



PRACTICE TO PLAY

“IT WAS great on the practice ground” came the cry from the fifth tee as Henry’s ball flew straight into the water. “That is the last time that I practice my putting before I go out and play”, said Paula. How often have you heard frustrated comments such as these being made by golfers as they fail to live up to their expectations? I am absolutely certain that we have all practiced a particular part of our game, be it driving, putting, bunker play or some other area of the game and expected that if we put the effort in then we will get the reward out, after all as the saying goes, “You only get out of something, what you put in”. So there it is; the recipe for disappointment is already written.

Golf does not work quite like other sports, there are times when you can practice for weeks and months and still not get the results that you want, but trust me if you practice correctly then you will reap the rewards even if they are not as quickly as you would like. You will have heard that “practice makes perfect”, well I am here to tell you that this statement is absolutely wrong, practice has never and will never make perfect, but perfect practice will make perfect , just as good practice will make good and beating balls will make you good at beating balls.

So if the quality of your practice has a direct effect on the quality of your play, then don’t you think that you should learn how to practice? I see players everyday stride onto the range and beat balls one after the other without ever considering a target, not only that most are practicing their swing, the latest tip from the golf channel only serves to keep their mind focussed on how they make the movement rather than where they want to have the ball finish.



The best players are able to recognise the difference between practice and play and take steps to ensure that their work on the range or the putting green transfers to the course. Clearly there are times when we want to work on our technique and improve one aspect or another, in these cases it is wise to forget all about the target and even for the matter how the ball flies and concentrate solely on what it is that you are working on, so for example if your teacher has advised a change of grip or posture then work on that and do not be distracted by the ball. You may decide to make several practice swings between shots and hit only a few balls during this phase of your practice. Before you complete the session you should switch modes and then practice to play with the last twenty percent of your balls. This means forgetting the technical aspects and focussing exclusively on how you want the ball to reach your target, you should change clubs or targets for each of these shots.

Likewise on the putting green it is much wiser to practice your technique or movement by stroking putts to the edge of the green rather than to a hole. Again when you come towards the end of your session, you can start playing to a hole, but forget about the technique at this stage rather focus on the speed and line of the putt. One of the most common practice drills on the putting green is to hit balls from the same place until you hole a certain number of putts, let's say 20 consecutive putts from one metre, I do not believe that this helps you perform on the course, yes it may build your confidence but this type of drill does not mirror a game situation which is vital if you want to get the best from your practice. A much better version of this drill is to mark out four points around a hole with putts of different distances, one metre, one and a half metres, two metres and two and a half metres. Now when you do this drill you have a different line and a different speed to contend with, this is much more like you will find on the course.



One of my favourite practice drills is to take a single ball to a green, throw the ball off the green and play the ball without improving its position. Your goal is to get the ball onto the green and into the hole in the fewest shots possible. You can repeat this in nine different locations and total the number of shots that you take for all nine 'holes', make a note of the results and keep a record, if you repeat this drill once a month then you will easily be able to see where you are good and what shots you need to improve on.

The quality of transfer of learning from the range to the course is one of the major differences between professionals and amateurs, there are no special skills needed to prepare a good practice session as long as you remember that your ultimate objective is to improve your golf on the course.

Article written by Tony Bennett

Tel (351) 93 2524253

Email tony@bmycoach.org