

## Chapter 1

# Welcome to a Mad Great Game

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Touring a standard golf course
  - ▶ Following the rules and keeping score
  - ▶ Keeping up with golf etiquette
- .....

**Y**ou've probably heard that business leaders are constantly making huge deals on the course, advancing their careers. It's true that golf can help you climb the corporate ladder, but that's only one reason to play.

More-important reasons include spending time with friends, staying in shape, and enjoying some of the most beautiful scenery you'll ever see. Golf is a physical *and* mental challenge; it tests your skill and your will.

Although many rules exist to govern the play of golf, the spirit of the game can be summarized in a few words. Simply stated, the goal of golf is to get the ball into each of 18 holes in succession with the fewest number of shots, using no more than 14 clubs. After you hit the ball into all the holes, add up your scores from each hole. The lower your total score, the better. That's it.

## Breaking Down a Typical Course

Most golf courses have 18 holes, although a few, usually because of a lack of money or land, have only 9. Courses beside the sea are called *links*, in honor of the parts of Scotland where the game began. (They were the link between beach and farmland.)

Most golf courses are between 5,500 and 7,000 yards. A few are longer, but leave those courses to the pros you see on TV. Start at the low end of that scale and work your way up.

Every hole is a par-3, a par-4, or a par-5. *Par* is the number of strokes a competent golfer should take to play a particular hole. For example, on a par-5 hole, a regulation par may consist of a drive, two more full swings, and two putts.



Two putts is the standard on every green. Three putts are too many. One putt is a bonus. In a perfect round of par golf, half the allocated strokes should be taken on the greens. That premise makes putting crucial. (I talk about how to putt in Chapter 5.)

With rare exceptions, par-3s are from 100 to 250 yards in length; par-4s are from 251 to 470 yards long, barring severe topography; and par-5s are from 471 to 690 yards. You often find several different teeing areas on each hole so that you can play the hole from different lengths based on your level of skill. Deciding which tee area to use can make you silly. So the tee areas are marked with color-coded tees that indicate ability to help you out:

- ✓ The **gold tees** are the back tees for long-ball strikers or lower handicap players only.
- ✓ The **blue tees** are usually slightly ahead of the gold and make the holes shorter, but still plenty hard. Club competitions are played from these tees.
- ✓ The **white tees** are for everyday, casual play and are the right choice for most men, beginning golfers, and capable senior players. Stray from the white tees at your peril.
- ✓ The **red tees** are traditionally used by women or junior golfers, although many women I play with use the same tees I play.

## Getting Started

If you've never played golf before or otherwise consider yourself a novice, you can easily feel overwhelmed with the many rules and tools that exist, as well as by the thought of hitting a small ball with a small clubhead — or not — without embarrassing yourself in front of more experienced friends or colleagues. Not to worry. Getting started is pretty simple.



The best advice I can give you when you're learning to play, which is just as applicable when you've become a fairly seasoned player, is to relax. Stay calm, make prudent decisions, and never hit a shot while contemplating other matters. You should play golf with complete concentration and no ego. Don't get greedy — play the game one step at a time.

### 1. Start by picking out golf clubs and balls.

You don't have to shell out thousands of dollars to get started. You can start simple — use cheap or borrowed equipment at first, and spend more if you enjoy the game. (Check out Chapter 2 for tips on what you need to get started.)

### 2. Know how to grip the club.

The V between the thumb and forefinger of your top hand should point to your right shoulder (for righties; reverse it if you're left-handed), and the golf club is more in your fingers and not so much in the palm of your hand. (Turn to Chapter 3 for more grip instructions and options.)

### 3. Armed with equipment and the right grip, you're ready to swing.

Believe me, the swing isn't as easy as it looks. But with practice, you'll get it. (I cover the swing in more detail in Chapter 3.)

Gear, grip, and swing are the bare bones of getting started playing golf. Over time you'll refine your choices and technique as you get to know and improve your game.

## Knowing the Critical Rules

Golf is a game of rules. As with most other sports, some people get giddy about the technicalities. For a smart, enjoyable look at the rules of golf, pick up a copy of *Golf Rules & Etiquette For Dummies* (Wiley) by John Steinbreder.

You also can get by with a few simple rules and a healthy dose of common sense.

- ✓ Play the course as you find it.
- ✓ Play the ball as it lies.
- ✓ Do what's fair if you can't do either of the first two things.

The following sections look at three specific golf rules that you're likely to encounter on the course.

### Teeing up

You must tee up between the markers — not in front of them and no more than two club lengths behind them.



You don't have to stand within the teeing area; your feet can be outside it. This knowledge is helpful when the only piece of level ground is outside the teeing area or if the hole is a sharp dogleg. You can give yourself a better angle by *teeing up wide* (standing outside the teeing area).

### Finding a lost ball

If you're reading this guide to help you get started playing golf, let me assure you that at this stage of your golf life, you're going to hit your share of errant shots. Some will finish in spots where finding a deer, bear, or Keebler elf seems easier than locating your golf ball. And sometimes you can't find the ball at all.

You have five minutes to track down your ball. Time yourself. If you can't find the ball in the five minutes you're allowed, you must return to the tee or to the point where you last hit the ball and play another ball.

With penalty, stroke, and distance, you're now hitting off the tee with three strokes under your belt.



One way to avoid having to walk back to the tee after failing to find your ball is to hit a provisional ball if you think the first one may be hard to find. If the first ball can't be found, you play the second.

Be sure, however, to announce to your playing partners that you're playing a provisional ball. If you don't, you must play the second ball — *with* the penalty — even if you find the first ball.

### Taking a drop

In some situations, you simply can't play your ball where it lands, so you have to pick it up and drop it in a new location. And every golf course allows you to take a free drop in these situations. A cart path is one example — if you hit your ball onto a path, you can move your ball away from the path with no penalty. Hitting your ball into *casual water* (such as a puddle) is another. Here's how to drop your ball:

1. Lift and clean the ball.
2. Find the nearest spot where you have complete relief from the problem and mark that spot with a tee.  
The spot you choose can't be closer to the hole.
3. Measure one club length from that mark.
4. Stand tall, holding the ball at shoulder height and at arm's length. Let the ball drop vertically.

