajman is very easy as they are on the 'right' side of DXB airport.

Ajman is a tiny emirate that is home to **Al Zorah**, which nudges aside some big names to make the top 10 of our ranking.

Designed by Nicklaus Design, it opened in 2015 and is set among flowing dunes, native sandy areas, two lakes... and, notably, 1,000,000m² of inland mangroves. This offers the rare golf experience of changing water levels altering how the course plays almost by the hour, with holes squeezed next to 12km of waterfront; as many as two-thirds of its holes are affected. Oh, and the Oberoi that sits right next to the course is one of the finest hotels I've ever stayed in.

Ras Al Khaimah has two courses to enjoy, as well as beachfront majesty at the Hilton (really superb), which is right next to the top golf attraction, **Al Hamra**, host of the European Tour. This is a beautifully manicured course with a really thrilling closing stretch. Comprising lush, velvety fairways that wind between water, bunkers

and mature trees, it was built by charismatic designer Peter Harradine.

It's backed up by **Tower Links**, which mixes stout par 4s with sporty affairs and concludes with a super par 5 with a moat guarding the green. It is not a typical resort course, more often intimidatingly narrow than it is open-the-shoulders wide. On a clear day you also get a view of the truly awesome Hajar Mountains that sit on the border with Oman.

The biggest joy in this job is discovering great golf destinations that usually fly under the radar. Bahrain put a big tick in that box. **Royal Club of Bahrain** – and everything about my trip there – was absolutely fabulous.

The golf course was designed by Colin Montgomerie in association with European Golf Design's Robin Hiseman, one of the few modern architects to have a design in our GB&I Top 100. They created one of the region's most interesting courses – and it is getting even better due to some fine-tuning that's making it even more entertaining and a little more forgiving.



Its clever architecture is unique for the region and sets it apart, hence a position in our list that some might find unexpected and surprisingly high. We are certain it is good enough to justify its position, however, for it is fun, strategic, thought-provoking and beautifully presented.

It is part of a sporting club with a wonderful vibe that is a pleasure to be around and hard to leave. That said, if you stay at nearby Jumeirah Gulf of Bahrain, it's a little easier! It boasts a beautiful white-sand beach, an immense pool area, magnificent spa, first-class gym, elegant bedrooms and exquisite dining options.

Bahrain can be very lively in the evening if that's your bag, and you can also go-kart next to the F1 circuit – and do a tour of the control centre. Bahrain will not disappoint.

Finally, Qatar, home to two courses we just can't split on the list. Peter Harradine's **Doha** opened in 1998 and offers a superb

**'ROYAL CLUB OF
BAHRAIN IS ONE OF
THE REGION'S MOST
INTERESTING AND
UNIQUE COURSES'**

routing and pleasing blend of exacting and scorable holes enhanced by its best-ever conditioning. There is visual pleasure from its wide fairways running between sandy waste areas, with lots of Instagrammable skyscraper backdrops. That it's a long-time European Tour host speaks volumes.

Education City gave the capital Doha a contrasting second course. It was designed by Jose Maria Olazabal and is impeccably conditioned. It's also a MENA top-20 course.

There is tonnes to do in Qatar: visit the stunning National Museum, have coffee or dinner at the cool Katara Cultural Village, take a trip on a traditional wooden boat (dhow). Or go on a desert tour in a 4x4 – whose driver will take you dune bashing – then to the inland sea, then to dinner at a desert camp. Or wander round Souq Waqif, the 'standing market', for a sense of old Doha. You really won't have enough hours in the day.

**OUT OF
THIS
WORLD**

Jordan is probably my favourite country in the world, thanks to its off-course attractions of the captivating city of Amman, the astonishing mountainous desert of Wadi Rum, and Petra, one of the world's most popular and epic tourist destinations. Ayla Golf is in Aqaba in the south and is a super Greg Norman design that's part of a high-calibre tourist development. An unbeatable experience.



My Dubai

Former European Tour player Zane Scotland enjoys the Middle East so much, he's just moved there. This is his take on the region...

I played the MENA Tour from its inception, which was 2011, and it was a bit beyond its time really. It was set up by the Emirati behind the Dubai Desert Classic and was intended to help develop golf in the region by bringing in pros from established parts of the golf world.

I had some great times on it and got lifetime membership, having won 10 times. It was when I was coming back from serious injury and it was great fun travelling all round the region.

So, I saw a lot of the courses, and the thing about Dubai and the UAE in general is that the level is just incredibly consistent; I wouldn't argue with anyone too long about which is the best or even the second or third best.

The Majlis has all the history and is an old-school type of course with dog-legs, tree-lined in places, a bit tighter perhaps. Then you have Trump Dubai, which is a modern beauty where you can tee it a bit higher and let it rip. It's just so much fun for the amateur golfer, from tee to green.

All the good players like The Els Club



The Els Club, Dubai Sports City

because you have to position your ball off the tee, the greens are slick and there are steep run-off areas. If you miss them, there's trepidation about your next shot. You have to think about which side you miss it on.

It's up there as the best test, along with Saadiyat Beach, although I've heard that is being re-routed so it might change it...

The Els is the most challenging overall. If I brought friends here on holiday or my dad, we'd go to The Els, but with the caveat that you might get a bit beaten up. But strong players love it. You cannot miss a beat there. Ernie clearly designed it when he was playing really, really well - because that place can be an absolute beast!

Funnily enough, Saadiyat and Els are great spots after the round too. The terrace out the back at Saadiyat is really nice, looking down the practice ground in the evening with the music on low. Similar for The Els, overlooking 9 and 18 with the sun setting is another really nice spot with nice ambience and vibe.

I've been very fortunate in the last few winters to be the golf correspondent for Dubai Eye radio and also to work alongside Iain Carter at the DP World Championship for the BBC. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to call it work. Thursday and Friday I'll walk the course and call in to the radio station, then on the weekend Robbie

Greenfield and Chris McHardy come down and set up a Dubai Eye pop-up booth, usually in hospitality, so we get to watch the players come in and finish. And that's work!

Now, after 14 years of coming to the UAE, I'm moving here on a more permanent basis as director of golf for Five Iron Golf, which is very modern golf and which excites me - especially as an R&A diversity ambassador.

It is making golf more accessible while maintaining the aspirational element. Five

Iron have 30+ locations worldwide and this is the first in the Middle East. In true Dubai style, it is the biggest one, with 17 Trackmans, indoor putting green, gym, VIP lounge, steam room, sauna and mini golf. There's a real vibe to it.

It really has something for everyone.

It's a golfer's dream - you can do the serious stuff with Trackman and get your numbers, while Callaway are an investor and have given us all their Ai Smoke clubs. You also have the well-being element of the gym, steam room, healthy breakfasts. But by 7.30pm, the music is turned up and there is a really good atmosphere, along with the 'hops and grapes'...

It's in a really good location in the marina where a lot of people live, work or stay on holiday. If you want to try golf, improve your golf or play golf and get a load of extras, it really is the perfect place.



Five Iron Golf is a global urban indoor golf experience...



... the Dubai branch is its largest, boasting 17 Trackmans.

Your guide to **MOROCCO**

It is possibly foolhardy to try to condense the attractions and options of Morocco into just a few pages.

This extraordinary country has so many alluring places to visit, from its largest city Casablanca – a must for film lovers – to sprawling Tangier. Or Ouarzazate, also a noted film-making location, where *Gladiator*, among many others, was shot, to the beach resorts of Agadir and Tarfaya. Or UNESCO World Heritage Site El Jadida to mystical Marrakesh, with its myriad souks, bars and restaurants and epic ‘Big Square’.

The good news is that the courses are largely collected in three key areas: Marrakesh, Rabat & Tangier, and the Atlantic coast down to Agadir.

Atlantic coast

We will start in Agadir in the south. **Royal Palace of Agadir** is one of the world’s most exclusive clubs and its course was laid out by Cabell Robinson under the Robert Trent Jones umbrella. It combines a seaside setting with interesting architecture and flawless conditioning. It’s utterly fabulous... but few can play it.

There’s better news at **Tazegzout**, just north of Agadir. It is part of the Taghazout resort and was designed by Kyle Phillips. It hugs the coast spectacularly for a number of holes while others are cut through an indigenous Argan forest. This cliff-top course sits 80m above sea level and its final three are terrific.

Mazagan Beach

There are four more Agadir courses in the list, showing its depth for a holiday.

Golf du Soleil was opened in 1999 and comprises lakes and waterfalls as well as tamarind trees, mimosas and eucalyptus, but its playing surfaces are happily wide.

Golf Les Dunes' yellow and red loops were designed by Robinson on sandy, often wooded land, while **Golf de l'Océan** is three loops of nine by Belt Collins.

Royal Agadir dates back to 1961, when a Scotsman, a Mr Wilson, created one hole on wasteland. Colonel Major Kamili added eight more and they survive today with a backdrop of pine and eucalyptus aromas.

Moving north, you come to **Mogador** near Essaouira. Its North course by Gary Player opened in 2009 and boasts wide playing corridors, Atlantic views and a super back nine.

Next stop is the El Jadida area and one of the stars of North African golf, **Mazagan Beach**. It was also designed by Player and opened in 2010. The Black Knight created a thrilling slice of holiday golf, especially the holes alongside the coast.

It has a 'look' of a links but is a very lush experience and can stretch to more than

7,000 yards. With the coastal breeze a regular feature, it is a serious examination.

After a steady start, the pulse raises towards the back nine, the dog-leg 7th taking you towards the ocean then the 8th and 9th guiding you back to the clubhouse along the beach. The back nine starts

solidly but again the highlights come in its second half, with the tempo rising from the fine par-3 15th. From that point the ocean is your companion to a great climax among the dunes.

