

Winter Golf

I'm often asked for indoor golf ideas by parents or by teenage golfers, and I always enjoy the conversation. For a teenager looking to improve his or her golf game, winter can be a great time to do it.

The first thought many teenage golfers have when it comes to improving their scores is, quite naturally, directed toward improving their golf swing. In winter, that should often be the third thought, behind two more important goals: 1) Improving your putting, and 2) Improving your strength.

Putting

There is no doubt that practicing putting in the winter will improve your golf scores. It's practically 100% guaranteed. Most teenagers can get dramatically better! For everyone else, they will notice some significant improvement with regular practice.

In order to improve your putting over the winter you'll need a good putting surface. Some carpets work well in simulating a real green. If not, picking up a putting matt at any number of stores in Rochester is well worth the \$15-\$20 investment.

Indoor putting can get boring, which is probably the #1 reason most golfers don't stick with it, despite knowing its benefits. Golfers who stick with indoor putting usually share these things in common:

1. Their practice area is easily available.
2. They practice for short periods of time, usually 5-15 minutes, although sometimes longer.
3. They practice most days of the week, if not every day.
4. They challenge and compete with themselves and/or others.

Of course, if you are lucky enough to have a putting area that also lets you practice chipping, your winter practice can be even more effective. If using a real golf ball is a safety problem, try a Nerf ball or something similar.

Strength

Teenage golfers have it really good – at no other time in your life will you “automatically” hit the ball further every year. It's a simple equation – each year you grow stronger and the golf ball travels further. So why strength train? The easy answer is because you can (unless your doctor says otherwise, of course).

There is no question your scores will be lower if you can, for example, hit an 8-iron instead of a 6-iron into a green.

Any strength training involving weights should be done with qualified supervision and your parents/guardians knowledge and consent. Weight training should be done for your entire body, targeting golf muscles isn't necessary. Here's another simple equation: the more time you put into (properly) lifting weights the further you will hit the ball.

For those interested in gaining strength without lifting weights, a lot of benefit can come just from doing these three simple exercises:

1. Push ups
2. Sits ups (when done properly, without straining your back muscles)
3. Leg squats (using a golf club to extend your arms during the exercise)

Again, proper technique is important to avoid injury and maximize benefits during the exercise. If needed, use Google to find some examples or demonstrations. At a minimum, try to at least double the amount of push ups you can do in the next couple of months.

Swing

With the golf dome down, the chance to see your golf ball fly isn't as easy this year. Southern trips are great, and being in "playing mode" is what it's all about, but winter can also be a great time to put yourself into "training mode".

Training mode was a lot easier with a golf dome. These days, finding a net to hit into is often the first choice and paying some pretty big bucks to use a golf simulator is the second choice. Of course, there's always the Twin-Cities, with their golf domes and one outdoor winter range (it's called the "Golf Zone" and is located in Chaska. It's where Tim "Lumpy" Herron from the PGA TOUR practices when he comes home to Wayzata - Google it for more information).

But your golf swing can improve without ever hitting a ball. Improving your address position and your pre-shot routine requires little space and can be easily practiced. Any improvements you make over the winter will not only help you this year, they could help you for the rest of your golfing life.

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being best, most golfers in the Teenage Golf League would rate about a 6 or a 7 in terms of the quality of their address positions. In order to improve your address position, simply watch golf on TV and become a copycat. It's amazing these days how nearly all TOUR players, both men and women, address the ball similarly. If you have access to a camera of any kind, use it to compare yourself to the world's best golfers. The more your address position looks like theirs the better you will play.

Improving your pre-shot routine can also be done before the snow disappears, and it's really easy. There are millions of different pre-shot routines, but they all include three things: 1) They keep the golf club moving, even if only a small amount, before the start of the backswing, 2) They require good mental visualization of the target, and 3) The routine is always the same and never varies (while your pre-shot routine for your driver will be different than for your putter, your pre-shot routine for your driver will never vary).

Especially for those of you competing on golf teams this spring, there's no better way to "pressure proof" your golf game than by having a pre-shot routine. You can check for ideas on just about any golf website, but create a pre-shot routine that works for you and practice it until you are very familiar with it. You'll know if you've succeeded not by the results of the next pressure packed shot you hit, but by your ability to hit every shot using your pre-shot routine during your spring golf rounds.

If all of this seems like a lot of work, don't bother with it. Golf is supposed to be fun, and winter golf isn't supposed to feel like work. But, if you want to channel your excitement for the upcoming golf season into something constructive, training in the comfort of your own home can make a big difference.