

PRACTICE

LIKE A PRO

By Todd A. Sones

All too often, I watch golfers practice diligently and not improve. The reason is they lack direction and fail to have a plan. It's been said many times that if you fail to have a plan, you might as well plan to fail.

Usually the typical person goes out to practice for thirty to sixty minutes with no objective or plan in mind. After a few shots, the player is generally reacting to what the ball is doing. For instance, a player starts out hitting the ball thin and after some self-analysis, deduces that they're lifting their head. Of course, the player then practices keeping their head down and ends up unknowingly practicing poor posture. During the next practice session, the player then hits the ball to the right because the poor posture left no room for a shoulder turn. After more self-analysis, the player tries to swing inside out by taking the club more inside and closing their stance. Before too long, the player has developed so many swing thoughts and compensations, it's nearly impossible to go to the course with a swing they can trust for any length of time.



Even pros like Scott McCarron need to check the fundamentals.

Working with and being exposed to PGA Tour players has been a great education. Tour players generally practice very differently than the average golfer. There are some basic principles that can be learned by examining the practice routines of some of the best players in the world. These practice routines have helped these players to perform at the highest levels in golf.

Principles #1 and #2. Always have direction or a plan for your practice

and know your personal tendencies.

When I go to a tour event to work with Scott McCarron or Robert Gamez, I always check their fundamentals. All players have personal tendencies. Ninety percent of the time, when the set-up is correct, the golf swing will also be in order.

If you don't understand your personal set-up and swing tendencies, then it's time to get some help from your teaching professional. He or she can help you pinpoint your tendencies and help you develop a personal practice plan to help you correct those tendencies. Once you start working consistently at the same plan for a period of time, you'll find that you will be better able to understand and develop your swing, and thus, play better golf. It's important to remember, however, that you must know your tendencies before you can work on them.

Principle #3. Understand and apply training practice techniques.

Sometimes Scott McCarron goes through his pre-shot checklist and finds something wrong. For instance,

he might be setting up with too much weight on his forward leg and the ball is back in his stance. At this point, he then goes into what he calls training practice. This practice technique is when a player is allowed to totally commit and focus on one fundamental change. Scott spends an allotted amount of time working on getting comfortable with those changes, then switches from training practice to target practice. When he's target practicing, he practices trusting that the work he's put in will produce the desired result.

Principle #4. Understand and apply target practice techniques.

Target practicing is a step that most amateurs fail to take. We've all had those days where we can't miss on the range, then walk fifty yards to the first tee and launch one right out of bounds. The reason this happens is that on the range it is easier to trust our swing because there is no consequence for a miss. We just have to hit another range ball. On the golf course, there are consequences for every shot we hit. Knowing that, we tend to trust our swing less and then try to control our swing more.

Target practice is when a player takes a mental step to not allow his mind to think mechanically about his golf swing. Sometimes this technique does allow for one simple and general thought, like slow, low takeaway, make a full coil, or maybe make a wide swing. General thoughts like these are not specific to a part of the swing and thus, allow a player to keep his rhythm and timing. Remember, the ultimate goal for all great players is to completely trust their swing during performance, leaving their minds clear to commit to and focus on the shot their hitting and the target. Target practice should take place at the end of a practice session. During this time of practice, players should work on a designed pre-shot routine. When a player is target practicing, the challenge is to not start thinking about swing mechanics during the time they are supposed to



Be sure to have a plan when you take to the practice tee.

PHOTO BY STEVE HANCOCK FOR GOLF COURSE SOURCE

be trusting. If you do it on the range, you'll do it on the course. Thinking mechanically on the golf course is really saying that you do not trust yourself to just let go and swing the club.

In summary, it is essential to always have a plan for your practice. If you are a developed player, you should know your tendencies and have a pre-shot checklist that you use consistently. If something is wrong, have specific ways

or drills in mind to bring you back to your best swing. If you are a player who is learning and still developing your swing, get some help so that your practice has direction. Work on your set-up and swing mechanics during your training practice. After you have spent time training an element of your swing, spend some time in your practice trusting your training. Keep your mind clear so that you can focus on the target. By using these practice techniques, you will develop your swing mechanics as well as your mental skills. After time, you will perform as well on the course as you do on the range.

These practice techniques should be applied to all areas of your game. Have goals, have direction and practice training your fundamentals. Then practice trusting that your training will pay off and eventually, YOU WILL PLAY BETTER GOLF.

Near The South Shore of Lake Michigan in Chesterton, Indiana

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

SPEND A DAY,
SPEND A WEEKEND
IN THE DUNELAND AREA

Schedule your tee times on-line:
www.thebrassic.com

TAKE I-94 OR THE SKYWAY
FROM CHICAGO
JUST 45 MINUTES
FROM DOWNTOWN



EASY TO FIND!
Exit 26A off I-94
Exit 33 off
I-80 (Indiana Tollroad)
Just 3 miles West of Rt. 49
at 1100 N. & Pearson Rd.

THE LINKS OF THE INDIANA DUNES



**1110 PEARSON ROAD
CHESTERTON**

(219) 921-1192

SITE OF THE 1939 INDIANA NORTHERN OPEN