It is a tremendous all-round resort too,

and you can very happily base yourself here for your entire trip (see 'Off-course guide' for details).

El Jadida Royal is barely 15 minutes away and is another fine Cabell Robinson design. It sits close to the coast but is largely forested in nature.

Marrakesh

There are so many courses to choose from here, but **Assoufid** leads the way, helped by the natural advantage of a more undulating site compared to most in the city.

Opened in 2014, it enjoys a desert setting and plays towards the snow-covered Atlas Mountains on the front nine while the

shaaba, a natural dry river, becomes a feature on many holes.

Royal Palm was a very pleasant surprise. We expected a well-groomed course, given it is part of the finest resort in Marrakesh, but it is also full of architectural nuance and an intricate routing by Robinson.

Unlike the rest of the city's courses, **Royal Marrakesh** (Green and Red) has bags of pedigree. Founded in 1927, it has 27 holes – 18 on the Old and nine on the New (2008) – that wind between dense corridors of mature trees. It has also been recently renovated to good effect.

Noria rivalled Royal Palm for shock factor. It flies under the radar but trust me, it is distinctive and very entertaining – all clever angles and square greens.

Al Maaden, by Kyle Phillips, is predictably well thought out and has a crazy water-based finish, while **Palm Ourika** is the sister course of Palm Golf and is a bold, modern course in extremely good condition, with lush, green fairways, large sandy waste areas and the occasional tall palm tree.

Across the road is **Samanah**, built in 2008 by the Nicklaus Design company – Jack himself visited in 2009. It has hosted the Ladies European Tour and is very open with a solid back nine.

Amelkis (Blue and Red) is a pleasant test among water hazards and bunkers while

'ROYAL AGADIR DATES BACK TO 1961, WHEN A SCOTSMAN NAMED MR WILSON CREATED ONE HOLE'



Montgomerie Marrakech was designed by the former Ryder Cup captain in association with European Golf Design.

Rabat & Tangier

There are fewer courses in the north of the country and there tends to be more distance between them, but the quality is high and the variety impressive.

In Rabat, **Royal Dar Es Salam** has two fine courses. The Red is a Trent Jones masterpiece in a cork oak forest and was restored by James Duncan, the Blue is by Robinson and is a shorter but tighter test.

Three hours' drive inland on the hills above Ifrane stands the modern masterpiece of **Michlifen**. Expect rock outcrops, ravines, lakes and contoured greens on this magnificent Jack Nicklaus design that overlooks the Atlas Mountains.

South of Tangier, **Al Houara** is the youngest course in the list and the one we have least knowledge of – but all reports are very positive, hence its inclusion here. It is a links-looking experience close to the Atlantic coast.

Royal Tangier, from which you get fine views of the rooftops of the 'White City', was built in 1914 by Cotton & Pennink.

Your off-course guide

Getting there: You can fly to Marrakesh from Liverpool, Stansted and Luton.



Royal Palm

For the coastal trip, we flew to Agadir from Manchester, with flights also available from Bournemouth, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Luton and Gatwick.

When to go: The summer is hot but not totally unbearable on a UAE level, but October and November plus February and March are perfect for golf.

Where to stay: We had two bases for our Marrakesh trip: Royal Palm in the south-west of the city, an opulent resort with loads of amenities, and Palmeraie Palace, next to the 2nd hole of Palm Golf.

For the coastal trip, the outstanding option is Mazagan Beach, from which you can get to all of the courses on the coast. It is a World Top 100-ranked resort with good reason.

This luxury hotel is situated beside a 7km-long beach and boasts an outdoor swimming pool, casino and wealth of activities that include archery, horse riding, tennis, trampolining, pickleball and kids' club. A beautiful and comprehensive spa includes special treatments for youngsters.

Each of the spacious guest rooms has a contemporary design with Moroccan features, with some boasting spectacular Atlantic Ocean views. An immense breakfast starts your day in the best possible way and after that you can choose from as many as 15 restaurants and bars throughout the rest of the day – including delicious traditional Moroccan cuisine.



Tazegzout

Your guide to EGYPT

Your key decision about Egypt is whether you want golf and iconic sightseeing from your break, or golf plus a Red Sea beach holiday. Cairo offers the former, Hurghada the latter. Both do so in exceptional ways.

You don't need me to explain the non-golf appeal of Cairo but suffice to say it is as vibrant, bustling and enjoyably chaotic a city as you might imagine. A boat trip on the Nile, the markets, Tahrir Square, the immense Egyptian Museum and, of course, the Pyramids are bucket-list stuff.

A couple of Cairo tips before we move

on to the golf. The first is that I've driven all over the world and Cairo is up there with the trickiest. It's more stock car racing than driving. Ubers – albeit in some fairly vintage cars! – are super cheap, so use them unless you are very confident behind the wheel.

The second is that you can add a day trip (via a short flight) to the truly epic Luxor. I'd have that as an essential part of any trip to Egypt, particularly going from Hurghada.

As for the golf, Cairo has several high-end courses, conveniently located in two clusters.

On the western suburbs of the city, Tim Lobb's cerebral design at **New Giza**, in the shadow of the pyramids, is our No.1 in Egypt. It ticks all the boxes: playable, atmospheric, strategic and well-presented.

The Allegría is another pedigree course, a Greg Norman design within one of Cairo's most exclusive residential communities, where undulating fairways slither between and over lakes, streams, rocks and vegetation.

Palm Hills (A and C) is by John Sandford, who did much of the work on Palm Hills working under the Nicklaus Design name. It features numerous water

Somabay



hazards and offers a good test.

And **Dreamland (Championship)** was initially laid out by Karl Litten, who also laid out Emirates (Majlis), and later redesigned by David Jones of Belek fame. Five lakes feature strongly.

In the east of the city in New Cairo, **Katameya Dunes** is a Nick Faldo design with lush velvet fairways sliding between sandy wastelands.

Nearby **Katameya Heights** was designed by Frenchman Yves Bureau in the early 1990s and water is key to a fine closing hole.

Robert Trent Jones Jnr's **Madinaty** is a terrific recent addition that is noted among the panel for its excellent

condition. This exacting course travels over undulating fairways lined by water and sand.

The fourth course in this pocket is Peter Harradine's **Mirage City**, which has a number of water hazards to negotiate.

There are three main resorts in the Hurghada area and all sit within vast holiday complexes or even, in the case of El Gouna, a miniature city. As a result, each course is surrounded by a plethora of amenities and attractions, with several excellent hotels to choose from.

Somabay is the most stylish resort of the three and is categorically the most spectacular in an aesthetic sense.

Laid out on a triangle of reclaimed desert that pokes into the Red Sea, it is therefore inevitably characterised by gorgeous beaches and Red Sea views.

The course within this swish resort, next to the Cascades Hotel, was designed by Gary Player and its highlights arrive at the 5th and 6th and then the 14th and 15th – the holes closest to the sea.

Mixing par 3s over the edge of the water or directly down towards it with sporty par 4s that are beautiful, seemingly innocuous holes with the ability to bite, these are some of the very best of the Red Sea Riviera.

The rest of Somabay's course sees lush green fairways sit distinctively against the blankets of white-sand desert in between.

There are many hotels to choose from, but we stayed at Cascades and it was a great choice – see 'Off-course guide' over the page.

'EGYPT'S OPTIONS BOIL DOWN TO CAIRO OR HURGHADA – BOTH OFFER EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES'



El Gouna is a Red Sea attempt at Venice by virtue of the 36km of lagoons that wind between the land on which sits an array of attractive burnt orange, red, beige and yellow buildings.

The course is a Gene Bates and Fred Couples design routed among the lagoons, even if in truth they are only in play for the very wayward shot. The bunkers are low-lipped affairs and the greens are in good nick, so it's unlikely to beat you up. Most holes play to a backdrop of the Red Sea or the mountains.

Thirty minutes south of the airport,

Madinat Makadi was built in 1998. There are lots of 4- and 5-star hotels to choose from, while the John Sanford-designed course is a mix of sand, water and palms. There are 1,300 palm trees, which sounds a lot, but in fact there is generally an open feel to this undulating track and you'll have expansive views as a result. Five of its holes overlook the Red Sea and three boast a view of the three salt water lakes that are connected by two cascades.

Put simply, you can easily play all three courses on the same trip and be in the taxi or transfer van for no more than an hour.

A terrific golf trip is waiting to be savoured, under the sun for 52 weeks of the year.

Your off-course guide

Getting there: Flights go to Cairo from Heathrow, Stansted and Manchester, while Hurgada is really well served with direct flights from Glasgow, Manchester, Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham, Nottingham, Belfast, Gatwick and Stansted.

When to go: The summer is hot but not totally unbearable on a UAE level, but October and November plus February and March are perfect for golf.



Your guide to **TUNISIA**

Most of Tunisia's golf lies down its coast in the cities of Hammamet, Sousse, Monastir and the capital, Tunis.

Hammamet is home to the country's No.1, **Yasmine Valley**, a Ron Fream design with large bunkers, tiered greens and water.

The **Citrus Club** has 45 holes, with **La Foret** the main attraction. Also designed by Fream, pine trees frame much of it, as its name suggests.

Les Oliviers in contrast – but again aptly named – is routed among an olive grove, and its open nature means

there is a frequent and often welcome breeze.

In the capital Tunis, a little further north, **The Residence** is the standout, a modern Robert Trent Jones Jnr course that is part of a high-end resort on Gammarth seafont.

Carthage is a sporty and historic course north east of Tunis that dates back almost a century.

