

How to Start the Season

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What is the best method for starting the new golf season? Should I practice first, or should I just go out and play around the course?

It is a rare golfer who does not ask himself these questions when spring is in the air.

In my opinion, the best method for starting the season is to play a relaxed nine or 18 holes. Playing helps you to get the feel of the clubhead before you become too conscious of what you are doing.

You probably recall that often in the past your first round has been one of your best because you did not think too much. You were completely relaxed.

Do not become involved in a "pressure" round in your first turn around the course. If there seems to be no opportunity to play a friendly, relaxed round, it would be better to play alone.

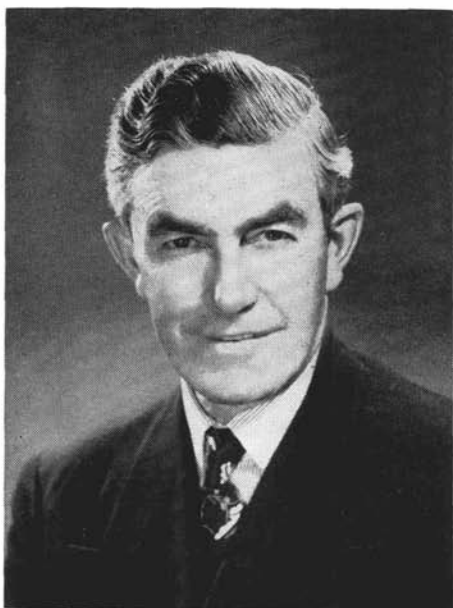
There will be plenty of time for practice after you have played a round or two, and that is when your practice should start.

The important thing in practicing is to have a plan. You should practice with an objective clearly in mind. The aimless hitting of balls serves no particular purpose.

Try to remember what you were doing when you played your best rounds last year. Possibly you were keeping your left arm firm. Maybe you were placing your hands in a particularly good position. You may have been keeping your left heel down during your backswing. Whatever it may have been, try to recapture it in your practice.

If you do not have a plan, ask your professional to give you one. He can do it if he is familiar with your swing or if you give him an opportunity to study it.

It is also a good idea to practice any particular shots which caused you trouble



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last year—bunker shots, putts, short iron shots or any others.

Practice when you are playing well. It will help to make the correct swing a matter of muscle habit.

If you are playing poorly or suffering a spell of shanking, it is best to stop playing for a while and relax. Your professional may be able to give you some useful advice. But in any case, *don't groove a bad swing by practicing it.*

I would also caution you not to practice too long at a time, especially early in the season. You might develop blisters before you realize what is happening.

That is one of the reasons I recommend playing before practicing at the start of the season. Practicing is much harder work and is harder on the hands and the muscles.

These hints are contributed to the USGA JOURNAL in the hope that they will help you start right and have a very enjoyable season of golf.