

Met Methods

Sharpen Your Focus

Worn out at the end of the golf season? Here's how to recommit to your game this fall

BY CHARLIE BOLLING WITH GREG MIDLAND

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEONARD KAMSLER

Fall is in many ways the best time of the year to play golf. It's a season of ideal course conditions, crisp weather and perhaps more time on your hands now that the kids are back in school. But what if your game doesn't match your enthusiasm? After all, it's been a long, hot summer, and you may have lost focus on the keys that helped you earlier in the golf season.

It may be tempting to shut down your game and take a "wait 'till next year" attitude. That's the wrong move if you have a place to escape to during the winter, or have a golf vacation in the works. You want to re-energize for those events, so you can enjoy taking your game on the road. The following are some keys to work on here at home this fall to sharpen your skills.



Stretch out your coil

A balanced full swing consists of turning your arms, shoulders and core back and through. However, it's easy to get sloppy this time of year and abbreviate either the backswing or the follow-through. When you do that, the big muscles in your body can't keep pace with the little muscles. This disrupts your timing and leads to poor contact.

This is one of the best stretches I know – not only to warm up before your round but also to check that you're making a full turn. Simply make your backswing and hold it for about 30 seconds (*below, left*). It stretches out your hips and all the muscles in your upper arms and chest. The longer you hold it, the more supple you will become. Now follow through and hold your finish for the same amount of time (*below, right*). Repeat this and try to increase the stretch in both directions. When you put down a ball and are ready to hit, feel like you're swinging to the two positions that formed the stretch.



Are you serious?

Hit the half-wedge

Improving your wedge play from that tricky 40- to 70-yard range is a good way to get the rest of your short game in shape. The key to distance control on half-wedge shots is to complete the swing with your body, not your arms. I see many mid- to high handicappers make a long backswing and then stop their body rotation shortly after impact, which causes a decelerating motion into the ball.

I encourage you to make about a three-quarter-length backswing (*inset, right*) and then a controlled finish to the same height on the other side. Here's a great key to help you: Make sure your right hip comes around and finishes equidistant to the target as your left hip (*below, left*). If it trails your left hip at the finish (*below, right*), it's an indication that you haven't rotated your body all the way through the shot. Finish with your right hip forward, and you'll hit half-wedges onto the green.



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Know your wedges

You've likely neglected your chipping all summer, so spend as much time as possible practicing it. Get to know your sand and lob wedges. A sand wedge typically has more bounce, meaning it's better from clean fairway lies and from the sand, while a lob wedge will serve you better from thick rough. It's all a matter of preference, however, and you should experiment with different clubs and a variety of greenside chips to find out which clubs you are most comfortable using.

Quick tip: When chipping with a lofted club from thick rough, hinge your wrists early in the backswing (*inset, right*) and then unhinge them into impact. Avoid rigid wrists and a shallow, putting-type stroke, or the grass will grab the club and you won't be able to take advantage of the club's loft. Think "hinge and release" to get the ball out.



Swing the putter head

Putts from inside 10 feet or so are certainly not gimmes, but you want to make them and expect to make your share. The best way to ensure that you do is to feel the swing of the putter head and try to repeat that in the stroke. Take a light grip and make some practice strokes, letting the putter head swing through (*left*). Don't try to guide it; its momentum will take it to the finish.

Finally, work on keeping your head and upper body in the same position they were in at address, with no forward movement. Keeping your body stable through the stroke, as Tiger Woods is so good at doing, will help you swing the putter head naturally and get a consistent roll on the putt. ■



Charlie Bolling played on the PGA Tour from 1985 through 1988, and won the 2002 Met PGA Championship. He is the head professional at Fresh Meadow Country Club in Lake Success, New York.