Men's Course Rating/Slope						HOLE		Women's Course Rating/Slope				
Blue		White						Hcp		Red Tees		
73.1	137	71.0	130					73.7/128		71.0/128		
Blue Tees	White Tees	Par	Hcp	JOHN - 8		PAUL - A + 6						
377	361	4	11	4	A	E	1			13	4	310
514	467	5	13	4	5	JH	2			3	5	428
446	423	4	1	4	4	E	3			1	4	389
376	356	4	5	5	5	PH	4			11	4	325
362	344	4	7	4	6	E	5			7	4	316
376	360	4	9	5	5	E	6			9	4	335
166	130	3	17	2	4	JH	7			17	3	198
429	407	4	3	5	5	E	8			5	4	368
161	145	3	15	4	3	PH	9			15	3	122
3207	2993	35		37	41		Out			35		2701
Initial								Initial				
366	348	4	16	4	5	E	10			14	4	320
570	537	5	10	5	6	JH	11			2	5	504
438	426	4	2	4	4	E	12			6	4	389
197	182	3	12	3	4	JH	13			16	3	145
507	475	5	14	5	6	JH	14			4	5	425
396	380	4	4	4	5	JH	15			8	4	350
380	366	4	6	4	4	E	16			10	4	339
165	151	3	16	4	5	PH	17			18	3	133
397	375	4	8	4	3	PH	18			12	4	341
3418	3234	36		37	40		In			36		2946
6825	6227	71		75	81		Tot			71		5847
Handicap								Handicap				
Net Score								Net Score				
Adjust								Adjust				
Scorer								Date				
Attested												

Figure 1-1: Keeping score.

Make sure the ball doesn't end up nearer the hole than it was when you picked it up. If it does, pick up the ball and drop it again.

## Step Right Up and Play

Scoring is another unique part of golf. Every course has a scorecard that tells you each hole's length, its par, and its rating relative to the other holes (see Figure 1-1).

Don't get too wrapped up in how many shots you're taking to play a round, at least at first. When starting out, the goal of the game is to first figure out how to play it, and then work on improving your skills so you don't have to hit the ball so many times before getting it into the hole — and, ideally, to have fun doing both. That philosophy is a totally different game from the one that you see the pros playing on TV every week. For them, every shot is vital — the difference between finishing in or out of the big money. That's why the pro game is better left to the pros.

### Deciding which format you should play



The best format I know of for the beginning golfer is a *scramble*. In that format, you're usually part of a team of four. Everyone tees off, and then everyone plays another shot from where the best shot lies. And so on. A scramble is great for beginners because you have less pressure to hit every shot well and you get to watch better players up close.

You can also play in games where the format is *stableford*. In this game, the scoring is by points rather than strokes. You get one point for a *bogey* (score of one over par); two for a *par*; three for a *birdie* (one under par); and four for an *eagle* (two under par). Thus, a round in which you par every hole reaps you 36 points.

You may well find that you play most of your golf with three companions. That's known as a *foursome* in the United States (a *four-ball* elsewhere). The format is simple. You split into two teams of two and play what is known as a *best-ball* game. That is, the best score on each team on each hole counts as the score for that team.

### Comparing match play and stroke play

In *match play*, which is typically played by the pros or at least golfers who are pretty skilled, you don't have to write down your strokes. The only thing that matters is the state of the game between you and your opponent. Essentially, you don't need to write down your actual score; you simply count the number of holes you've won or lost.

*Stroke play* (or *medal play*) is strictly card-and-pencil stuff, and it's the way most golfers start. All you do is count one stroke each time you swing at the ball.

In stroke play, your playing partner keeps your official score, although you can track it as well if you want. The card in your pocket has your playing companion's name on it. At the end of the round, he signs his name to your card and gives it to you; you do the same with his card. After you've checked your score for each hole, you also sign your card.

## Getting a handle on the handicap system

The USGA employs the handicap system to level the playing field for everyone. The handicap system is one reason I think that golf is the best of all games. Theoretically, handicapping allows any two players, whatever their level of play, to have an enjoyable — and competitive — game together.

### Calculating your handicap

Okay, you're wondering how you get a handicap. It's easy: All you do is report your scores at the course where you normally play. Then you're off and running. Your handicap at any one time is the average of the best 10 of your previous 20 scores.

Most country clubs and public courses make things easy for you. They have computers that take your scores and do all the work to update your handicap throughout the golf season, about twice a month.

### Understanding what your handicap means

A low handicap reflects solid golfing skills. Thus, if your handicap is 6 and mine is 10, you're a better player. On average, four strokes better, to be exact. Your handicap is the number of strokes over par you're expected to take to play an 18-hole course.



When you're just starting out, you don't want to team up with three low-handicap players — that's just discouraging. Play with golfers of your own ability at first. After you get the hang of the game, start playing with people who are better than you so that you can learn from them.

## Dealing with penalty shots

Penalty shots are an unfortunate part of every golfer's life. Sooner or later, you're going to incur a penalty shot or shots. Here are the most common penalty situations:

- ✓ **Out-of-bounds:** When you hit your ball to a spot outside the confines of the golf course — over a boundary fence, for example. Out-of-bounds areas are usually marked with white stakes that are often abbreviated with the dreaded *O.B.* When you go out-of-bounds, you're penalized *stroke and distance* — you must drop another ball (or tee up if the shot you hit out-of-bounds was from a tee) as close as possible to the spot you just played from and take a one-stroke penalty.
- ✓ **Unplayable lies:** When you hit a ball into a spot from which further progress is impossible. In a bush. Against a wall. Even buried in a bunker. You have three escape routes: pick up the ball and drop it within two club lengths of the original spot under penalty of one shot; pick up the ball, walk back as far as you want, and then drop the ball, taking a one-stroke penalty; or return to the point where you hit the original shot and take a penalty stroke.
- ✓ **Water hazards:** When you hit a ball into a pond, creek, or lake. You may play the ball as it lies, with no penalty, if the ball's only half-submerged or otherwise hittable. Or you can choose to either hit another ball from the spot you just hit from, or take the point where your ball crossed into the water hazard and drop another ball. Either way, it's a one-shot penalty.

- ✓ **Swing and a miss:** When you make a mighty swing and miss the ball. The penalty? None, actually. But you must count that swing as a stroke. If you swing at a ball with intent to hit it, that's a shot, regardless of whether you make contact.

