

# Keeping Your Game Up:

## Making the transition from winter to spring

By Chris Bristow

**W**ind blows cold and hard. Snow blankets the fairways and greens of your favorite course. Time to put those clubs away, it's wintertime in Kansas.

For many, cold weather or the onset of snow means several months of anticipation until you can get on the links again. Unfortunately, more often than not, your game in the spring is not where you left it in the fall. But taking steps in the comfort of your own home during the off-season, like stretching and swing practice, can provide overall improvement in your game when you hit the course in the spring.

### PRACTICE YOUR PUTTING

Contrary to what 460cc clubhead owners might tell you, there is nothing more important on the golf course than your short game, especially putting.

Imagine the situation. You shoot even-par 72, hitting every green in regulation; half of your strokes would come from the green. Don't underestimate the importance of a good putting stroke. As the old adage goes, "Drive for show, putt for dough."

John Morris, Golf Operations supervisor at Eagle Bend Golf Course and Learning Center, reiterates the importance of working on putting during the colder months.

"Your putting stroke is something you can do in the comfort of your home," Morris said. "It is easy, and great for developing hand-eye coordination."

To practice putting, buy an inexpensive, automatic putting cup or you can just turn a plastic cup on its side. Clear as large of an area as possible on your carpet and practice putts from varying distances. This will help in maintaining a solid stroke for next season.

### BE THE KING OR QUEEN OF SWING

Weather conditions should not be the reason for you to let your clubs rust in the garage and allow your swing to deteriorate. In fact, spending more time in the garage may be the best thing you can do to improve your swing.

Morris recommends investing in a mat and hitting net to

practice inside when conditions outside are unfavorable.

"The mat and hitting net are lightweight and portable," Morris said. "And being able to take full swings is very important when you aren't able to be out playing."

You might even want to invest in a club designed especially for swing improvement. There are many products on the market like the Speed Stik, Fan Club and Medicus dual hinged club Morris said.

The Speed Stik gauges the user's swing speed and is used to increase clubhead velocity, which results in more length on shots. The Fan Club is also used to increase clubhead velocity, but it adds resistance to strengthen the muscles used in the golf swing. For those looking to work on form, the Medicus dual hinged club "breaks" at its hinge each time improper ball contact is made. This offers instant feedback to a golfer who might be wondering what they are doing wrong.

If you are worried about knocking out every light bulb in the house or do not have enough room to take full swings, Morris said chipping would be just as beneficial.

"[With swing training] it all comes down to being able to work your hands, because they are the first things to go when you stop playing," Morris said. "Taking swings or chipping allows you to work your hands, while at the same time developing good ball contact."



## SIMPLE STRETCHES

Often overlooked by golfers, proper stretching is a component which makes everything about swinging a club easier. Flexibility, balance and strength are its by-products, and all are essential in executing the proper swing.

Stretches which target large muscle groups, like the upper and lower back, abdominal muscles and arms are great ways to improve your game because they make everything about the golf swing easier.

Mike Pedersen, golf fitness expert and author of the *Ultimate Golf Fitness Guide*, says a daily routine of stretches helps prevent injury and can even increase your driving distance.

One simple stretch which Pedersen recommends is designed to loosen up the muscles in the back of your shoulders and your upper back, resulting in more freedom on both your backswing and follow through.



To complete the stretch, extend your left arm (for right-handers) out in front of you and place the right hand under the left wrist.



Pull with the right hand against the left wrist, making as big a turn on the backswing as possible. Hold for 15 seconds, repeating once more.



To work on the follow through, switch to the other arm and move in the opposite direction.

## WALK LIKE AN ENGLISHMAN

Although Mark Twain may have said “golf is a good walk spoiled,” don’t let his words discourage you from dropping the cart during your next round. It will save you money and your body will appreciate it.

Consider the layout of Eagle Bend. From the blue tees, the course measures more than 6300 yards. If you were to go in a straight line from tee to green on

all 18 holes, this would mean more than 3.5 miles of walking. With the additional yardage for errant shots, elevation change and distance between holes, you’ll find you’ll walk a little bit longer, which is a nice way to sneak in a workout when you are out on the course.

Feel like you have to use a cart? Morris recommends adding in some walking on selected holes. For example, on the par 4s, after taking your second shot, grab your putter and wedge if you need it, and walk the rest of the fairway to the hole while your partner drives. This simple trick will help keep your body loose and allow you to get some more exercise.

So next time the weather has you cooped up don’t throw in the towel, there are plenty of opportunities to make yourself better. Pick up a putter and practice in the living room or release some stress by hitting balls in the garage. Also, on those nice days during winter, you might even want to put the clubs in the car and take some range practice during the lunch hour. Whatever your efforts, you’ll be helping yourself prepare for the next time you are out on the course, and that is always a good thing.

