

FORE!

Thought

Expert tips on how to improve your golf game



With the weather warming up and the Masters just around the corner, the 2005 golf season is ready to tee off. With Georgia golfers, the desire to improve never ends. We sat down with Chateau Elan's Director of Instruction Tom Ness for some tips that will help you shoot your best scores this year.

Ness learned his craft under the tutelage of Davis Love, Jr. and has taught players from each of golf's major tours. He is one of Golf Digest's Top 50 Instructors in America and was head instructor of the Golf Digest Schools for 20 years.

Teaching at Chateau Elan's Golf Academy for the last 10 years, Ness oversees one of the best practice facilities in the state, along with the beautiful Chateau and Woodlands courses at the Braselton resort. He shared some things you can do to lower your scores before you even step out on the first tee.

Goals

Each golfer's goals are individual to the golfer, but Ness says you should base your goals on the weaknesses in your game. Take the time to analyze your game. Do you put the ball in the fairway, but miss the

green with your approach shot? Do you 3-putt often or do you have trouble getting out of a bunker? These answers will help you define your goals. Then be sure to track your progress during the season.

Equipment

Technology has made the game easier for the average golfer. "The best thing that technology has done in recent years is



lower the center of gravity of the club," says Ness. "This gives a greater margin of error. You still have to hit it in the sweet spot to hit a good shot, but your bad shots are better."

New clubs are longer and lighter, both of which make more club head speed—which hits the ball farther—even if your swing doesn't change. Ness suggests that if your clubs are more than 10 years old, your game will probably benefit from a new set

of clubs.

Make sure your grips are in good shape too. Grips are not expensive, so replacing them about once a year is a good idea. An alternative would be to clean them with an abrasive cleanser or rub them lightly with sandpaper.

And while there's no doubt that a new golf ball will perform better than an old ball, for most high and middle handicap golfers, a fancy high-priced ball won't make much difference.

Practice

Have a hard time fitting practice into your schedule? Ness suggests that you just pick up a club and swing it, every day. Make the practice count. Develop an address routine and use it on each practice swing.

"On any given shot, the player first has to get their grip and determine the line, then place the right foot to the ball, set their left foot, then swing and hold the finish for three seconds," says Ness. "Even if you're swinging in the backyard, you want it to be a realistic dress rehearsal. Make it like you're actually playing the shot."

Ness's article in the March issue of *Golf Digest* suggests that you can even practice indoors by swinging at popcorn or a rolled up sock. "I actually prefer that to hitting a ball because there's no outcome. You'll

concentrate more on the mechanics of your swing rather than where the ball is going.”

It's also very important to practice your short game—shots right off of the edge of the green and putting. Putt indoors—even on your household carpet—until you can two putt every time. Once again, make sure you use the same pre-shot routine during your practice.

Of course, a lesson from a PGA teaching pro can make a big difference in your scores. One lesson can get rid of a slice or make a significant improvement in your putting and chipping.

“I think that lessons should upgrade your technique, not necessarily change it,” says Ness. “I’ll make up a punch list of the three things my students need to work on the most. Once they have those things fixed, they can decide if they need to come back for more.”

Course Management

Once you get on the course, you’ll score better if you are realistic about your abilities. “Most players plan to hit their Grade A shot on the course, when they should plan for their average shot,” says Ness. “If you ask them how far they hit a 7-iron, they’ll say 165 yards. That’s because one time in 1983 they hit a ball 165 yards with a 7-iron. The truth is that on the average they hit it more like 135 yards.”

Don’t try to be a hero when you get in trouble. Ness relayed advice that Davis Love, Jr. gave to his students, “Never follow a bad shot with a great shot.” So you hit a bad shot, don’t try to get it all back on the next one. Just get your ball back into play and go on from there.

Finally, remember that the longer and less lofted a club is, the more precision it requires. While it may be tempting to use the latest super-sized driver, Ness says that you may actually score better with less club off the tee. “If you don’t break 100 you will play better by teeing off with a 5-wood. Once you can break 100, use your 3-wood. When you can break 90, then you’ll benefit from using a driver.”

There you have it. Put a little thought in your game, spruce up that equipment and then practice, practice and practice again. You’ll end up seeing a lot of birdies this spring.

Glenn Boylan is an Alpharetta-based writer and avid golfer.

Golf in the South

“The General” Fazio-designed course at **Barnsley Gardens Resort** in Adairsville was ranked in the Top 20 in the State of Georgia by Golf Digest magazine. For reservations call (770) 773-7480 or (877) 773-2447. For golf information call (770) 773-2555.

Big Canoe, near Dawsonville, has 27 holes of beautiful mountain golf. The Choctaw, Cherokee and Creek 9-hole courses offer a wide variety of golf challenges. Golf pro Dave O’Connor learned his trade under the Arnold Palmer. For reservations call (770) 893-2733.

Brasstown Valley Resort is located in Young Harris. Its par-72 layout is Zagat Survey rated as one of the best in the country. For reservations call (800) 201-3205. The direct golf line is (706) 379-4613.

Chateau Elan Winery & Resort is located in Braselton. After working on your swing at The Golf Academy at Château Élan, you can test yourself at the highly rated Château and Woodlands courses. Then end your day with some of the best wine on the East Coast. Call (800) 233-9463 for more information.

Lake Lanier Islands Emerald Pointe course takes you on a breath-taking route around Lake Lanier. The par-72 course has 13 holes on the water to test your skills. Call (800) 768-LAKE for reservations. For golf call (770) 945-8789.

The Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation on Lake Oconee boasts 81 holes of golf designed by Rees Jones, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Fazio and Bob Cupp. Instruction opportunities include The Dave Pelz Scoring Game School. For reservations call (800) 241-3333.