## Etiquette: Playing the Right Way

Golf, unlike the trash-talking sports you see on TV, still prizes sportsmanship. Golf is an easy game to cheat at, so every player is on his or her honor. But there's more to it than that. Golf has its own code of etiquette: semi-official "rules" of courtesy that every player is expected to follow. Here are the main ones:

- ✓ **Don't talk or move around while someone is playing a stroke.**
- ✓ **Be ready when it's your turn — when your ball lies farthest from the hole.** Make your decisions while you're walking to your ball or while waiting for others to hit. And when it's your turn, don't delay.
- ✓ **The honor (that is, the first shot) on a given tee goes to the player with the lowest score on the previous hole.** If that hole was tied, the player with the lowest score on the hole before that retains the honor.
- ✓ **Make sure everyone in your foursome is behind you when you hit.**

- ✓ **Pay attention to the group behind you, too.** Are they waiting for you on every shot? Is there a gap between you and the group ahead of you? If the answer to either or both is yes, step aside and invite the group behind you to play through.

The best place to let a group behind play through is at a par-3 (it's the shortest hole and, therefore, the quickest way of playing through). After hitting your ball onto the green, mark it and wave to them to play. Stand off to the side of the green as they hit. After they've all hit, replace your ball and putt out. Then wait for them to finish and let them go to the next tee ahead of you.

- ✓ **Help out the greenskeeper by repairing ball marks.** Use your tee or an inexpensive tool called a *divot fixer* to repair any ball marks you see on the greens. You also want to smooth out or rake any footprints in bunkers (but only after you play out).
- ✓ **If you must play with a golf cart (my advice is to walk if you can), park it well away from greens, tees, and bunkers.**
- ✓ **Leave the green as soon as everyone has finished putting.**

## Choosing Your Weapons Wisely

### In This Chapter

- ▶ Choosing golf balls and clubs
- ▶ Packing your golf bag with the essentials

Britain's great prime minister Winston Churchill once griped that golf was "a silly game played with weapons singularly ill-suited to the purpose." Perhaps this was true a hundred years ago, but today's clubs are unrecognizable compared to the rather primitive implements used by the game's early pioneers in the late 19th century. Today's equipment is much better suited to the purpose of getting the ball down the fairway to the green and then into the hole.

### Golf Balls: The Dimple Derby

Many technological advances have occurred in golf over the years, but perhaps nothing has changed more than the ball. It's no coincidence that the United States

Golf Association (USGA) and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club (R&A) keep a tight rein on just how far a ball can go nowadays.

Even with these regulations, take a look around any golf pro shop and you see many different brands. Try not to get overwhelmed. Keep in mind that golf balls come in three basic types: one-piece, two-piece, and three-piece.



I recommend a two-piece ball for the beginning golfer. And unless you have very deep pockets, go the surlyn, two-piece route. *Surlyn* is a type of plastic, the same stuff covering bowling pins. Assuming you don't whack them off the premises, these balls last longer than alternatives.

Golf balls used to come in three compressions: 80, 90, or 100. All balls go far when hit properly, but each one feels a little different. Your ideal compression is a matter of personal preference.



Here's a rule of thumb: If you hit the ball low and want to hit it higher, switch to a softer cover. Your drives will spin more and soar toward the stratosphere. If you hit the ball too high, switch to a ball labeled "low-trajectory."

### Clubs: Getting Into the Swing

In the early centuries of golf, players could carry as many clubs as they liked. Since 1938, however, 14 clubs has been the limit. Your collection can include any combination of the following varieties:

- ✓ **Driver:** Big-headed club with the longest shaft; what you use to drive the ball off the tee on all but the shortest holes.
- ✓ **Woods:** Lofted clubs (*loft* is the angle at which a clubface is angled upward) numbered from the 2-wood and 3-wood up to more-lofted 9- and even 11-woods.
- ✓ **Irons:** Generally more lofted than most woods; most commonly used to hit shots from the fairway or rough to the green; include *wedges* for hitting high shots from fairway, *rough* (long grass), or sand.
- ✓ **Hybrids:** Sometimes called *utility* or *rescue* clubs; like a cross between a wood and an iron.
- ✓ **Putter:** Used to roll the ball into the hole.

### Choosing clubs to put in your bag



Deciding which clubs to put in your golf bag can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it. If you're just starting out in golf, you may discover that this game isn't for you. So it may be prudent to start with rental clubs at a driving range. Most driving ranges rent clubs for a few dollars apiece. Go out and test-wield these weapons to get a feel for what you need.

You're in your experimental stage, so try all sorts of clubs. Don't be afraid to ask your friends if you can try their clubs on the range, and judge for yourself whether they feel good. If you don't like the club you

just tried, don't tell the person who loaned it to you that the club stinks — that's not good golf etiquette. Simply hand the club back and say thanks.

After you've swung rental clubs for a while, find cheap clubs to use as an interim set during your adjustment period. If you keep your ears open around the golf course or driving range, you may hear of someone who has a set that he or she is willing to sell. You can also ask whether people have any information on clubs that you can get cheaply. And, of course, you can check the Internet — the fastest-growing marketplace in golf.



Pay close attention to proper length and weight of the golf club. Women and juniors should beware of swinging clubs made for men, which may be too long or too heavy for them. That only makes golf more frustrating! Juniors should start out with junior clubs, and women with women's clubs.

### Deciding when to use each club

Table 2-1 shows how far the average golfer generally hits with each club when he or she makes solid contact. When you start to play this game, you probably won't attain these yardages, but as you practice, you'll get closer.



The best way to find your average is to hit 50 balls with each club. Eliminate the longest five and the shortest five and then pace off to the middle of the remaining group. Use this information to figure out which club to use on each shot.

Club	Avg Distance: Men	Avg Distance: Women
Driver	230 yards	200 yards
3-wood	210 yards	180 yards
2-iron	190 yards	Not recommended; 4-wood or hybrid = 170 yards
3-iron	180 yards	Not recommended; 5-wood or hybrid = 160 yards
4-iron	170 yards	150 yards (consider a hybrid)
5-iron	160 yards	140 yards
6-iron	150 yards	130 yards
7-iron	140 yards	120 yards
8-iron	130 yards	110 yards
9-iron	120 yards	100 yards
Pitching wedge	110 yards	90 yards
Sand wedge	90 yards	80 yards
Lob wedge	65 yards	60 yards

### Accessories: Getting the Goods

The best golf bags contain only the bare essentials:

- ✓ About six balls
- ✓ A few wooden tees
- ✓ A couple of gloves
- ✓ A rain suit
- ✓ A pitch-mark repair tool
- ✓ A few small coins for markers
- ✓ Two or three pencils
- ✓ A little bag for your personal effects

Hang a full-size towel from the strap for drying off and cleaning your clubheads. Also get headcovers for your woods or metal woods.