Moving south to holiday hotspot Sousse brings us to the **El Kantaoui** club, whose **Panorama** course is the newer and, in our view, better of the two options. Fream designed it on undulating land with regular elevation changes. **The Sea** lives up to its name with a fine coastal stretch coming home.

Flamingo is south of Sousse in Monastir. Expect clever routing by that man Fream again, this time among olive trees and on undulating fairways overlooking Monastir lakes.

Finally, **Tabarka** is in the north west, next to the border with Algeria. Seven of its front nine play around the gulf of Tabarka while others move between oak and pine.

Where to stay: Cairo naturally has numerous options to suit all budgets, but if you want a play-and-stay, we really enjoyed JW Marriott, which is attached to Mirage City.

In Hurghada, all three resorts have several hotels but the pick is Somabay. We stayed longest at Cascades, which is a wonderful base for couples, families or single-sex groups. It has stylish rooms, beach access, a superb swimming pool area, spa and therapy centre, plus excellent dining both in the hotel and in the wider resort. It has a peerless short-game area

and Par 3, then consider the incredible non-golf activities on offer here. In fact, there are too many to mention but some of the most appealing are go-karting, a waterpark, horse riding, a racquet club with floodlit tennis courts and squash courts. Water sports include diving, snorkelling, sailing, windsurfing and kite surfing, with the world-famous Red Sea coral reefs easily accessible from a jetty that extends from the Dive Centre to the house reef. Essentially, whatever you want to do, you can do it from Cascades hotel within the Somabay resort.

Also consider
Jolie Ville in Sharm El Sheikh – host of the European Challenge – and Seniors tours – is a flat, easy-walking course with 18 man-made lakes. The Tim Lobb-designed El Ein Bay is located at coastal Ain Sohkná.





6 COURSES LIKE NO OTHER



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Dubai Creek, Dubai



BARE
MY
SOUL



MICHAEL BLOCK

'CELEBRITIES ARE A LOT SHORTER AND NOT AS GOOD LOOKING IN PERSON'

What's the best and worst thing about your new-found fame?

That I'm travelling the world, meeting a lot of cool people. The most difficult thing? That I'm travelling the world. I'm 48 and being on the road so often means I miss my family and kids a lot. I miss my job as well, but at the same time I know this isn't going to last forever. I don't really say no much.

Have you given up teaching now?

I haven't given a single paid lesson since the PGA Championship in 2023.

Do you miss it?

No. I've always enjoyed teaching friends and my boys for free more than I've enjoyed teaching for money. I do miss running a golf course though.

We hear your son's a very good player...

Dylan's a player. He's got a lot of skill, more than I've ever had. He's super long, great hands around the green, but he doesn't

quite practise as much as he should. He's more into videoing stuff for YouTube and social media rather than practising, which I think hampers how good he could possibly be. But he's 19, still very young. He's going to PGA Tour Q-School this year. Whether he gets through or not, he's going to learn a ton and that's the most important thing.

What's the coolest moment you've had in the last 18 months?

Getting texts from Michael Jordan, being DJ Khaled's (pictured below) spiritual advisor when he goes and plays golf tournaments, and then playing multiple rounds with Fred Couples.

Have you got a little match going with Freddie then?

Oh yeah. Freddie and I play a lot. He brought Rickie Fowler along, too. All those things are very cool. I've even been doing a thing with Wayne Gretzky, the greatest hockey player

Club pro Michael Block achieved cult status at the 2023 PGA Championship after making a hole-in-one and finishing in a tie for 15th. His pay cheque of \$288,000 was almost four times higher than his previous best.

of all time. I made a hole-in-one with him filming a commercial shoot.

Which celebrity's golf game has impressed you the most?

Maybe Jimmy Fallon? He has game. I know Michael Jordan's great, he's off three or four, but we haven't played yet.

Do you still get starstruck?

It happened literally last week with Miles Teller, who was in *Top Gun* and all those different movies. When you see them in person, they're a lot shorter and not as good looking as you thought they would be!

Does the same apply to Tiger?

(Laughs) I did have Tiger talking a little shit to me. He invited me out to his junior event at Pebble Beach. The next week I was playing the tour event down in Cabos St Lucas and doing a charity par-3 contest. I was over the ball on the 1st hole and I heard someone say, "Do you ever f***ing work?" I hit the shot, pretty good to 5ft, and then I turned round. Sitting in the golf cart, with a big smile, was Tiger looking at me. I was like, "You've got to be kidding me?"

Are you living your best life right now?

I'm almost 50, right, and we're talking about playing a couple more events on the International Series. I may go to the event in Thailand. That would be amazing, I've never been to Thailand before. But I've got to be very careful because if I play in many more, I can't play in any Tour events next year on the PGA. I'm limited as a Class A PGA member as a club professional. But I need to get ready for when I turn 50. I do want to test myself against the old guys.

How do you think your game would measure up on the Champions Tour?

I think I could do quite well. I'd be the young guy. Now, when I'm warming up, I've got a guy hitting 3-iron as far as my driver. For me not to be the short guy would be great. Always being the short guy doesn't build your confidence. For me to gain more confidence, that would be a huge asset.



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WELCOME... **Improve your game on and around the green to break your scoring barriers**

So you want a better short game? Yes, of course you do! After all, golf is all about getting the ball in the hole as quickly as possible, and only a laser-sharp short game can deliver that.

As tour pros demonstrate on a weekly basis, it's the ability to turn three shots into two that allows you to win the match, shoot your lowest score possible, or simply turn an ordinary round into a pretty good one. A good short game day is a good golf day.

But as well as better scoring, the short game is perhaps the most fun part of golf. With lies, slopes and conditions ensuring every shot is unique, greenside golf lets us demonstrate skill and express ourselves. Without a base level of competence – whether you want to break 100 for the first time, break 80 or score in magical 70s – you are missing out on this key part of golf.

The tips here, in association with Benross, will give you that foundation.

And finally, for a better short game, we would urge you to consider your toolkit. Your wedges and putter are the most used clubs in the bag. The latest groove technology or putter shape can deliver startling performance upgrades over older, worn-out weapons; and Benross offers both at incredible value.

When you can team the right gear with an improved technique, a better short game is yours for the taking.



WHAT'S INSIDE

6 Master the fundamentals

The simple set-up advice you need to build a repetitive and reliable chipping technique.

14 Pitching essentials

When you're a little further out from the green, this is what you need to do.

18 Short game versatility

Three specialist shots you can add to your game that will help you get up and down.

24 Bunkers made easy

Consistency keys from the sand... and how to get the ball out off slopey lies.

28 Putting basics

Finish the job off when you've knocked it closer by holing the putt.



FUNDAMENTALS

SET UP FOR A MORE SOLID STRIKE



It's safe to say that for the golfer looking to break 100, the biggest issue is making a clean and solid strike.

The key here is to get as close as possible to the ideal impact position at set-up. That way, you can build your action around stability and simplicity – two qualities every reliable chipping action possesses. Follow these rules to make pure contact a habit.

1. Chest ahead of ball

A clean, solid chipping strike is all about creating a slightly downward attack angle. This minimises your chances of striking the ground before the ball and delivers a pure, compressing strike. This begins by setting up with the ball a little behind your chest... which promotes impact with the club on its downward arc. As part of this, settle 60% of your weight into your front foot.

2. Chest faces forward

Now open your shoulders a touch until the centre of your chest points six inches or so ahead of the ball – as shown by the tee peg. This simple move helps to shift the swing's low point a little further forward and adds an element of steepness to the attack – both promote a more crisp, gently downward strike.

3. Putting it all together

Working on this new address position can take a little time, but mastering it means your action needs fewer moving parts to arrive at a solid impact. Here is a checklist for you to work towards:

- **Weight:** favouring your front foot. Don't overdo this as it can lead to getting steep and choppy.
- **Stance:** open. As well as helping create a subtle downward attack, open shoulders and hips create room for the arms to swing through towards the target.
- **Ball position:** just behind the chest to encourage a squeezing strike.
- **Clubface:** square to slightly open helps resist the leading edge digging.
- **Grip pressure:** soft, to promote feel and smooth motion.

BREAK 100
Pre-set
the strike

THE STRIKE

With so much work done at address, the short swing itself should be a simple matter of using your arms and shoulders to swing the club back and through. While some subtle wrist hinge adds to the flow of the stroke, your hands should remain essentially passive. Here is a simple thought that can help...

4. Breakdown

Even from the perfect set-up, your hands can still ruin the shot if they become overly active. Trying to help the ball up, or give it some extra power, can lead to unwanted hand action. The usual result is a breakdown in the wrists and forearms, a rising clubhead and any number of miscues.

5. Handle past pocket

To get out of this destructive habit, hit a series of chip shots with one thought and one thought only – to send the handle of the club past your lead pocket as you move through impact. By focusing on the top end of the club like this – rather than on the clubhead or ball – you can calm those busy hands and maintain a down-and-through strike pattern that enables you to hit the ball solidly.

Stable base

One further point to keep in mind here: with your weight set forward at address and your hips pre-opened, there is no need for weight shift or rotation during the stroke. Stability is the bedrock of a sound chipping action, so work on feeling rock solid as you swing the club back and through.

1



2



YOUR COACH



BEN EMERSON
Head PGA Professional,
Sand Martins Golf Club
benemersongolf.com




3



5





 The golfer who shoots in the 90s can typically make reasonable contact with the ball, but struggles to control distance consistently. The solution here is to improve the rhythm and flow of your action; deceleration and jerkiness make it almost impossible to regulate clubhead speed, while a smooth acceleration makes it easy. Try this approach...

1. Address Relaxed and ready

Take your address position with a renewed focus on softness and feel. Allow your arms to hang naturally from tension-free shoulders, and keep your grip pressure secure yet light. You should feel relaxed but ready to move.

