

Met Methods

Win On One

A few mental and physical pointers will help you pure the first tee shot of the day

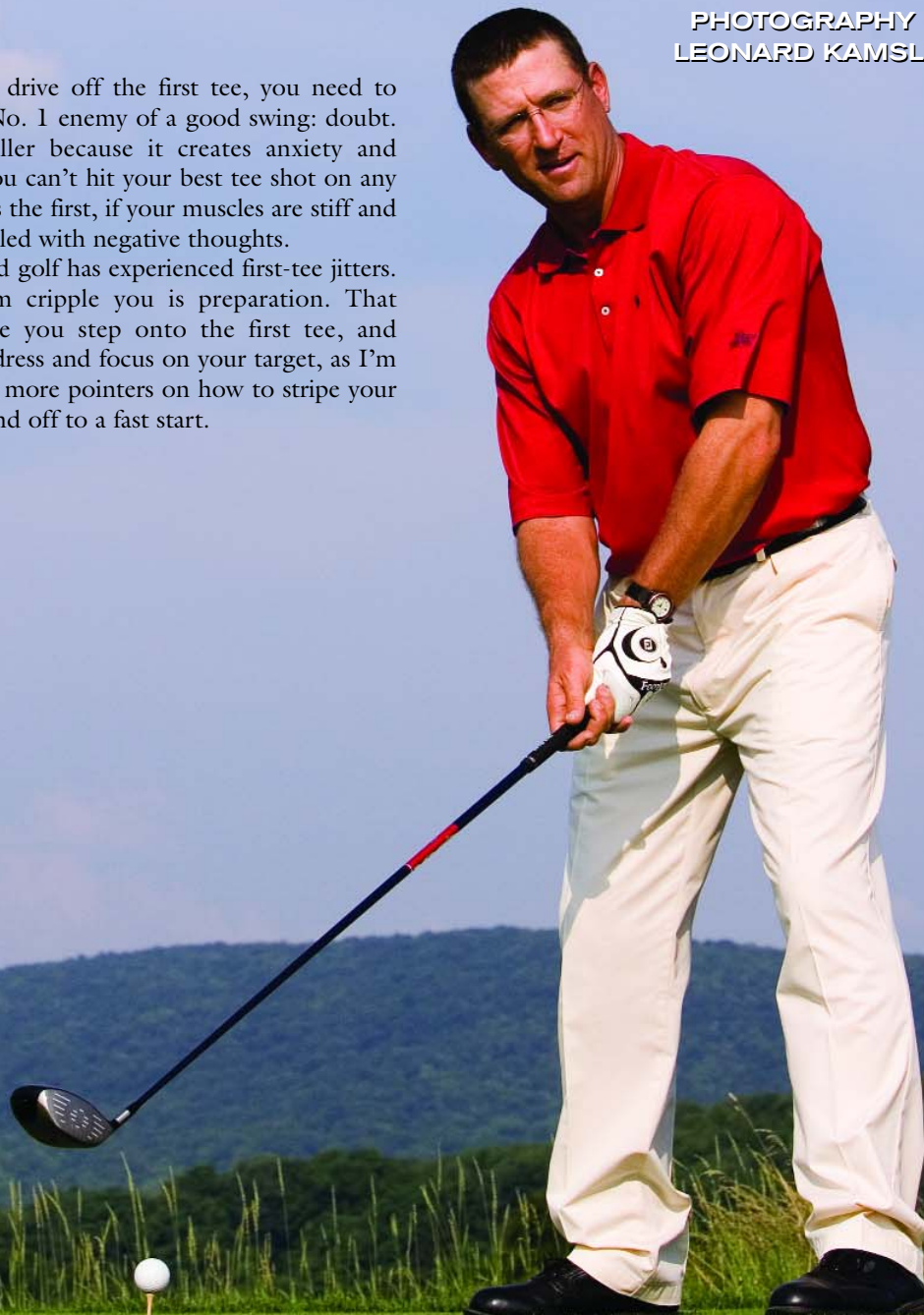
BY MICHAEL LOPUSZYNSKI WITH GREG MIDLAND

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LEONARD KAMSLER

To hit a strong drive off the first tee, you need to eliminate the No. 1 enemy of a good swing: doubt. Doubt is a killer because it creates anxiety and tension, and you can't hit your best tee shot on any hole, much less the first, if your muscles are stiff and your mind is filled with negative thoughts.