As for your golf bag, you don't need a large tour-sized monstrosity with your name on the side. Especially if you're going to be carrying your bag, go small and get a stand bag — the kind with legs that fold down automatically to support the bag. That way your bag stays on its feet, even on hot August days when you feel like collapsing.

# Getting Into the Swing

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Finding your pivot point
  - ▶ Exploring the components of a solid golf swing
  - ▶ Making a full, effective swing
- .....

**A**s the great golf expert Duke Ellington once said, "It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing." You can be the most stylish-looking golfer in the world, swinging the most expensive driver at the most exclusive club, but without a sound fundamental swing, you're on the A train to nowhere. This chapter helps you get into the swing of golf.

### *Understanding Swing Basics*

In simple terms, a *golf swing* is a (hopefully) coordinated, balanced movement of the whole body around a fixed pivot point. If you do it correctly, this motion swings the club up, around, and down so that it strikes the ball with an accelerating blow on the center of the clubface.

Balance is the key to this whole swing thing. When your swing consists of a simple pivot around a fixed

point, the clubhead strikes the ball on the same downward path and somewhere near the center of the clubface every time. Bingo! You're probably wondering where this fixed point in your body is. Well, it isn't your head. The fixed point in your golf swing should be in the middle of your chest, about three inches below the spot where your collarbones meet. Your swing rotates around that point. If you get that pivot point correct, your head swivels a little bit as you turn back and then through on your shots. If your head moves like Linda Blair's in *The Exorcist*, you may have a career in the circus, but not in golf.

### *Getting a Grip*

Although the grip is one of the most important parts of the game, it's also one of the most boring. Few golfers who've played for any length of time pay much attention to hand placement. For one thing, your grip is hard to change after you get used to the way your hands feel on the club. And hand placement simply doesn't seem as important as the swing itself. But that kind of neglect is why you see so many bad grips — particularly among bad players.

Here's how to sleep well in eternity with the correct grip. Standing upright, let your arms hang naturally by your side. Get someone to place a club in your left hand. All you do now is grab the club and — *voilà!* — you've got your left-hand grip. Well, almost. The grip has three checkpoints:

1. **Place your left thumb and left index finger on the shaft.**

I like to see a gap of about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch between the thumb and index finger. To get that gap, extend your thumb down the shaft a little. If extending your thumb proves too uncomfortable, pull your thumb in toward your hand.

2. **Make sure the grip crosses the base of your last three fingers and the middle of your index finger.**
3. **Complete your grip by placing your right hand on the club.**

You can fit the right hand to the left in one of three ways: the overlapping (or Vardon) grip, the interlocking grip, or the ten-finger grip.

### *Vardon grip*

The *Vardon grip* is the most popular grip, certainly among better players. The great British player Harry Vardon, who still holds the record for British Open wins (six), popularized the grip around the turn of the century. Old Harry was the first to place the little finger of his right hand over the gap between the index and next finger of the left as a prelude to completing his grip, as shown in Figure 3-1. Harry was also the first to put his left thumb on top of the shaft. Previously, players kept their left thumbs wrapped around the grip as if they were holding a baseball bat.

Try the Vardon grip. Close your right hand over the front of the shaft so that the V formed between your thumb and forefinger points to your right ear. The fleshy pad at the base of your right thumb should fit snugly over your left thumb. The result should be a feeling of togetherness, your hands working as a unit.



**Figure 3-1:** In the Vardon grip, the right pinkie overlaps the left index finger.

### Interlocking grip

The *interlocking grip* is a variation of the Vardon grip. The difference is that the little finger of your left hand and the index finger of the right actually hook together, as shown in Figure 3-2. You may find this grip more comfortable if you have small hands. Many top female and junior players use this grip.

### Ten-finger grip

The *ten-finger grip* is what the name tells you it is. All ten fingers are on the club, like you're gripping a baseball bat. No overlapping or interlocking occurs; the little finger of the left hand and the index finger of the



**Figure 3-2:** In the interlocking grip, the right pinkie interlocks with the left index finger.



If you have trouble generating enough club-head speed to hit the ball as far as you want, or if you're fighting a slice, give this grip a try. This approach can be particularly helpful for female and junior golfers.

### Completing the grip

Put your right hand on the club, with the palm directly opposite your left hand. Slide your right hand down the shaft until you can complete whatever grip you prefer. Your right shoulder, right hip, and head lean to the right to accommodate the lowering of the right hand. Your right earlobe moves closer to your right shoulder.



Your grip pressure should never be tight. Your grip should be light — no clenching.

## Setting Up Your Aim, Stance, and Ball Position

A good grip is just one of the building blocks of a good swing. After you find your grip, how do you align yourself to the target so that the ball goes somewhere near where you aimed? What should your posture look like? And where in the world should the ball be in your stance? Should you look at the ball or somewhere near the sun? This section has the answers.

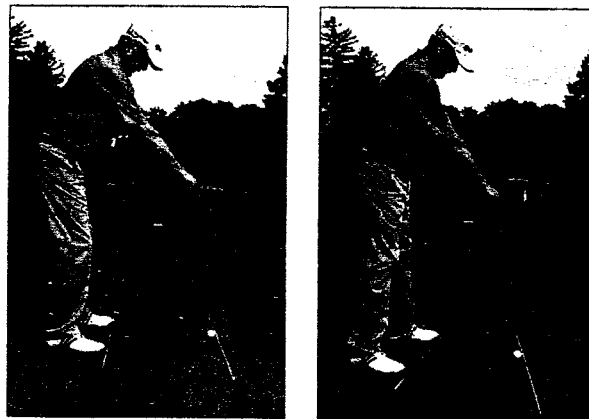
### Aiming

Aiming properly at address is difficult. Generally speaking, right-handed golfers tend to aim too far right of the target and then swing over the top on the way down to get the ball started left.

Think of your aim like a railroad track. On one rail is the ball and in the distance, the target. On the other rail are your toes. Thus, your body is aligned parallel with — but left of — the target line. Your feet should be parallel to the target line, not aimed at the target, as shown in Figure 3-3. If you take nothing else away from this section on aiming, remember that phrase.