2. Backswing Go slow(er)

Snatching the club back increases grip pressure and kills your rhythm. So instead, commit to making a slower, calmer move where your hands remain soft and you can feel the weight of the club.

3. Throughswing Use gravity

Gravity is the ultimate in consistent acceleration. Allow it to control the pace of your downswing and you will apply the same force to the ball every time. So, after feeling the weight in the club at the end of the backswing, simply let that weight fall forward.

The fall and rise

With gravity and the weight of the club in charge of the flow of your chipping action, an effortless acceleration will pull the club down and through to a finishing position that's at least as long as your backswing. Work on this 'unassisted' move until it feels more comfortable, and your touch improves.

BREAK 80

Harness spin



Any golfer looking to shoot in the 70s regularly needs to gain control of the element of spin when chipping. It's impossible to get up and down consistently when the ball is running out on one shot and checking up on the next. Here is a technique you can use that actively creates spin, giving you the confidence to strike with authority...

1. Address

Weak lower hand

As you set up to the ball, turn your lower hand slightly more on top of the club: that thumb/forefinger V can point up at your chin or even towards your lead shoulder. Open the clubface a touch, maintain some forward lean in the shaft, and keep pressure and weight forward.

2. Backswing

Use wrists to create steepness

Allow some extra wrist cock as you swing back. This fires some energy into the club and promotes a sharper, steeper attack angle, all essential if you are going to create spin.

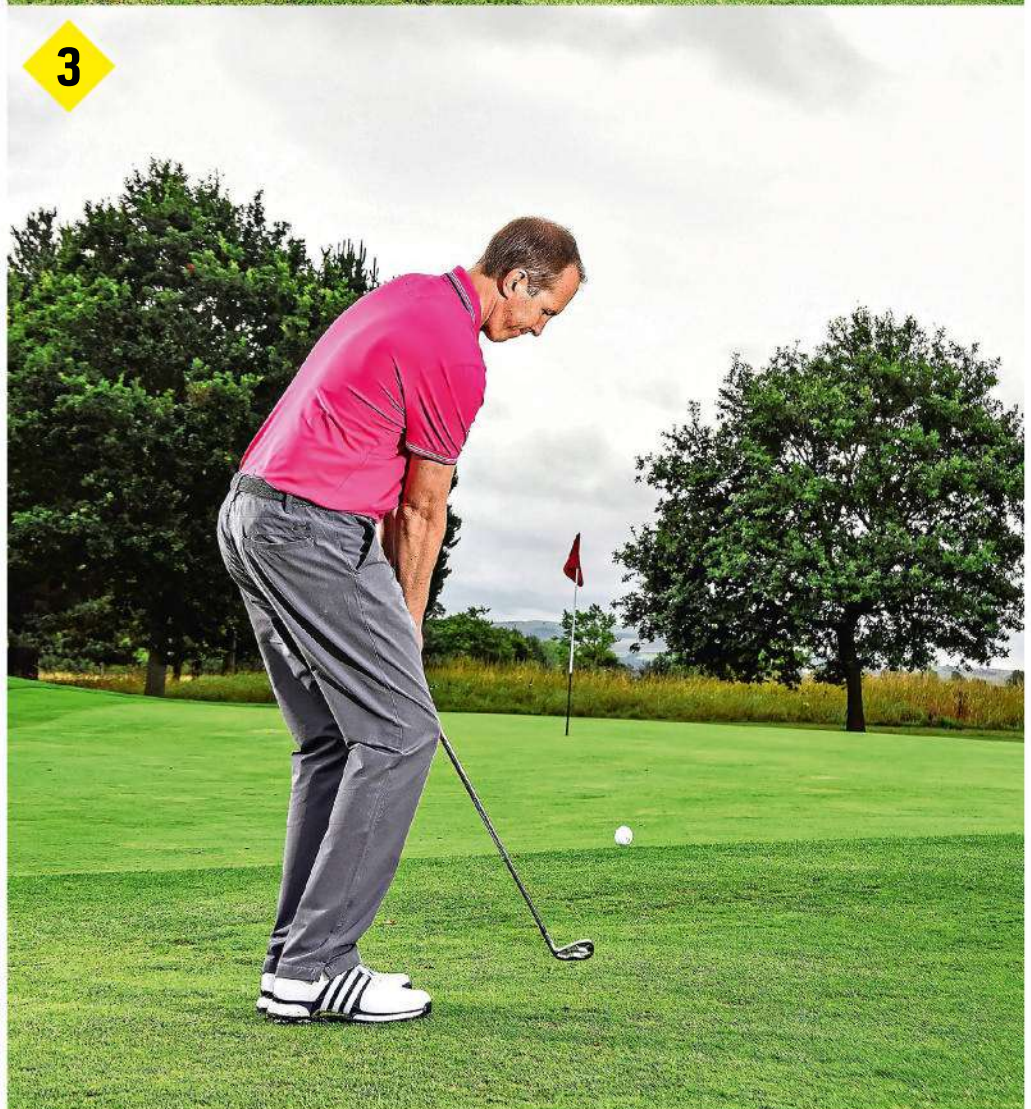
3. Strike

Zip through impact

Naturally, you will have to tailor aggression to the shot, but to create spin you need some speed. So be as crisp as possible, zipping the club down into the back of the ball – ideally with an element of out-to-in. At first you may feel the ball will go too far, but the spin created will mitigate that.

Grab... and release

Spin is created when you increase the difference between attack angle and clubface loft. Your weak grip and open clubface are promoting loft, while your backswing creates steepness. With some practice you can develop a shot that comes out brisk and low, before checking and releasing out to the hole side.



FUNDAMENTALS

SHARPER
GREENSIDE
PLAY

For the golfer looking to break 100, the priority around the green is to build confidence in a clean, solid strike. That means developing an action that is simple, repeatable and effective. 'Up, Down, In' – a simple way of representing backswing, downswing and follow-through – is the ideal technique for this. Let's take it step by step.

BREAK 100
Strike chip
shots pure...
every time!

Set-up Use the shaft angle

Take your regular set-up (1). With the sole of the club flat on the turf, focus on the shaft's angle. Ideally, stick a cane or shaft in the ground behind the shaft at the same angle, just inside the heel of the club.

Backswing Think 'Up'

Move the club back, keeping the shaft and head outside the cane (2). The 'Up' part of the backswing is not from picking the head up with your hands and wrists, but from this steeper backswing plane. Your hands and wrists should remain quiet.

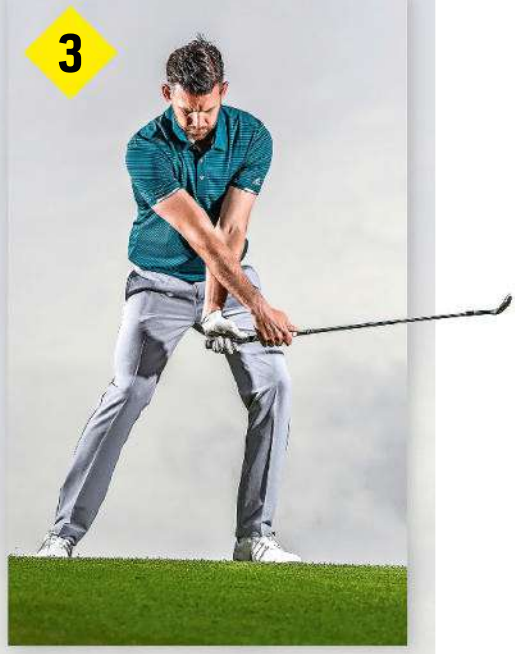
Downswing Think 'Down'

Keeping your hands and arms quiet, feel yourself strike down on the ball a little more than normal (3); aim for the low point of the club's arc to come after impact. That straighter, steeper backswing promotes this downward attack angle, which in turn affords a crisper and cleaner strike.

Throughswing Think 'In'

Your key thought for the follow-through is to feel the club works inside the ball-target line (4). Extend down the target line and the clubface tends to rotate; pull inside and you can keep the face squarer for longer, helping both strike and accuracy.





BREAK 90
Master
the lob



YOUR COACH



CHRIS RYAN
Founder of the HIT
Golf Academy, based
at Forest of Arden
chrisryangolf.com



As your skills begin to develop, you can start thinking about adding more expansive shots to your repertoire. A truly useful shot to have in your bag, the high-flying, soft-landing lob shot is well within your capabilities once you understand the shot's fundamentals. Use these set-up and swing keys.

Under and up

Just like the greenside bunker shot, the clubhead releases under and past the ball when you play the lob. The only difference is that this time the sole of the club works against the grass rather than the sand. In order to master the shot properly, you need an address and release that will allow this to happen.

Set up for quick launch

Play the ball just forward of centre and open the face to add loft. For quick height you need to deliver loft on a shallow angle. To promote that, widen your stance and increase knee flex to lower the handle.

Release drill
Split hands

Take your regular gloved-hand

grip, but place your trail hand at the bottom of the rubber (1). This split-hand grip encourages the lower hand to release under the ball, adding loft to the face and height to the shot (2). Aim to finish with your forearms crossing and the clubface facing the sky (3). Hit 10 shots like this before reverting to your regular grip and repeating the feeling.



