

# Making Good use of the Driving Range

## Philosophy

Many golfers mistakenly approach a large bucket of balls as they would a marathon. They hit one ball after another at a rapid pace, only with the finish line in mind.

The goal of using a practice range should be to build the golf swing. Start with your wedges and short irons, progress to your longer irons, then your fairway woods. Finish practicing your full swing with, yes, your driving club, whether it's a Driver or 3-wood.

First-timers should concentrate on making good contact, hitting as straight as possible and getting the ball in the air. Don't be disappointed if the ball dribbles off the tee now and then, or goes astray. Just step back, take a deep breath, and make a correction. Take several practice swings to develop a tempo. When you're ready, focus on the ball.

## Range Etiquette

Just as there is course etiquette, there also is range etiquette. Here are a few things to be aware of:

- Hit only from designated areas. Ranges often stagger the hitting zones to replenish the grass.
- Once you find a spot, make sure you are in no one else's way.
- Be aware of what is going on around you. Balls have been known to be hit sideways.
- As a courtesy, avoid hitting at the same time as the person(s) directly next to you.
- For your safety, never retrieve a ball or stray tee even a few yards away.
- Don't make target practice out of the tractor or vehicle that picks up the balls.
- Return the empty bucket after finishing.

## Improving your game

Practice is important in any sport and golf is no exception. To really improve your game you must spend time fine tuning your swing. But many golfers simply "hit balls" on the practice range without checking to see if they are improving. Here are some tips to help measure the effectiveness of your practice sessions on the driving range.

First, you must identify your objective on the range. Some people are trying to fix a slice or a hook while others are trying to add distance to their shots. If you do not know what your objective is you will not know if you have achieved it. You may not have a noticeable flaw to correct but you need to train your muscles so you can make good shots consistently. So hitting consistently is your objective in that case. Just make sure you have a clear idea of your purpose.

Second, it does not matter too much if you quit slicing or hooking the ball, or if you add 30 yards to your drive if your shots are spraying to the left or right. You may have eliminated the slice in your ball flight, but did the ball actually go towards your target? I have heard people "ooh" and "ahhh" over their practice shots even though one went well to the left of what appeared to be their target line and the next went just as far to the right. Make sure you identify a target and gauge if you are hitting the ball within a few yards on either side of that target until the ball rolls to a stop.

Third, always hit a variety of clubs in a random order on the range. This will better reflect how a real round of golf is played. You never hit your seven iron fifteen times in a row on a normal round of golf so do not get locked into hitting only your seven iron on the practice range even if it is your seven iron that needs the work. For example, to work on your seven iron try hitting your seven a few times, then hit a 3-wood a couple of times, then hit a four-iron, then a wedge, then back to the seven for a few shots. This will help you practice your set-up routine for various shots since usually you address the ball and take your stance slightly differently for woods, low irons and high irons respectively.

Fourth, do not be in a hurry. Take a break for a minute or two after hitting a dozen balls or so. If you exhaust yourself you may begin making poor swings due to your tiring out that would almost never happen in a round of golf because on the course there is almost always a few minutes between shots that require a full swing.

Finally, take time at home some evening to write down on an index card the swing keys that help you prepare for taking a golf shot. Most people will have a list of five to eight things. Go through your set-up routine in your mind and jot down, in order, what you do to check your alignment, grip, stance, weight distribution, etc... and take that card with you to the practice range. Then read it over before EVERY practice shot for the first ten or fifteen shots. Train your mind to go through that list so it becomes a habit when you are playing a round of golf.

Hopefully you will develop your own list of golf tips from your time spent on the practice range and you will graduate from just "hitting balls" to actually tuning your swing by having a yard stick by which to measure your results on the practice range.

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