Don't make the mistake that I see countless golfers making: aiming their feet at the target. Think about it: If you aim your feet at the target, where is the clubface aligned? To the right of where you want the ball to go! Instead, get your feet aligned a little to the left of the target line, *parallel* to it. It'll feel like you're



**Figure 3-3:** Your feet should be parallel to the target (left), not aimed at it (right).

### Nailing down the stance

Okay, you're aimed correctly. But your feet aren't finished yet. Right now you're just standing there. Point your left foot to 10 o'clock and your right foot to 1 o'clock. Keep it simple and always be on time.



Width of stance is easy, too. Keep your heels shoulder-width apart. Not 14 inches or 18 inches. Shoulder width. Let the shape of your body dictate the right stance for you.

### Deciding on ball position

Where is the ball positioned between your feet? When using a driver, you want it aligned with your left armpit. That means the ball is also aligned with your left heel.



For other clubs, the ball moves steadily back with each club until you get to the middle of your stance with a wedge.

### ***Amplifying the low point***

The bottom of the swing is an important, often-neglected aspect of golf. After all, that's usually where the ball is! The arc of the swing has to have a low point; hopefully, that low point is precisely where your golf ball is as you swing an iron.

If you don't know where the bottom of your swing is, you don't know where to put the ball in your stance. You can make the best swing in the world, but if the ball is too far back, you hit the top half of it. Too far forward is just as bad; you hit the ground before the ball.

Fear not; such shots aren't part of your repertoire. Why? Because you always know where the bottom of your swing is: directly below your head.

Think about it. The preceding section discusses how the ball is aligned with your left armpit when you use the driver. That position automatically puts your head behind the ball whenever you swing your driver. In other words, the ball is nearer the target than your head is, which means that you strike the ball a slightly upward blow. The bottom of the swing is behind the ball, so the clubhead is moving up as it hits the ball. That's all right because the ball is perched on a tee. The only way to make solid contact (and maximize your distance) is to hit drives "on the up."

The situation for an iron shot from the fairway differs from that of the driver. Now the ball is sitting on the ground. Plus the club you're using has more loft and is

designed to give best results when the ball is struck just the middle of your left thigh. For a driver, it should be opposite your zipper. Every other club is between those parameters.

### ***Unleashing Your Swing***

Now it's time to do what you've been wanting to do: Create some turbulence. Many people think the most effective way to develop a consistent swing is to stand on the range whacking balls until you get it right. But the best way to develop a consistent swing is to break the swing down into pieces. Only after you have the first piece mastered do you move on to the next one.

#### ***Making miniswings***

I start the swing process with what I call *miniswings*. Position yourself in front of the ball as I describe in "Setting Up Your Aim, Stance, and Ball Position" earlier in this chapter. Now, without moving anything but your hands, wrists, and forearms, rotate the club back until the shaft is horizontal to the ground and the *toe* of the club (the part of the clubhead farthest from the shaft) is pointing up. The key to this movement is the left hand, which must stay in the space that it's now occupying, its address position. The left hand is the fulcrum around which the swing rotates. The butt of the club should stay in about the same position while your hands lift the clubhead.

After you get the hang of that little drill, try hitting shots with your miniswing. Let the club travel through 180 degrees, with the shaft parallel to the ground on the backswing and then back to parallel on the through-swing; your follow-through should be a mirror

before the ground. So now your head should be over the ball at address and impact. Something has to move.

That something is the ball. Start from the middle of your stance, which is where the ball should be when you're hitting a wedge, one of the shortest and most lofted clubs in your bag. Move the ball steadily forward as the club in your hands gets longer.

### ***Keeping your eyes on the ball***

How do you position your head? The answer is in your eyes. Look down at the ball, which is in what optometrists call your *gaze center*. Your gaze center is about the size of a Frisbee. Everything outside your gaze center is in your peripheral vision.



Now lift or drop your head slightly. As your head moves, so do your eyes, and so does the ball — into your peripheral vision. Suddenly, you can't see the ball so well. But if you hold your head steady enough to keep the ball inside that Frisbee-shaped circle, you can't go too far wrong. Try to keep the ball in the middle of your gaze center.

### ***Observing the one-hand-away rule***

One last thing on address position: Let your arms hang so that the *butt* end of the club (the one with the handle) is one hand-width from the inside of your left thigh. Use this position for every club in the bag except your putter.



The butt end of the club is a useful guide to check the relationship between your hands and the clubhead. With a wedge, for example, the butt end of the club should be in line with

image of the backswing. The ball obviously doesn't go far with this drill, but your hands and arms are doing exactly what you want them to do on a full swing: Cock the wrists, hit the ball, and recock the wrists. After you have the miniswing down, you can turn on the horsepower and get your body involved.

### ***Testing your rhythm***



One of the most effective ways for your brain to master something like the golf swing is to set the motion to music. Music plays a valuable role in the learning process. You learned your ABCs by putting the letters to song. So when you start to move the club and your body into the swing, think of a melody. Make the song real music. The golf swing should be a smooth motion, so your song should reflect that smoothness. Think Tony Bennett, not Eminem. I've played some of my best golf while humming Hootie and the Blowfish tunes.

To begin adding body movement to your miniswing motion (see the preceding section), stand as if at address, with your arms crossed over your chest so that your right hand is on your left shoulder and your left hand is on your right shoulder. Hold a club against your chest with both hands (see Figure 3-4).

Now turn as if you're making a backswing. Turn so that the shaft turns through 90 degrees, to the point where it's perpendicular to a line formed by the tips of your toes. As you do so, let your left knee move inward so that it points to the golf ball. The butt of the club also points at the ball, as shown in Figure 3-4.

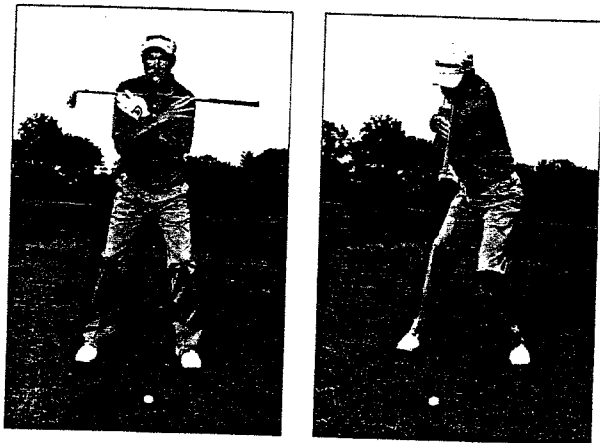


Figure 3-4: Turn your body.