REV 2.0

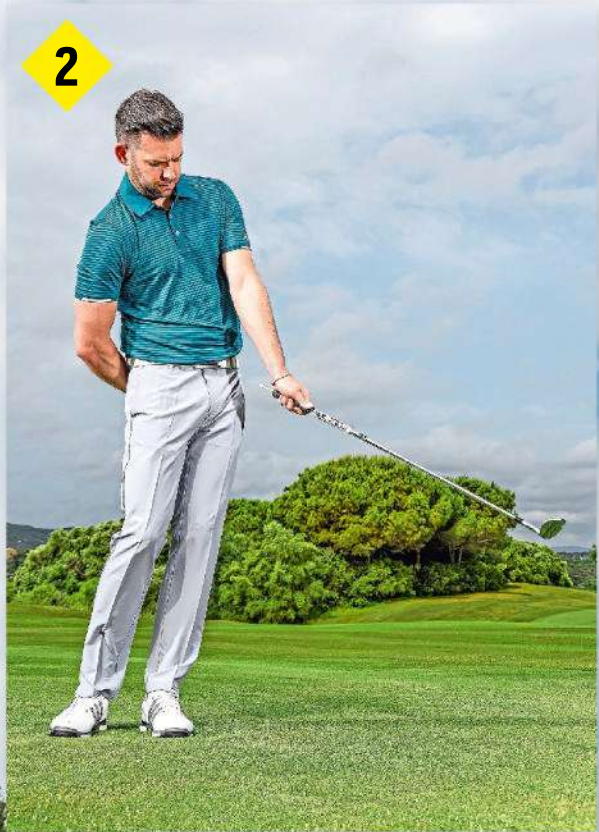
MORE FEEL. MORE SPIN. MORE CONTROL

BREAK 80
Add spin...
or take
it off

1



2



With your sights set on shooting in the 70s, you can start to think about how to harness spin to make your short game more adaptable and versatile. In practice, this means developing a high-spin technique that encourages the ball to check up, and a second low-spin option that allows it to roll out. Here's how...

WHEN YOU WANT TO ADD SPIN

Use this technique when the pin is cut close to the front of the green, or the green runs away from you.

Set-up Create loft

Spin creation comes from applying loft with a gentle downward attack angle.

To achieve this, keep your shirt buttons, the butt of the club and the ball in line at address (1). That means playing the ball centrally in your stance.

Level shoulders

Aligning chest, handle and ball also has the effect of dropping your lead shoulder slightly. This helps promote that

slight downward strike while maintaining loft on the clubface. Your weight can slightly favour your lead foot.

Release the spin

To train the correct spin-creating delivery, place a peg in the butt of the club and swing with your lead arm only (2). Let the peg point back



to your belt buckle as you swing through. This ensures you maintain the loft on the clubface through impact.

WHEN YOU WANT TO TAKE SPIN OFF

Use this technique when you have a lot of green to cover to reach the pin, or you're chipping up a slope.

Set-up Take loft off

To lower spin we need to reduce face loft and shallow the attack angle. So move the ball back in your stance to deloft the club; play it off your back toe cap (3). Keep your weight even and check your shirt buttons are forward of the ball.

Shallow backswing

Also, grip the club a little more firmly. This tends to immobilise the wrists, which helps you make a wider, wrist-free backswing. This creates a shallower arc to your action, which helps you keep spin off the ball.


Retain the angle

Again, place a peg in the butt of

the club but this time swing with your trail arm only (4). For this release you need to keep loft off the face, so maintain the angle in the back of your trail wrist and keep the shaft vertical; the peg will point up to the sky. As this image shows, it's important to keep the chest rotating to deliver the club like this.

PITCHING

PITCH
PERFECT

 Typically under 100 yards, pitch shots are, of course, far more about control of flight and distance than the creation of power. Any golfer looking to shoot in the 90s needs to find an address position that promotes those qualities. But because this swing is shorter and less aggressive, we must also make sure we use the set-up to encourage the rotation and mobility that keeps the swing on a good path and plane. Bring these elements into your address...

1. FACE ON

A narrow stance

A wider stance has the effect of locking your hips into place; move your feet closer together and you will find that you become increasingly free to rotate and move through your pelvis and core. So bring your feet in under the insides of your shoulders in order to promote rotation on this quieter swing.

Play the ball centrally

The ideal pitching contact sees a very slightly downward strike, the sole of the club bruising the ground just after impact. Encourage this attack angle by playing the ball centrally in your stance. This puts it just a touch before the swing's low point, promoting that gentle descending blow.

Weight favours the front foot

We need good balance to pitch well, and in this regard, the old mantra of 50-50 both left to right and from heel to toe is never a bad target to have. But if anything, you should feel you have a little extra pressure under the lead foot, again to promote that subtle downward strike.

2. UP THE LINE

Aim Stand slightly open

Pull your lead foot back a touch to feel slightly open through your lower half. This will encourage the core rotation that does not come quite so easily on this quieter, part swing. Your shoulders and forearms can stay square to the ball-target line.

Grip Slightly down

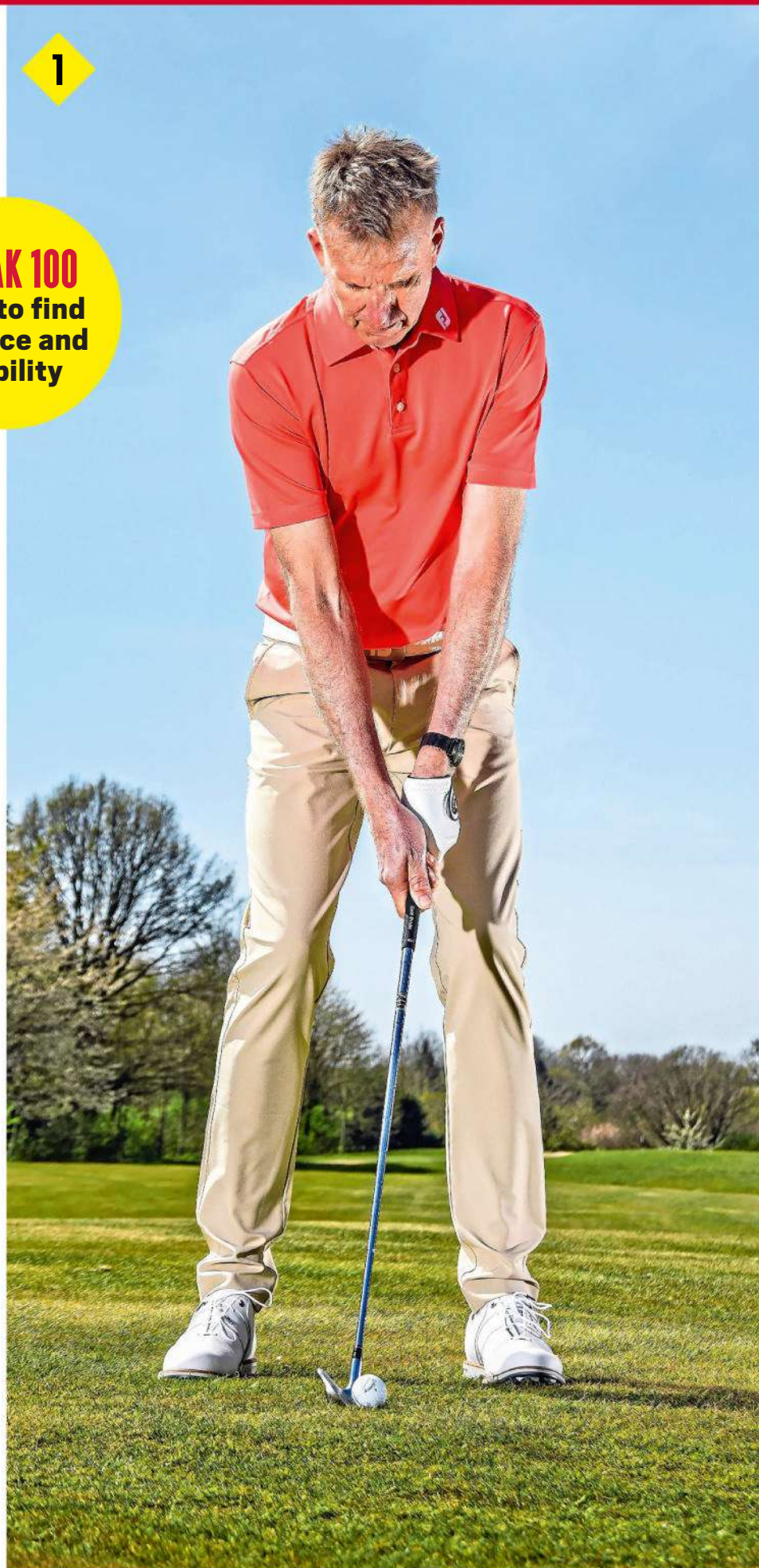
This is a shot for control, not power, and your grip location should reflect this. Dropping down the handle by an inch or so may not seem that much, but it helps you stay in charge of the clubface and allows you to meter the pace of the club during the swing.

Posture Stay soft

Your body angles should broadly mimic those for the full swing – tilted forward from the hips, hip bones over ankles, with a comfortable but not excessive knee flex. But monitor your tension levels throughout your body, and aim to feel 'softer' or more relaxed than a full swing. We need your whole body to contribute to the swing, not just the hands and arms – and soft muscles will help that.

1

BREAK 100
How to find
balance and
mobility



2

YOUR COACH



STUART DOWSETT
PGA Head Professional
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When you make a full swing, the speed and rhythm of your action comes relatively easily; on part swings, things become more difficult. Perhaps the biggest challenge to the would-be 80-shooter is syncing up the movement of the club and the body; typically, the arms tend to speed up while the body slows down, which leads to problems with path, attack angle and speed control. Here is a simple drill to get your action co-ordinated...

BREAK 90 Keep the trail shoulder moving

Trail shoulder focus

Grip the club in your trail hand only... and down at the bottom of the handle (1). Place your gloved hand on your trail shoulder. You don't need a ball for this exercise. Adopt your regular pitch shot stance and posture.

