



New Season, New Game Plan

For golfers, this time of year is magical. Life outside is awaking and golf courses are being populated again. The budding of azaleas and the crowning of the green jacket always seems to be the unofficial kick off to the golf season in the midwest and across the country.

As we head outside and get back onto the golf course, there are some things we can do to ensure we have a pleasant spring and get off to a good start.

Golf is unique in that it's the only sport in which the place we practice is different from the field the game is played on. The driving range, domes or indoor facilities are uniquely different than the golf course. That's why you hear so many bemoaning their inability to "take it to the course."

The situations you encounter on the golf course are too challenging to replicate in traditional practice areas.

Here are some suggestions to help with that transition to outside this spring.

The Hibernating Golfer

If you weren't able to do much in terms of swinging a club this off-season, not to worry. Wake up your swing and get ready for the course.

1. When we take time away from the game, we often lose overall rhythm, sequence and coordination. In order to regain these all important functions, we need to get in swing reps.

My recommendation is making 15 to 30 thoughtful swings per day. Start out slow, but as you increase speed, work to increase range of motion. This will begin to coordinate mind and body connection,

in addition increasing overall swing awareness. No ball needed!

2. After thawing out and getting moving again with your swing reps, it's time for the driving range. Take this time to introduce the ball. Notice how it distracts you from being aware of your swing. The intention should be to continue to stay aware of your personal swing cues, which help you reproduce a quality swing. Observe how the excitement of hitting the ball changes things. Do you get faster? Do you shorten your backswing? Do you begin to fill up with tension? Does balance begin to falter? Whatever you observe, work to come back to the feelings and effort you experienced when making practice swings at home.

3. Lastly, early in the season use the golf course as a practice ground. I often hear from students that their only experience on the golf course are ones where they are playing for money or competing for a score. It's hard to get comfortable on the course if you always have external pressure present. You would be better served if you found an early morning or evening time to go out by yourself and experiment, taking your swings from home and the range to the course.

The Off-Season Practicer

You're been practicing all off-season and so are eager to take it to the course. It's important to understand the indoor practice experience has less stimulus to navigate through than that of a course. So as we work our way outside for what I like to call "spring training," let's be intelligent about how we work ourselves back into playing form and set our expectations.

1. When outside for the first couple of rounds, understand that it takes time to acclimate to turf conditions, wind, wearing multiple layers, and pressure. Try playing without keeping score. Drop second shots when pace of play allows for it.


2. Have realistic expectations — your skills will be rusty, and the mind will be overwhelmed by the outdoor experience. Give yourself ample time to settle into form.

Setting up for Success on the Course

Golf courses usually play hard, as spring usually comes with high winds and soft and cool conditions. So the course plays long.

1. Consider moving up a tee box. The course is playing longer than the yardage, and most likely you are hitting the ball shorter at the beginning of the season. Ease your way into it.

2. Don't play for money. Golf has enough external and internal pressures. Give yourself a fighting chance this spring to get acclimated with being outside. No need to add more distraction.

3. Play nine holes in the evening or early morning to get practice on the course. Don't be critical or over analytical of poor shots. Most likely they came from discomfort which arose from over stimulation from the new environment. Give yourself time to settle into being outdoors, hitting from uneven lies, and navigating the conditions before upping the stakes with competition. 

Chris Oehlerking, PGA

Co-Owner and Dean of Instruction at The Golf Practice

2024 Illinois Teacher of the Year

www.thegolfpractice.com