The key here is keeping your right leg flexed. The only way to get the shaft into position is by turning your body. You can't sway or slide to the right and still create that 90-degree angle.



Your backswing should feel as if you're turning around the inside of your right leg until your back faces the target. That's the perfect top-of-the-backswing position.

### Unwinding

From the top, let your body unwind back to the ball in the proper sequence. (Your spine angle must stay the same from address to the top of the backswing.)

Uncoiling starts from the ground up. The first thing to move is your left knee, which shifts toward the target

until your kneecap is over the middle of your left foot, where it stops. Any more shifting of the knee and your legs start to slide past the ball. An *alignment stick* (a flexible fiberglass stick used to help with alignment) poked into the ground just outside your left foot is a good check that your knee shift hasn't gone too far. If your left knee touches the stick, stop and try again.

Next, your left hip slides targetward until it's over your knee and foot. Again, a stick in the ground provides a good deterrent to keep your hip from going too far.



Pay special attention to the clubshaft across your chest in this phase of the swing (work in front of a mirror if you can). The shaft should always parallel the slope of your shoulders as you work your body back to the ball.

Swing through the impact area all the way to the finish. Keep your left leg straight and let your right knee touch your left knee. Hold this position until the ball hits the ground — that way, you prove beyond doubt that you've swung in balance.

### Visualizing shots

Few people hit the ball dead-straight; they either *fade* most of their shots (the ball flies from left to right) or *draw* them (the ball moves from right to left in the air). If you hit a ball that curves from left to right, aim far enough left to allow the curve of your ball to match the curve of the hole, and vice versa.

If either tendency gets too severe and develops into a full-blooded slice or hook (a *slice* is a worse fade, and a *hook* is a worse draw), go get a lesson. One session with a pro should get you back on track.



Don't let your faults fester. They can quickly become ingrained into your method, making it much more painful to correct them.

After you've developed a consistent shot shape that works, you can start to visualize how that shape fits the hole you're playing. Then, of course, you know exactly where to aim — whether the hole is a *dogleg right* (turns right), *dogleg left* (turns left), or straight-away. You're a real golfer.

## Chapter 4

# Pitching and Chipping: Short-Game Secrets

.....

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding the short game and its importance
  - ▶ Making pinpoint pitch shots
  - ▶ Chipping your way to great shots
- .....

**F**ive-time PGA champion Walter Hagen had the right approach. As he stood on the first tee, the great Haig knew that he'd probably hit at least six terrible shots that day. So when he did hit one sideways, he didn't blow his top. Hagen simply relied on his superior *short game* (every shot within 80 yards of the hole) to get out of trouble.

Of course, everything within 80 yards of the hole includes putting (which I discuss in Chapter 5). So what's left to cover in this chapter? Pitching and chipping — two versions of short shots to the green.

### *Exploring the Ups and Downs*

Hang around golfers long enough and you inevitably hear one say something like, "I missed the third green

but got up and down for my par." At this stage, you're probably wondering what in the world *up and down* means. Well, the *up* part is the subject of this chapter — *chipping* (hitting a low, short shot) or *pitching* (hitting a higher, more airborne short shot) the ball to the hole. The *down* half of the equation is holing the putt after your chip or pitch (see Chapter 5). Thus, a golfer with a good short game is one who gets up and down a high percentage of the time (above 50 percent).

Although a good short game can erase your mistakes and keep a good round going, many amateurs tend to look down on golfers blessed with a delicate touch around the greens. They hate to lose to someone who beats them with good chipping and putting. Somehow a strong short game isn't perceived as "macho golf" — not in the same league as smashing drives 300 yards and hitting low, raking, iron shots to greens. This attitude is more than a snobbery thing — it's also a missing-the-point thing.



In golf, you want to move the ball around the course in the fewest possible strokes. How you get that job done — great drives, expert chipping — is up to you.

You can make up for a lot of bad play with one good short shot. As someone once said, "Three of them and one of those makes four." Remember that saying; even if you need three cruddy shots to get near the green, you can save par with a nice chip or pitch.

You don't hear golf pros downplaying the importance of a good short game. We know that the short game is where we make our money. Here's proof: If you put a club champion and a tournament pro on the tee with

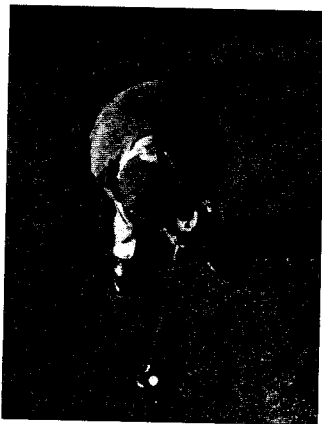
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## 2. Make a miniswing.

Without moving the butt end of the club too far in your backswing, hinge your wrists so that the shaft is horizontal. Now swing through the shot.

## 3. Watch how far the ball goes and make adjustments.

That distance is your point of reference. Do you want to hit the next pitch 10 yards farther? Make your swing a little bit longer. Shorter? Your swing follows suit. That way, your rhythm never changes. You want the clubhead accelerating smoothly through the ball. And you best achieve that acceleration if you build up the momentum gradually from *address* (the point right before you hit the ball).



**Figure 4-1:** To pitch, align your shoulders and feet to the left of the target.

drivers in their hands, their drives don't look all that different. Sure, you can tell who the better player is, but the amateur at least *looks* competitive.

The gap in quality grows on the approach shots, again on *wedge play* (shorter approaches hit with wedges), and then again in the short game. In fact, the closer the players get to the green, the more obvious the difference in level of play. And the green is where a mediocre score gets turned into a good score, or where a good score gets turned into a great one.

## Making Your Pitch

Pitch shots, which you play with only your wedges and 9-iron, are generally longer than chips and stay mostly in the air. That introduces wrist action into the equation, which opens the issue of how long your swing should be and how fast. In other words, pitch shots need some serious feel.

Even the best players try to avoid pitch shots. They're in-between shots. You can't just make your normal, everyday, full swing — that would send the ball way too far. You're stuck making a partial swing — which is never easy, especially when you're under pressure.

Here's how to build your pitching swing.