Anyone who has ever played golf has experienced first-tee jitters. The key to not letting them cripple you is preparation. That preparation starts well before you step onto the first tee, and continues as you take your address and focus on your target, as I'm doing here. Turn the page for more pointers on how to stripe your first tee shot and get your round off to a fast start.

Waggle your club and look at your target to prepare yourself to hit the first drive of the day.



Start Slow on the Range

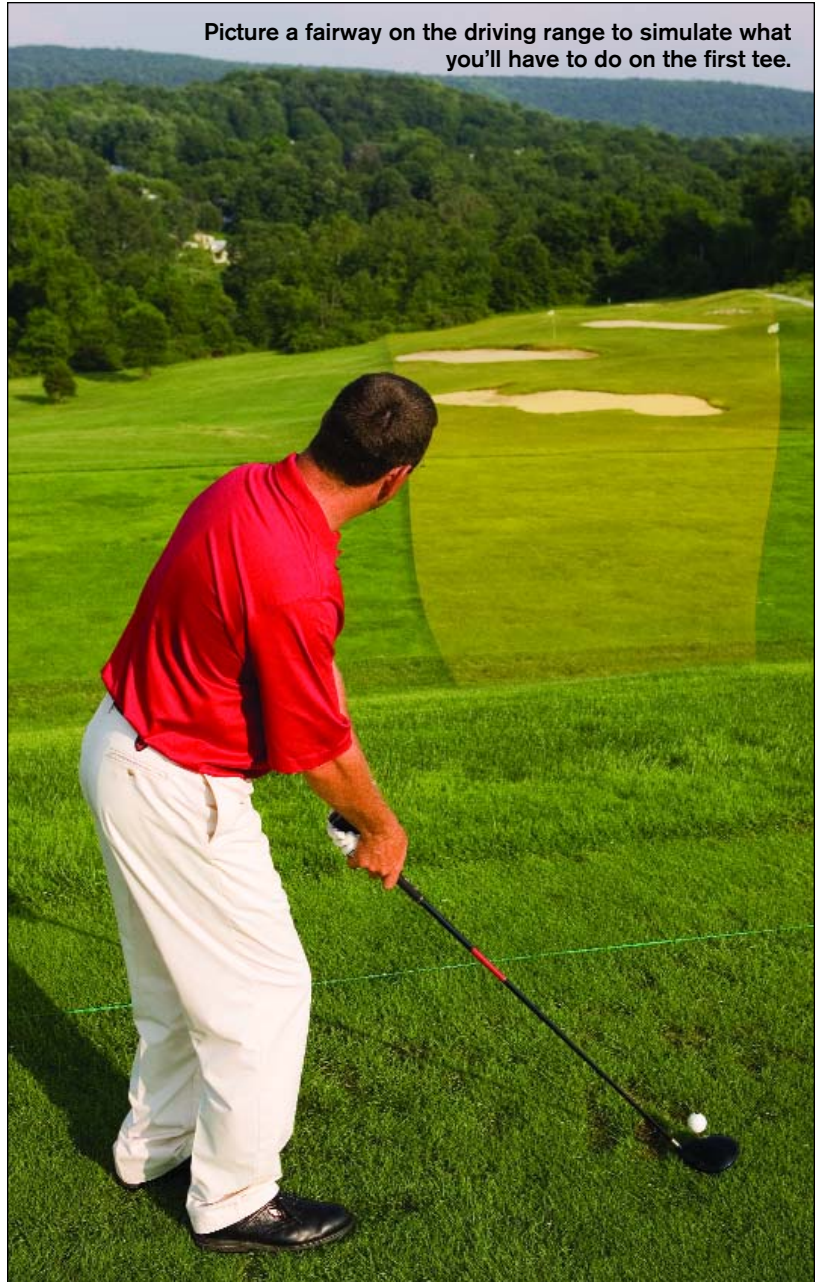
Make it a goal to leave yourself at least 20 minutes of driving range time before your round. Start by taking some slow, rhythmic swings with your sand wedge (*below*), and progress through your pitching wedge and 9-iron before skipping ahead to longer clubs. This will help you build confidence and establish a good tempo for the day.



