

INTRODUCTION

PRACTICE IS A PROCESS USED TO develop a skill. It is a tool that should lead toward improvement. In golf, practice should ultimately produce players who are well-rounded and better prepared for any on-course situation and competition. With practice comes the hope that lower scores and a more consistent game are on the horizon. Unfortunately, a multitude of golfers don't experience such benefits.

This is in large part due to the overwhelming tendency to relate practice only to *mechanics* while the development of *playing skills* goes by the wayside. While it is absolutely true that numbers of golfers need to improve their mechanics, it is not the entire picture. A balance between *mechanical improvements*, developing a strong *mental game* and *on-course skills* as well as making the most of your time through the use of *practice games* is a more meaningful way to look at improving.

Most golfers spend their whole lives trying to develop a repeating swing, as if mechanics alone will make them good players. I learned early on there is more to golf than that.

--Phil Mickelson

Hitting ball after ball without a goal, a consequence or a feeling similar to what you'll experience on the course is not sensible. Putting multiple balls without any pressure involved or carelessly chipping or pitching a bunch of balls to a hole isn't preparation for the actual event. Training in the form of repetitions is commonly accepted when developing mechanical improvements but should not dominate your practice especially once those improvements have been acquired. The endless search for some sort of perfect swing, the over consumption of advice and constantly practicing from a level lie is far from what the game is about. Being able to adapt to different lies and various terrain, having a plethora of shots in your bag, getting over mishits or misfortune and

experiencing a variety of situations is more realistic and is what you'll encounter from shot to shot, hole to hole, round to round and course to course.

Unrealistic practice breeds **inconsistency** and the **inability to transition good shots in practice to the course**. Even great shots in practice are often a façade and don't necessarily translate into great shots and lower scores while playing. This can be extremely frustrating but blame can't be directed at the golf course itself. It is the unrealistic practice environment and purposeless practice process that needs to be transformed.

THE MISSING LINK

In order to play better golf, you should practice how you play or how you'd *like* to play. As it is in other sports, practice in golf should be in preparation for competition, the field of play and the feel of play. Ironically, the shots and emotions you experience on the course seldom, if ever resemble what occurs in practice and therein lies the problem ... or opportunity.

If you want to be more consistent on the course, the shots you hit in practice should be inconsistent. That's right – inconsistent. The types of shots must differ just as they do on the course. If you happen to consecutively hit the same club or shot in practice, while less realistic, pressure applied through the use of consequences, goals or a scoring system can dramatically boost your on-course play. Your practice must simulate the golf course physically, mentally and emotionally. Most players don't have the luxury to learn solely on the course, so what golfers are left with is transforming the practice facility into a more realistic environment. All of this is accomplished by incorporating realistic situations under pressure into your practice through the use of **competitive practice games** or **golf scrimmages**.

This book is a practical source containing nearly one hundred competitive practice games. Many have multiple versions or variations and they fall into six basic categories: putting games, chipping games, pitching games, bunker games, full swing games, and on-course games. You can make many of these games as easy or as difficult as you wish

which makes them effective for the novice as well as the professional. These games demand or require either by their set rules or by you - and this is the most important part - that the lie, your stance and the shot vary and that you alternate the target and change clubs often. Through your own chosen goal or a scoring system, your shots will now emulate playing in situations which evoke pressure and this, along with various circumstances, creates realism. This develops a purpose for and benefit to every shot that is hit whether it is a full swing, short shot or putt and is what will help you get the most out of your practice transforming your game into one that is well-prepared for the course and competition. Depending on your level of dedication, you can even add practice sessions in various weather conditions. But regardless of your ability level or degree of dedication, to get the most out of your practice and learning, it must eventually be done in a realistic outdoor setting.

BENEFITS

Playing these games promotes several skills. Your ability to recover mentally from missed shots should be acquired and you should attain the physical skills to hit a wide array of shots. At the same time, they will help sharpen your attitude and your desire. You will become a more effective thinker and mentally stronger as you develop strategic thinking, sound risk-reward analysis and mental toughness. In order to improve in these areas though, you need to be aware of your actions, your frame of mind and your approach. Don't let a poor attitude hinder your ability to gain experience during practice.

Through playing golf scrimmages, you'll come to understand how they'll help your competitive on-course spirit. Your overall confidence will rise along with your inner will power to get the ball in the hole - and in a fewer number of strokes than you ever have before – those are playing skills. As Lee Trevino once said, "Just figure out a way to get it in the hole, no matter what it looks like." He also said that he got his confidence from hard work and that hard work was in the form of practicing realistically not without purpose and mindlessly beating balls on the range.

As realistic practice comes to the forefront of your practice regimen, you'll also learn how to effectively use your practice facility. You'll understand how easy it is to simply incorporate the various games in this book into your practice and efficiently match a game or two to what you need to work on within your game. It will become apparent how productive and fun such practice is as you become a more skillful player teaching yourself new shots along the way. Your practice will be more useful and purposeful. You will walk away from each practice session with a sense of accomplishment, knowing you're doing something great for your game. You may even find that you play better than you practice. After all, you practice so that you can sink that final putt to win the club championship or a major championship, beat your friend for the first time or shoot your lowest score ever.

THE TARGET ... AUDIENCE

People obviously play and compete for different reasons. Many enjoy the sport for the camaraderie and others enjoy it for the personal challenges that it presents. For some it may mean breaking 100 for the first time or just playing without being embarrassed. For others, competition is their weekend league, junior golf association tournament, college golf, the tour qualifying school or major golf championship. Whatever competing means to you, practicing these games will help you take a more accomplished and intuitive game to the golf course.

Whether you're a junior golfer or adult, amateur or professional, the games in this book will hone or develop your on-course skills and turn you into a player of the game. If you're a golf coach or instructor, this book consists of practical tools that provide more meaningful, fresh and efficient guidance for your players or students. Incorporation of these games into your practice or the practice of your students or players will construct a bridge between the practice tee and the first tee. No matter your level of competition they promote challenging situations in practice so the actual game on the course is more familiar to you and perhaps even easier.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

The series of chapters which precede the nearly one hundred competitive practice scrimmages begins with an effective way to look at improving

your game. It is a balanced approach to bettering the aspects of your game that need attention. Also within these chapters, your understanding of the necessity to practice realistically will be confirmed. You will learn how the range and the course drastically differ but more importantly, you'll learn how to turn the entire practice facility into a practical and beneficial arena as well as the general percentage of time that you should allocate to training your mechanics compared to practicing the game of golf. You will learn how athletes in other sports practice and prepare for a game and how they incorporate scrimmages and other game-like scenarios into their practice regimen. The chapter on pressure should make it apparent that infusing pressure into your practice is an invaluable component to successfully transitioning your game to the course. Overall, these chapters should help better explain how incorporating scrimmages into your practice will help bridge the gap between practice and play.