Connected strike

Place your attention on the hand on your trail shoulder, and make a three-quarter downswing (2). From the top, keep the hand and shoulder moving with the trail arm as you swing down and through. Feel how the delivery of the club comes as much from the shoulder as your hands and arms.

Shoulder/hip teamwork

In the best pitching actions, the shoulders and hips work together and both are equally open to the target at impact – around 20–30% is the average on tour. As you work on this drill, allow your chest to open up to the target with the hips as you swing through. This will help you claw back control of the club, and harness swing speed.

Held back

Image 3 here shows the typical release pattern when the upper body stops contributing to the strike. The shoulders stay square, while the hands and arms flip the club through – a disconnected and uncontrolled motion. Keep that trail shoulder moving to marry everything up.



BREAK 80

**Pick a
'window' to
establish
launch
control**



If you're looking to shoot into the 70s, your technique should be well honed. So, to move your pitching to the next level, you need to focus on more external areas such as ball flight and target. Become a better visualiser and you will bring an extra layer of creativity and versatility to your game. Try these ideas...

See your 'launch window'

Some pitch shots demand a lower, driven flight, while others warrant a higher, spinnier trajectory. On every shot, determine what the ideal shot looks like – then picture a 'launch window', perhaps three or four yards in front of you, that the ball would need

to go through to hit that ideal flight.

Adapt to the picture

Once you have created the window, let your instincts guide you to the appropriate address position. Would you need to move the ball position back or forward? What about the shaft lean,

face angle and weight distribution? Play with these until you have created the perfect foundation for the shot you have pictured.

Repeat for impact

The address position promotes and supports good impact, but keep that window focus right through to the strike.

How do you need to deliver the club to send the ball through the window? This will help ensure your impact qualities reflect the shot you are trying to hit. Repeat this process of 'Window, Set-up, Impact' on every pitch and you'll find yourself able to execute the right shot more often.

OPTIONS

THREE WAYS TO GET UP & DOWN



Struggling to break 100? Your priorities are solid contact and taking no more than three to get down, so you need to make greenside shots as foolproof as possible. The simplest play is to putt the ball, but if the grass is wet, longer or clingy, you need a shot that launches the ball clear of the grass while keeping it low. That's why, whenever the grass is short enough to run the ball in, a hybrid is an excellent choice...

WHY USE A HYBRID?

The average hybrid has around 20-25° of clubface loft. That is enough to shoot the ball up, out and forwards, even from a slightly downward attack angle. Its rounded edges and deeper sole also tend to cope better with ground contact than the more angular irons, gliding rather than catching or snagging. This makes it the ideal weapon for sending the ball out clear of the grass, but low and chasing.

1. Address

Set up a smooth brush forward

The one downside of the hybrid for this greenside shot is the club's length; a shorter club is more controllable. But you can deal with this by gripping down the handle, even on to the shaft with the lower hand. Once you have 'shortened' the club like this, you are ready to take your address...

- Bring the ball in closer to a narrow stance and set the shaft more upright than usual to encourage a more down-the-line swing path.
- Play the ball just a little forward of centre in your stance to promote a smooth, brushing impact.
- Add a little forward shaft lean by positioning the hands level with the front edge of the ball, and forward of the clubface.

2. Stroke

Feel it from the shoulders

Hand and wrist action cause massive changes in the clubface's aim and attack angle; if you do not yet possess the skill to control this, it's better to keep the hands and wrists quiet and allow the calmer arm-and-shoulder muscles to drive the action. Make a couple of practice swings, feeling the sole of the hybrid brush the grass through the impact zone. Then, focusing on a smooth back-through rhythm, step in and play the shot.

1



BREAK 100
Keep the
technique
simple, the
ball low

YOUR COACH



BEN EMERSON
Head PGA Professional,
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REV 2.0

MORE FEEL. MORE SPIN. MORE CONTROL

BREAK 90
Add
versatility



While the hybrid chip is certainly also an effective choice for the would-be 80s-shooter, it remains a bit one-dimensional and can be hard to control the run-out. As your skillset increases, it begins to make more sense to chip with irons. Allowing more versatility in carry and roll-out ratios, chipping with anything from lob wedge to 6-iron gives you a great option in a wide range of scenarios. It does, though, need a more precise strike. Use your set-up to control it...

Address
Promote a firm squeeze

The ideal chipping strike is gently downward, an angle that encourages crisp, clean contact without destroying the loft on the clubface.

Encourage this attack by making these changes...

- Play the ball centrally in a narrow stance. Too far back and you can get too steep on the shot.
- Lean your upper body slightly towards the target

until 60% of your weight is on your front foot.

- As you lean, allow your hands to follow until you create an obvious forward lean in the clubshaft.

From this set-up, play the shot with

firm wrists and a purposeful rhythm. You shouldn't be breaking the surface of the ground with the strike, but look to bruise it as the club squeezes down and through the ball.

BREAK 80
Take out the
slopes

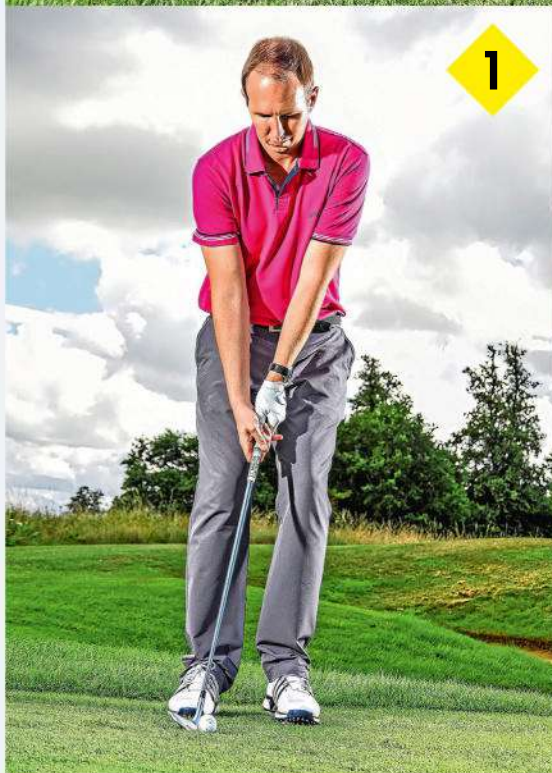
↓ Ideally, on any short-game shot we want the first bounce of the ball to be on the green; it gives greater predictability. This is not always easy, yet the advanced player with more clubface control has two options of pulling the shot off, and both involve using your most lofted wedge. If you are looking to break 80 regularly, you should have both in your locker...

Lower, with spin

Play the ball back in your stance (1) and lean your upper body towards the target to create shaft lean. Open the clubface to add loft. Strike down briskly on the back of the ball, keeping the loft on the clubface through impact. The ball will come out low and relatively hot, but also packed with spin. If you get the right strike, it will take one hop before settling quickly.

Higher, with softer landing

This time play the ball more centrally in your stance (2), and reduce the shaft lean until the handle is only barely forward of the clubface. Keep grip pressure soft to encourage the clubhead to release through the ball. Make a longer, slower swing; the ball will launch at a sharper angle, fly higher, and land more softly.



GIVE YOUR SHORT

REV 2.0



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REV2.0 WEDGES,
AND BUY THEM

BENROSS REV 2.0 WEDGES

RRP: £79

Options: 50°/52°/54°/56°/58°/60°

Key features

- Softer 304 stainless steel
- CNC-milled face (full-face groove options on 56°/58°/60°)
- Tighter groove pattern
- KBS Hi-Rev steel shaft
- Lamkin Crossline grips

The new REV 2.0 wedges feature a soft stainless steel head finished in brushed nickel

to improve your feel and touch from any lie on the course. With a tighter groove pattern across all lofts and a CNC-milled face, the REV 2.0 are designed to increase spin and control on both short greenside chips and long range pitches. For the first time, the REV 2.0 wedges between 56°/58°/60° lofts also feature a full-face groove pattern, to impart more spin no matter where you impact the face. Combine all this with a KBS Hi-Rev steel shaft and Benross have created a wedge to give you more feel, more spin and more control. Available exclusively at American Golf.



GAME MORE BITE



BENROSS TRIBE SRT PUTTERS

RRP: £99

Options: Four head shapes

Key features

- 304 stainless steel head
- Fixed weight ports
- SR TECH Milled Aluminium Full-Face Insert
- CNC-milled cavity/matt PVD finish

Benross's new Tribe SRT family is covered by four models to suit golfers of all abilities. The Tribe SRT range looks sleek and refined with a matt black finished head to deliver a premium look and feel. Contrasting with a SR Tech Milled Aluminium Full-Face Insert and fixed weights ports, the Tribe SRT putters have all the components to give golfers the ultimate feel for optimum distance control with an increased MOI for stability. Available exclusively at American Golf.