1. **Set up a narrow stance about 12 inches from heel to heel and open, with your left foot back from the target line.**

Your shoulders should be open to the target, and the ball should be about two inches to the left of your right big toe, as shown in Figure 4-1.

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Poor pitchers of the ball do one of two things: Either they start their swings too slowly and then speed up too much at impact, or they jerk the club away from the ball and have to decelerate later. Both swings lead to low, thin shots that hurtle uncontrollably over the green or complete duffs that travel only a few feet. The most common cause of both is tension. So relax!

In golf, you get better by doing, so improve your pitching by practicing. Here's a game we play at the back of the range at our facility at Grayhawk Golf Club in Scottsdale, Arizona. We get five empty buckets and place them in a straight line at 20, 40, 60, 80, and 100 feet. We then have one hour to hit one ball into each bucket, starting at 20 feet. The winner gets the title to the other guy's car. We're still driving our own cars — we usually get frustrated and quit before the one-hour time limit expires, or we go to lunch. But at least we get some good pitching practice.



Although pitch shots fly higher than chips, you still want to get the ball back to the ground quickly so that it doesn't sail too far. Pick out your landing area somewhere short of your final target and let the ball roll the rest of the way. See the shot in your mind's eye before you hit the ball, and remember your *Golf For Dummies* secret: To make the ball go up, hit down — don't try to lift it. The loft on the club's face is designed to get the ball airborne.

## Setting Up a Solid Chip

Chip shots are shorter than pitches; they stay mostly on the ground. Chips are also easier than pitches, or at

least they should be. With the proper technique, you can chip the ball close enough to the hole to tap the ball in . . . unless, of course, you sink that chip!

Chips are played around the greens with anything from a 5-iron to a wedge. (Head to Chapter 2 for the low-down on these and other clubs.) The basic idea is to get the ball on the green and rolling as soon as you can. If you get the ball running like a putt, you have an easier time judging how far it will go. The following sections point out some vital chipping considerations.

### **Pick your spot**

Your first point of reference is the spot where you want the ball to land. If at all possible, you want that spot to be on the putting surface. The turf there is generally flat and well-prepared, which makes the all-important first bounce more predictable. Try to avoid landing chips on rough, uneven, or sloping ground.



Pick a spot about two feet onto the green and visualize the ball rolling the rest of the way to the hole. Visualization is a big part of chipping. Try to picture the shot before you hit the ball. Then be as exact as you can with your target. Don't aim for an area. Try to hit a blade of grass! You can't be too precise. For a specific practice exercise, see the later section "Chip away!"

### **Choose the right club**

Your club choice depends on how much room you have between your landing point and the hole. For only 15 feet, you need a more *lofted* club (one with a face that's severely angled back from vertical), such as a

sand wedge or even a lob wedge, so the ball doesn't run too far. If that gap is bigger (say, 60 feet), a straighter-faced club, such as a 7-iron, is more practical.



Try all sorts of clubs for these shots. Sooner or later, you develop a feel for the short game. Observing how different clubs perform in different situations is one of the secrets of a successful short game.

### **Considering your ball placement**

Now consider how your ball is lying on the ground. If it's in long grass, you need to use a more lofted club and make a longer swing, no matter where the hole is. (**Remember:** Longer grass means a longer swing.) You need to get the ball high enough to escape the rough. If the ball is lying *down* (in a depression) and you can't get it out with a straighter-faced club, you have to go to more loft and move the ball back a little in your stance — closer to your right foot — to make the shot work. This part of the game calls for creativity.

### **Chip away!**

One key to chipping is your setup. Creating the right position at address is essential. Your stance should be similar to the one you use on pitch shots: narrow, with about 12 inches from heel to heel, and open, with your left foot back from the target line. Your shoulders should be open to the target as well. Now place about 80 percent of your weight on your left side. By moving your hands ahead of the ball, you encourage the downward strike that you need to make solid contact with the ball. The ball should be about 2 inches to the left of your right big toe.



During your stroke, focus on the back of your left wrist. That wrist must stay flat and firm, as in putting. To keep your left wrist flat, tape a popsicle stick to the back of that wrist (slipping the stick under your watchband works almost as well). You feel any breakdowns right away.



Short game guru Phil Rodgers taught me my chipping technique, which is basically the same one I employ for putting. I use a putting stroke with a lofted club — and I want you to do the same. Take your putting grip and stroke, and go hit a few chip shots.

## Chapter 5

# Putting: The Game within the Game

.....

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Choosing a putter
  - ▶ Hitting good long and short putts
- .....

**P**utting skills are vital in golf. Statistically, putting is 68 percent of the game of golf, and you can't score well if you can't putt — it's that simple.

If you want proof, look at the top professionals on tour who average about 28 putts per round. In other words, these professionals are one-putting at least 8 of the 18 greens in a round of golf. The average score on tour isn't 8 under par, so even these stars are missing their fair share of greens. And where are they making up for their mistakes? That's right: on good putts.

## Examining Putter, the Most Important Club in the Bag

Because putting is such a crucial part of golf, your putter is the most important weapon you have. Club makers seem to have noticed: In recent years, they've brought out a dizzying array of high-tech putters. Some are as sleek as a sports car, while others look more like anvils or spaceships. How can you choose the putter that's best for your game? It's not as tricky as you may think.

Although you have many putters to choose from, you can eliminate most of them by knowing the type of putter you are. My good friend and noted teaching professional Peter Kostis explains that almost all putting strokes fall into one of two shapes. They either move "straight back and straight through" with the blade staying square, or "inside to inside" with the blade doing a mini-version of the rotation in a full swing. Conveniently, most putters are designed to suit one of those two stroke shapes. Following are the two main types of putters:

- ✓ Face-balanced, center-shafted putters
- ✓ Putter that aren't face-balanced, such as heel-shafted blades

If keeping the blade square throughout the putting stroke is your style, get a face-balanced, center-shafted model. The inside-to-inside stroke is easier to make on a consistent basis with a heel-shafted putter. Figure 5-1 shows two types of putters: heel-shafted on the right and heel-shafted on the left.



Figure 5-1: Two types of putters.

## Building Your Putting Stroke

You can putt well using any number of methods or clubs, but at this stage, you should putt in as orthodox a manner as possible. That way, when something goes wrong — which it will — the fault is easier to fix. The trouble with being unorthodox is that finding order in the chaos is more difficult.