Hit short irons to ease your way into a warm-up.

Visualize a fairway boundary on the driving range and work on hitting draws and fades into that area (*right*). Give yourself a wide enough target to hit, but a narrow enough boundary so that you're not just blasting balls anywhere.

Finally, go through your full preshot routine and finish your range session with whatever club you plan to hit off the first tee. Ideally, you'll go directly from the range to the first tee with this positive image fresh in your mind.



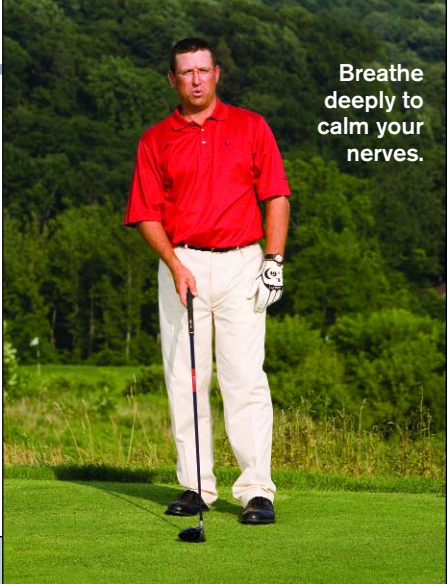
Picture a fairway on the driving range to simulate what you'll have to do on the first tee.

Are you serious?

Focus on Your Line

Control your breathing and you'll be less likely to tense up. Take about 30 seconds while your playing partners are hitting or before your group is called and make several deep breaths in and out (*right*). You should feel focused and in control.

Before you take your address, visualize a line from your ball to your target in the fairway (*below*). Concentrate on that spot, and block out bunkers, long grass, and any other hazards that may be present. You've put in your prep time, and you're ready. You wouldn't appreciate if an opponent whispered "don't hit it in the woods" while you were setting up to the ball, so why do it to yourself? Pick a target and commit to it.



Breathe deeply to calm your nerves.

Before address, have a clear picture of the trajectory you want your ball to take to the target.



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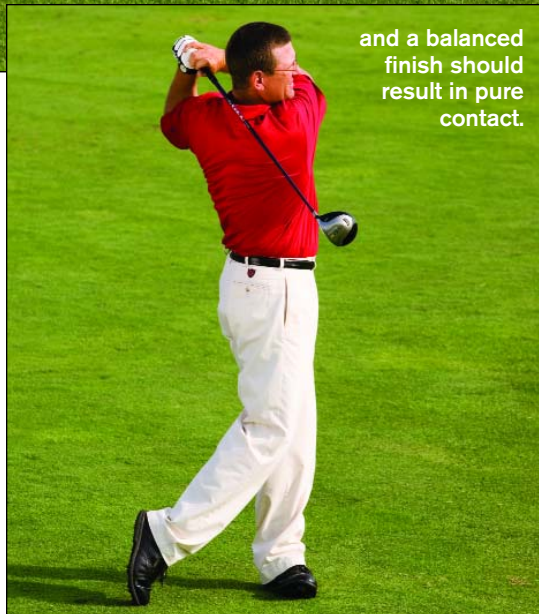
A light grip...



a smooth takeaway...

Final Checklist

- 1) Don't hesitate... pick a target and commit to it.
- 2) Take no more than three seconds to start the club back after address.
- 3) Swing with freedom.



and a balanced finish should result in pure contact.

Make an Efficient Routine

There is no need to spend an inordinate amount of time over the ball – it only contributes to the jitters. So when it comes to your pre-shot routine, remember to hold the club with a secure but light grip (*inset, top left*) and take a final look at your target. Once you set the club behind the ball, you should wait no more than three seconds before pulling the trigger and starting a smooth one-piece takeaway (*left*).

Swing with freedom and abandon, as if you were hitting off the deck of a ship. You've already picked a target and aligned yourself, so there's no need to try to steer the ball to the fairway. That effort will only tense you up and lead to poor contact.

Finally, key on a balanced finish, with your chest facing your target and your weight coiled over your left leg (*below, left*). Chances are you'll be watching your first tee shot soar down the middle. ■



Michael Lopuszynski won the MGA Junior Championship in 1982. He teaches at the David Glenz Golf Academy in Franklin, New Jersey.