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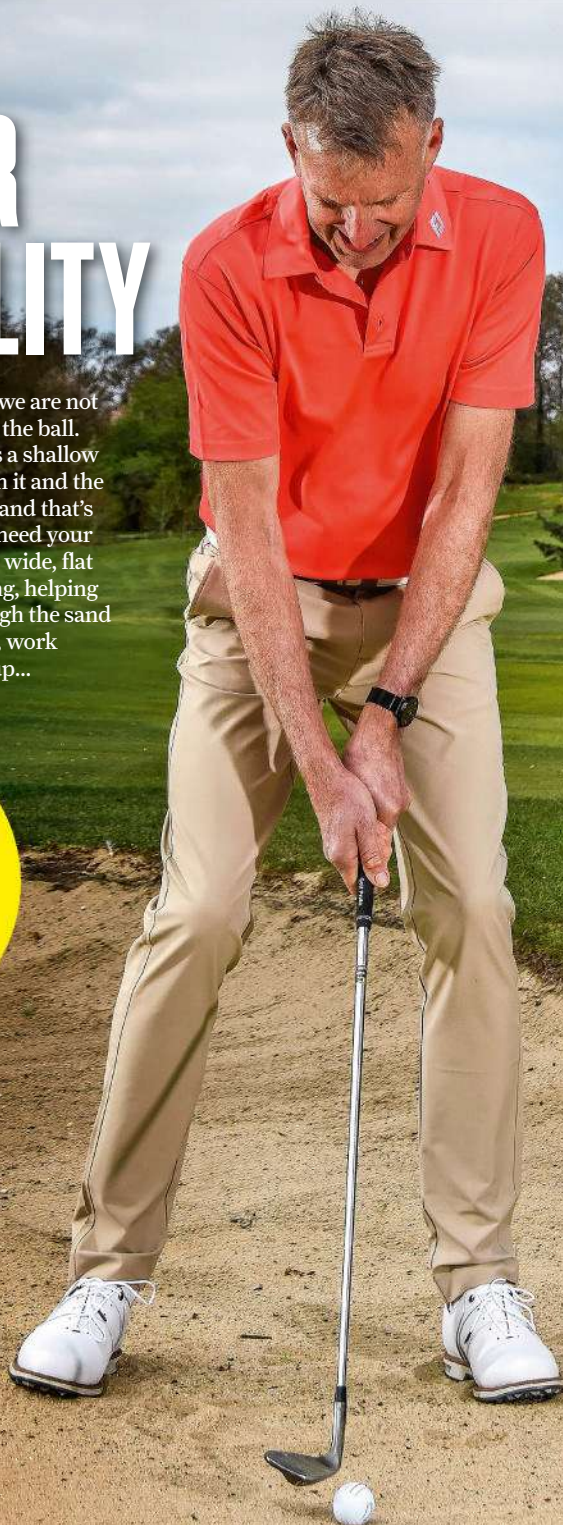
TRIBE

BUNKERS

BUNKER
MENTALITY

↙ In greenside bunkers we are not actually looking to hit the ball. Instead, the club takes a shallow divot of sand from underneath it and the ball rises up on the carpet of sand that's removed. Because of this, we need your address position to promote a wide, flat bottom to the arc of your swing, helping the club sweep forward through the sand and under the ball. To do this, work these elements into your set-up...

BREAK 100
Set up
for a level
attack

**FACE-ON****Two vital changes**

From the turf we squeeze down on the ball with a ball-turf contact, but in a bunker the club must move forwards through the sand to take a shallow sand divot. Adjust ball and club position to encourage it...

Ball position Forward

Play the ball forward of centre;

opposite the lead chest is about ideal. The club's circular motion bottoms out around this point, so positioning the ball here is the first step in creating that shallow, level impact.

Handle Level with head

Angle the shaft so it leans neither forward nor back. This means the handle is neither ahead of

nor behind the clubhead. To do this, allow a slight cup in the lead wrist. This shaft position again encourages a more level delivery of the club.

Clubface Open

Before you take your grip, twist the face so it looks a little open to your target line, then grip the club normally. This adds loft and

presents the back edge of the sole to the sand... which encourages the head to skim the surface rather than dig in.

Avoid this

Pushing your hands out ahead of the clubhead is, perhaps, the biggest blunder you can make at address. The forward lean it creates in the shaft promotes a



YOUR COACH



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downward attack angle; you'll either catch the ball clean – sending it way over the green – or chop down into the sand behind the ball, stalling the club and muffling the strike.

UP THE LINE
Keep it simple

Forget anything you may have read about opening up your feet,

hips and shoulders and slicing across the ball. It only creates problems controlling path, low point and strike. Instead, keep things straightforward and changes to a minimum.

Aim just slightly open

You can play this shot with a perfectly square stance, but standing slightly open – feet, hips

and shoulders aiming a touch left for the right-hander – just gets your lead side out of the way and helps you turn through the shot.

Add more crouch

Flex the knees more than for a normal shot. Doing so brings two major benefits...

■ It engages your thigh muscles, which helps create a stable swing

base on an unstable surface.

■ It lowers the handle, which brings that opened clubface back to square.

Sand, not ball

Focus your eyes on where you want the club to enter the sand – perhaps the width of a credit card behind the ball. Keep your focus on this spot as you swing.




REV 2.0

MORE FEEL. MORE SPIN. MORE CONTROL



BREAK 90
Improve the consistency of your contact point



 For the 90-shooter, perhaps the biggest challenge is strike. Off the turf we want to create a downward, squeezing strike to compress the ball; in sand, however, things are very different. Because we want to remove the sand from under the ball, the ideal release is a lot shallower and more level. We also want to see the clubhead overtaking the hands through the strike to use the curved sole correctly. Here is a simple drill to promote this different release...

Low tee

Find a decent level stance in the practice bunker. For this drill we are going to tee the ball up in the sand – leave just a cm or so of tee peg showing. Open the face of your sand wedge a touch, and present it to the ball.

Set-up
Ball forward of centre

Play the ball opposite your lead chest – a shirt logo makes a good guide if you have one. This positions it forward of centre

in a wider stance than normal, a position that encourages a level strike. Avoid shaft lean by keeping the handle broadly level with the clubhead.

Pegged out

Your goal for this drill is basically to take the tee from under the ball, so focus your attention on the tee, not the ball. This intention will help you avoid creating any excessive steepening or shift in low point: instead you will make a centred,

level strike, your trail hand releasing the clubhead to nip that tee peg out.

Consistent strike

Try this drill several times. Sometimes you will strike the ball cleanly; sometimes you'll take a shallow sand divot. As your confidence grows, lower the tee... then remove it altogether. Keep the same release feels and you will begin to see a consistent, controllable sand contact pattern.

BREAK 80
Use slopes to
improve your
strike



In the ideal sand strike, the ball is pretty much centred in the sand divot.

But even among better players, this is not always the case. Pretty much every player has issues with the club's entry point into the sand, or its exit from it. Whichever you struggle with, here is the solution...

Entry problems Practise from a downslope

For most golfers, poor entry means coming in too steep. This typically results in taking too much sand and ends with a muffled, spinless strike. If this sounds familiar, set up on a downslope to hit shots. Play the ball just back of centre, towards the higher foot.

Shallower attack

With the sand so high behind the ball, the penalty for chopping down steeply into the bunker is increased; you simply have to develop a shallower, more skimming delivery to make any sort of effective strike. Training contact from this slope is a genuinely effective way to address entry problems; once you can create crisp contact from here, your strike off a level stance becomes so much easier.

Exit problems Practise from an upslope

Golfers with exit problems struggle to get the club through the sand with speed; typically, the club ploughs downwards instead of skipping up off the sand. If this sounds like you, set up to hit shots on an upslope. Again, play the ball towards the higher foot, this time forward in your stance.

Shallower exit

As before, the slope intensifies the fault. If you dig too deeply, the upslope magnifies the error and stalls the club completely. This time you have to find a way to release the clubhead up the slope, keeping the sand divot as shallow as possible. Again, the adjustments you must make to master this strike translate into better technique when you play from level ground.



PUTTING

LEAD HAND GROOVES A BETTER FEEL

BREAK 100
Tame the face to hole out

↙ If you are a golfer who is looking to shoot regularly in the 90s, the first thing to take care of on the greens is those short putts, from 3-5ft. You're not going to hole all of them, but if you can make missing more of an exception than a rule you can quickly trim a handful of crucial shots off your 18-hole score. To improve your holing out, I want you to focus on your lead hand. Whether it goes above or below the trail hand, it performs a key role in controlling the face. Here's what to do...

Make the connection

Putting becomes a lot easier when you align the back of your lead hand with the putterface as you take your grip. When you do this, you form a strong and efficient connection between your hands and the blade; from here, a natural swing forward holds the face square. So set the putter with the blade looking at the hole. Add your lead hand so its back looks down the same line, thumb on top of the grip (1).

One line

Now focus on the angle between the putter's shaft and your lead forearm. Ideally there won't be one; if you can get the shaft and forearm to form one continuous line (2), you will put the lead wrist in a relatively immobile position, one that limits wrist action and helps you hold the putterface square.

DRILL ONE-HANDED PUTTING STROKE

To work on your short putting – and to build up trust in the relationship between your lead hand and the putterface – hit a series of shorties with your lead hand only.