### The putting grip

Grip the putter more in the palm of your hands to reduce the amount of movement your hands make. Although you may putt well with a lot of wrist action in your stroke, I recommend that you take the wrists out of play as much as possible. You're far better off relying on the rocking of your shoulders to create momentum in the putterhead.

Not all putting grips are the same, but what almost all putting grips have in common is that the palms of both hands face each other so that your hands can work together. The last thing you want is your hands fighting one another.

- ✓ **Conventional grip:** In the conventional grip, start by placing the palms of your hands on either side of the club's grip. Slide your right hand down a little so that you can place both hands on the club. You should feel like you're going to adopt the ten-finger grip (refer to Chapter 3). Then do one of the following, depending on which grip you prefer:

Place your left index finger over the little finger of your right hand. This is known as the *reverse overlap*.

Extend your left index finger past the fingers of your right hand until the tip touches your right index finger. I call this grip the *extended reverse overlap*. The left index finger, when extended, provides stability to the putting stroke.

- ✓ **Left hand low:** This method is commonly referred to as *cross-handed*. The left hand hangs below the right with the putter (or vice versa if you're a lefty). Many players use this method because it helps keep the lead hand (the left, in this case) from bending at the wrist as you hit the ball.

One of the biggest causes of missed putts is the breakdown of the left wrist through impact. When the left wrist bends, the putter blade twists, causing the ball to wobble off-line, no matter what kind of fancy putter you use. That's why you want to

maintain the bend of your left wrist from the address position all the way through the stroke.

Another reason you see many of today's pros using a cross-handed grip is that, with the left arm lower on the shaft, you pull the left shoulder more square to your target line. Pulling your left shoulder happens automatically with this grip.

- ✓ **The claw:** To try the claw, start with a standard putting grip. Turn your right palm toward you and bring it to the putter's handle so that the handle touches the spot between your thumb and index finger. Now bring your index and middle fingers to the shaft, leaving your ring finger and pinkie off, as shown in Figure 5-2.



Figure 5-2: The claw grip.

### Putting posture: Stand and deliver

As you crouch over the ball to putt, your knees should flex slightly. Bend from your waist so that your arms hang straight down. This position allows your arms to swing back and forth from a fixed point in a pendulum motion. Hold your arms straight out from your body. Bend down with those arms outstretched from the waist until your arms are pointing to the ground. Now flex your knees a little, and you're in the correct putting posture.

As in a full swing, the line of your toes is the key to good putting posture. Regardless of which stance you choose, your toe line should always be parallel to your target line. As for width of stance, your heels need to be about shoulder-width apart at address.

You have to bend over to place the putter behind the ball. How far should you bend? Just far enough to get your *eye line* (the direction of your gaze) directly over the ball.



To find that position, place a ball on your forehead between your eyes, bend over, and let the ball drop. Where does the ball hit the ground? That's where the ball should be in relation to your body. This alignment places your eyes not just over the ball but also over the line that you want the ball to ride.

### Matching your putt to your full swing

One basic rule for a beginning golfer is to match the length of your golf swing to your putting stroke. That is, if you have a *short swing* (your left arm, if you're

The firmer you hit a putt, the less the ball breaks on even the steepest gradient. So don't be fooled into thinking that you can hole a putt one way only. On, say, a 20-footer, you probably have about five possibilities. How hard you hit the ball is one factor.



The first thing I do when I arrive at a golf course is to find the natural slope of the terrain. If the course is relatively flat, go find the pro or course superintendent. Ask about nearby reservoirs or, failing that, the area's lowest point. This point can be 5 miles away or 20 — it doesn't matter. Find out where that point is and take advantage of gravity. Gravity is a wonderful concept. Every putt breaks down a hill — high point to low point — unless you're in a zero-gravity environment. But that's another book.

After you know the lowest point, look at each green in detail. If you're on an older course, the greens probably slope from back to front to aid drainage. Greens nowadays have more humps and undulations than ever and are surrounded by more bunkers. And the sand tells a tale: Most courses are designed so that water runs past a bunker and not into it. Take that insight into account when you line up a putt.

### Reading the grain

Golf is played on different grasses (ideally, not on the same course). Climate usually dictates the kind of grass you find on a course. When dealing with grasses,

backswing), make sure that your putting stroke is a short one, too. If your full swing is *long*, make your putting stroke long. This way, you're consistent.

### Getting up to speed



When putting, you want to get the ball rolling at the right speed. That means hitting a putt so that if the ball misses the cup, it finishes 14 to 18 inches past the hole. This distance is true no matter the length of the putt. Two feet or 40 feet, your aim must be to hit the ball at a pace that has it finish 14 to 18 inches beyond the hole — if it doesn't go in, that is.

You're probably wondering why your ball needs the right speed. Well, the right speed gives the ball the greatest chance of going into the hole. Think about it: If the ball rolls toward the middle of the cup, you don't want it moving so fast that it rolls right over the hole. If it touches either side of the cup, it may drop in. Your goal is to give the ball every chance to drop in, from any angle — front, back, or side.

### Reading the break

After you have the distance control that a consistent pace brings, you can work on the second half of the putting equation: reading the break. The *break* is the amount a putt moves from right to left, or left to right. Slope, the grain of the grass, topographical features such as water and mountains, and, perhaps most important, how hard you hit the ball dictate the break. For example, if I'm an aggressive player who routinely hits putts several feet past the cup, I'm not going to

architects try to use the thinnest possible blade, given the climate, and then try to get that grass to grow straight up to eliminate grain.

Grasses in hot, tropical areas have to be more resilient, so they typically have thick blades. *Bermuda grass* is the most common. Its blades tend to follow the sun from morning to afternoon — in other words, from east to west. Because the blade is so strong, Bermuda grass can carry a golf ball according to the direction in which it lies. Putts *downgrain* (with the grain) go faster than putts *into* (against) the grain. All that, of course, has an effect on your putt.



Look at the cup to find out which way the Bermuda grass is growing. Especially in the afternoon, you may see a ragged half and a smooth, or sharp, half on the lip of the cup — that shows the direction in which the grass is growing. The ragged look is caused by the grass's tendency to grow and fray. If you can't tell either way, go to the *fringe* (the edge of the green). The grass on the fringe is longer, so you can usually see the direction of the grain right away. The grain of the fringe is the same as on the green.

Another common type of grass is *bent grass*. You see this strain mostly in the northern and northeastern United States. Bent grass has a thinner blade than Bermuda grass, but it doesn't stand up to excessive heat as well.