Address

Set up the stroke

Play the ball forward of centre in your stance, just inside

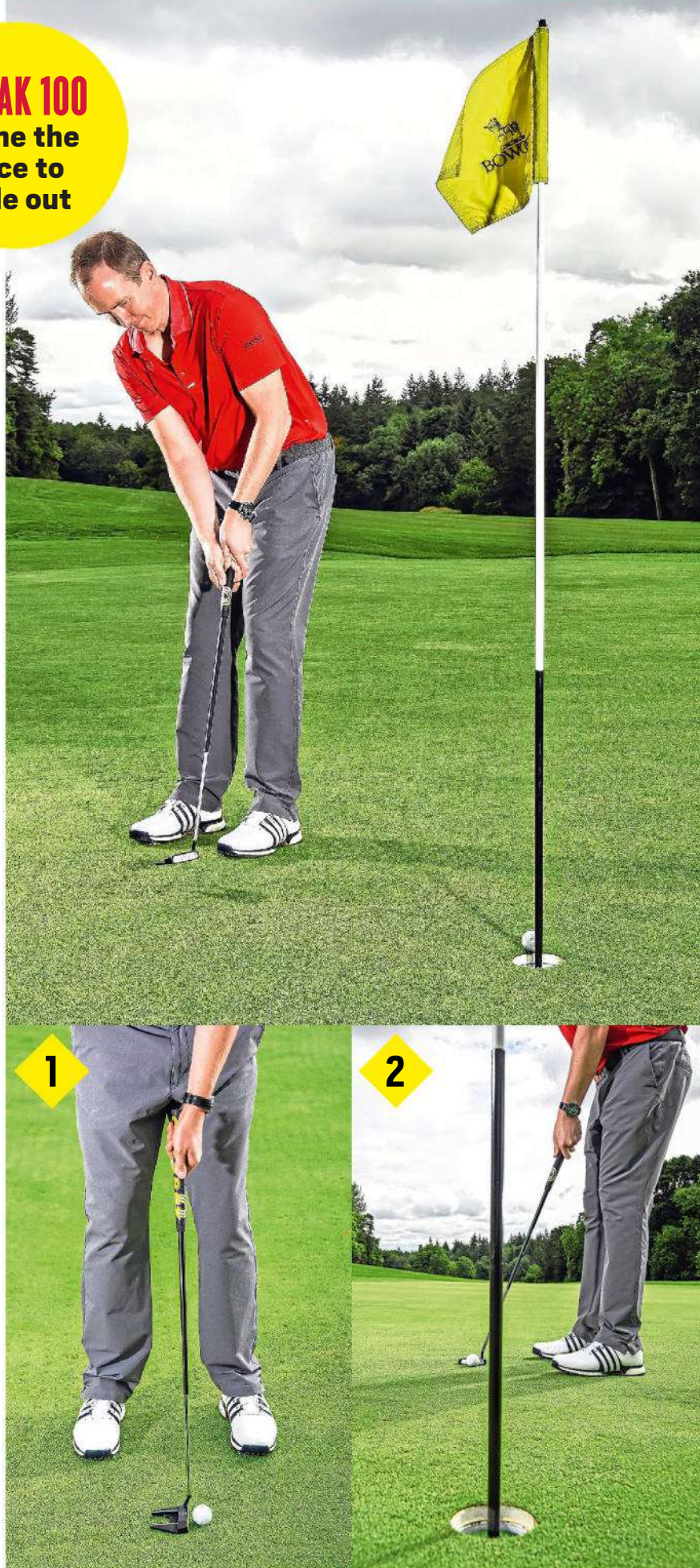
the lead instep (3). Grip the putter with your lead hand as we have just discussed, the back of the hand square to the blade and looking at the hole; put your trail hand in your pocket. If you have a watch, put it on your lead wrist; aiming its face at the hole can help create a feeling of aligned squareness. Keep your grip pressure light.

Stroke
Face/hand to hole

Now strike the putt with one intention: to keep the putterface and the back of the lead hand looking at the hole right through to the end of the stroke (4). In longer putts there will be some natural rotation and closing of the two, but at this length, with this short stroke, you can feel the two remaining square post-impact.

Ingrain the feel

Hit a series of putts like this. At first it will feel strange, but after several efforts you will start to feel the connection between the lead hand and the putterface, and how they work best as one aligned force. Keep going until you hole 10 in a row. Then add the trail hand – palm facing the hole – but allow the lead hand to retain its control over the face.



YOUR COACH



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TRIBE ULTIMATE FEEL AND CONTROL



BREAK 90
Control
distance, slash
three-putts



1 For 90-shooters looking to score in the 80s, one of the fastest ways to cut those putts is to minimise three putts. Even average golfers are rarely far out for direction on the greens, but distance is a different story; most three jabs come from leaving a putt way short or rushing it past. Develop a better feel from range and you can turn three putts into two on a regular basis.

Posture Let your arms hang
Longer putts need a longer stroke; and to execute that you need to give your arms room to swing the putter freely back and through. As you address the ball, make sure you tilt forward enough from your hips so that your arms can hang freely from your shoulders with no interference from your

thighs – as illustrated inset. Letting your arms hang is the best way to avoid tension. From this position you can make a smooth, unhindered move back and through... even on the longest putts.

Balance Find your middle ground
With poor distance control, erratic striking is one of the biggest culprits. To get on top

of this, we need to look at the role our feet play. Unless we set ourselves with great stability, a long stroke can pull us out of balance, creating head and upper-body movement and compromising the strike. To improve stability, use this very simple three-step strategy that you can take to the course...

1. To begin, rock back onto your heels...
2. ... then tip forward onto your toes...
3. ... and finally settle comfortably between the two.

Look to feel pressure right down under the laces of both feet – and picture yourself being able to offer resistance to anyone trying to push you over.

BREAK 80
Hole more
par-savers

↘ Anyone who shoots in the low 80s will be aware of how many 6-10-footers they have in a typical round. At this level you're unlikely to hit loads of greens, so getting up and down becomes key in your mission to turn more of those bogeys into pars. So often, a moderate chip leaves us with a putt that is both makeable and missable. To get more comfortable at this range, make sure you are seeing straight.

1. Stymie yourself

Set up a straight putt of around 8ft on your practice green. Now position a second ball halfway between your object ball and the hole, slap bang on your target line. Stand behind the putt to check the ball is dead on your line.

2. Optical illusion

Now set up to the putt, and run your eyes up and down the straight ball-to-hole path. Does the intermediate ball still look as if it's on your line? Right-handed golfers often report seeing it as left of the ball-hole line, a trick of perception that can ruin aim and alignment. When on-line looks left to us, we'll generally push our putts.

3. True view

That trick of the eye can be caused by eye alignment, or even head position. We've always been taught to place our eyes over the ball when putting, but in fact different golfers see 'square' from different head positions. Experiment with head position and eye line until you find a set-up that brings the middle ball back onto your target line. When your eyes are telling you the truth about the putt, you have a much better chance of a successful outcome.





BREAK 100
Position
your lead
hand



PUTTING

BETTER PUTTING



Golfers at this level need to grasp one key element about learning the game: the grip we use for putting is not the same as the one we use for the full swing. Indeed, a full-swing grip will make it hard for you to gain any level of consistency on the greens. Let's look at why... and how to form a more effective putting hold.

NO! Lead hand Gripping for speed

In the long game, we of course have very different objectives than the short game. We are looking to build an action that develops speed and power, and the grip is a big part of this. We need to hold the club in a

way that gives our wrists the mobility to cock, hinge and release... and we do that by placing the handle under the heel of our lead hand (1 & 2).

Heel on top

Just like using a hammer, this hold gives us the opportunity to turn our wrists into a powerful

lever; they can now cock and release to create speed.

All change

This wrist mobility may be great for power, but it starts to work against us when we require precision and accuracy. Excessive wrist hinge (3) during the stroke creates severe

5



4

changes in face aim, attack angle and swing path. That's why your regular, long game grip makes putting so difficult.

YES!
Lead hand
Gripping for accuracy

To make your grip more appropriate for putting, we need

to take that mobile lead wrist and lock it down. We do this by running the handle more vertically up through the hand, the heel now on the front side of the handle (4 & 5).

Lockdown

Fold your fingers around the handle and you will feel how the

heel of the hand is now very much to the side of the grip, rather than on top of it. The lead wrist should now feel locked down and immobile, with the handle securely held by the fleshy parts of the hand's palm.

Checkpoint

A key sign of a well-placed lead

hand is that the putter's shaft and your lead forearm form one continuous line. This helps these two separate entities work back and through together, as a unit. Contrast this with that more fingery long game grip, where we set a definite angle between the forearm and clubshaft.

YOUR COACH



NEIL WAIN
PGA Professional based at Keele GC, Staffs

BREAK 90
Putt from
your chest



↙ While most potential 80-shooters have a relatively wrist-pacifying grip, the most common problem here is a putting stroke driven almost exclusively by the hands and arms. If we are to develop a smoother, more accurate and more consistent stroke, we need the body to make a bigger contribution. I'll show you how to do this...

Armsy putting
The problem

If we move the putter with arms only, we are forced into rapid changes of angle as the elbows fold and straighten to accommodate it. As with a wristy grip, delivering the putter with control becomes much harder.

Farewell to arms

As with the full swing, the fulcrum for your movement should be the torso with the chest turning back and through. Get this more into your stroke and you can start to build a much more repeatable and reliable action. For a great way to train this, place an alignment stick on the back of your putter (1) and use your chest to hold it in position. Swing back and through; if your chest stops moving, the stick works loose.

Shaft shift

If your putter won't allow that – or you don't have an alignment stick – hit putts with the stick or a clubshaft pinned across your chest by your upper arms (2). Though a slightly more awkward feeling, this will help you cut out independent arm movement and get your chest more involved in driving the stroke.

BREAK 80
Two
changes for
a smooth
roll

↘ Even with both a decent grip and chest contribution, it's still possible to struggle to create a smooth roll on a regular basis. If you are a better player who is prone to some skipping off the blade, there are two further areas to check – one at address, one through the stroke.

Bouncing bomb

A bouncing, skidding ball will kick off-line and fail to run out the required distance. It is typically caused by striking down on the ball – even a subtle angle can mean problems. To get the ball rolling again, we need to be sure we are striking level-to-up.

Ball position
Further forward
than you think

It is very easy for regular golfers to overlook ball position as something they simply assume they have right. But in fact, even many good players have the ball further back than is ideal, which can lead to a slightly downward striking angle. So check it over – set the ball just inside the lead heel of a shoulder-width stance (1), and no further back.

Release the blade

Handle-dragging is a second, common reason better players fail to roll the ball. It creates forward shaft lean – handle leading the putterface – and descending strikes. The putterhead must release freely through the strike, the butt pointing back at your stomach (2). This will create an upward attack angle and a smoother roll.



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