

- » Beginning with a little golf history
- » Understanding what makes the game special
- » Looking into golf course basics
- » Playing the smart way
- » Adding golf to your lifestyle

Chapter **1**

Loving a Crazy Old Game

Golf is simple. Golf is great. Golf will drive you nuts and keep you coming back for more.

It's deceptively simple: You've got clubs and a ball. Your job is to knock the ball into a series of holes laid out in a large, grassy field. You encounter hazards on the way; and by the time you finish the 18th hole, you may want to go to the clubhouse bar, order a beverage, and tell innocent strangers how every bounce went against you that day. That's probably not what happened, but golfers always need a shoulder to cry on. And if you're a golfer at heart, you'll empathize with everyone else who plays the most frustrating, maddening, wonderful game in the world. You'll play for relaxation, challenge, companionship, and a chance to enjoy the great outdoors. You'll also get so frustrated you wonder why anybody would spend time and money on such a ridiculous pursuit. Then one day you'll shoot your best score ever, and you'll know why.

In this chapter, I introduce you to the game and provide the basics you'll need to get started. Here's hoping you get some smiles along the way.

Understanding Golf's Origins

Golf dates back to medieval Scotland, where Macbeth ruled in the 11th century. Not the Shakespeare character but the real Scottish king old Shakey based his play on! Some historians say the sport began when Scottish shepherds used long, wooden crooks to knock rocks at rabbit holes.

The first printed reference to golf came in 1457, when Scotland's King James II banned "gowf" so that his subjects could concentrate on their archery — the better to beat the English in battle. Years later James's descendants, including his great-great-granddaughter Mary, Queen of Scots, embraced the game. (The original golf widow, she scandalized Britain by playing golf in the days after her husband, Lord Darnley, was murdered.)

The wooden golf balls of those early days gave way to *featheries* — leather pouches stuffed with goose feathers — and then *guttie balls* made from gutta percha, a rubber from Malaysia. In 1860, one of the best Scottish golfers, Tom Morris of St. Andrews, organized the Open Championship, which many Americans call the British Open. That tournament launched modern professional golf. Scottish immigrants introduced Americans to the game, which went on to become one of the world's most popular sports. The rest is history — along with colorful cursing and fun.

Knowing Why Golf Is So Special

You've probably heard about business leaders making huge deals on the golf course. It's true. Back in 1901, zillionaires Charles Schwab and Andrew Carnegie met at St. Andrews Golf Course in New York to make the \$480 million deal that created U.S. Steel. Countless handshakes later, the game has earned a reputation as the ultimate networking game. And while business leaders, like the rest of us, actually spend much of their time on the course looking for wayward golf balls, it's true that golf can bring great networking opportunities.

And that's about the 167th-most-important reason to take up the game. Better reasons include spending time with friends, staying in shape, challenging yourself, and enjoying some of the best scenery you'll ever see. (Tennis courts are all pretty much the same, but each golf course is different, and many are designed to show off their gorgeous surroundings.) Golf is physical, mental, and even spiritual challenge — it tests your skill and your will. It tests your *self*.

And it's a game for a lifetime. Lots of people played football or basketball in high school, but how many are returning punts or grabbing rebounds when they're 50

or 60 years old? I know 70-year-old golfers who have “shot their age,” meaning they carded a score of 70 or better. I’m one of them. The term means that your score for a full round is the same or less than your chronological age. Here’s hoping you play the game long enough to shoot your age someday!

The most important reason to play, though, is that golf is magic — and totally addictive. After it becomes part of your life, you can barely imagine living without it.

It’s also *difficult*. Otherwise, everybody would be out there earning millions on the PGA (Professional Golfers’ Association) and LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) tours. As I see it, there are two main reasons why:

- » The ball doesn’t move on its own.
- » You have, on average, about three minutes between shots.

In other words, you don’t react to the ball as you do in most sports. A baseball gets thrown, hit, and spat on. A football gets passed, tossed, kicked, and carried. A basketball gets shot, rebounded, and dribbled. But a golf ball just sits there, daring you not to lose it.

In most sports, you have only an instant to react to the action — natural athletic instincts take over, and you move to the ball. In golf, you get far too long to think about what you’re doing. Thinking too much — worrying about what might go wrong with the next shot — can make your worst fears come true.

Maybe golf would be easier if the ball moved and you were running after it. Then you could stop worrying and *react*. But if it were easy, it wouldn’t be golf.



REMEMBER

Like many sports, golf has a language all its own. If you’re just starting out, you’ll encounter many terms that might be unfamiliar as you go through this book. *Dogleg. Waggle. Double eagle.* But don’t worry! You’ll find them all defined in Appendix A at the back of the book.

Breaking Down a Typical Course

Most courses have 18 holes, although some have only 9. The *19th hole* is golfspeak for the clubhouse bar — the place where you can guzzle an *Arnold Palmer* (a mix of iced tea and lemonade) or a *John Daly* (a spiked Arnold Palmer) and regale your friends with tales of how the *rub of the green* went against you. (See Appendix A for more on golf jargon.) Seaside courses are called *links* — the parts of Scotland

where the game began were the link between beach and farmland. Many people use “links” to mean any golf course, but purists stick to the correct usage: A links is a course by the water.

Most courses are between 5,500 and 7,000 yards. A few monsters are longer, but leave those courses to the pros you see on TV. It’s a good idea to start at the shorter yardages and work your way up. It’s also important to start each hole from the proper set of tees — a topic I’ll get to later in this section.

You may have heard the word, *par*, which is the number of strokes a good golfer should take to finish a particular hole. Every hole is a par-3, a par-4, or a par-5. (Par-2s are for minigolf; the exceedingly rare par-6 hole is usually a gimmick.) On a par-5 hole, for example, a typical par consists of a *drive* (the first swing from the tee), two more full swings, and two putts. Two putts to the *hole* (also known as a cup) is the most you want to take on every green.



TIP

Three putts are poison. Don’t worry if you take three putts on a green when you’re starting out in the game because it’ll happen. If you take only one, congratulations! That’s a bonus. See Chapter 10 for my surefire putting tips. For now, remember that during an ideal round of golf, half your strokes will be putts. A good day with your putter can make up for a bad day with every other club in your golf bag.

Many courses have a total par of 72, often consisting of ten par-4s (40 regulation strokes), four par-3s (12), and four par-5s (20). But you can find golf courses with total pars of anywhere from 62 to 74. Table 1-1 lists each type of hole’s regulation strokes and the yardages that generally determine par on a hole for men and women. It’s worth noting that these guidelines don’t always refer to precise yardages, but rather to what the United States Golf Association (USGA) calls a hole’s “effective playing length.” A 460-yard hole that goes straight uphill, for instance, may be a par-5 for men.

TABLE 1-1

Shooting for Par

Par	Regulation Strokes	Regulation Yardages	
		Women	Men
Par-3	1 swing, 2 putts	200 yards or less	260 yards or less
Par-4	2 swings, 2 putts	200–420 yards	240–490 yards
Par-5	3 swings, 2 putts	370–600 yards	450–710 yards

Source: USGA

That's the big picture.

You often find different teeing areas on each hole, allowing you to play the hole from different lengths based on your skill level. Pay attention to these different *tee boxes* (the designated areas for the first shot of a hole)! Most courses offer four for each hole, with color-coded markers on the ground to help you out:

- » **Gold tees** are invariably the farthest from the green — they're are for long-ball strikers or expert players only. (Sometimes the back tees are black rather than gold.)
- » **Blue tees** are usually a few yards ahead of the farthest back tees. Teeing off from this set of tees makes a hole shorter, but it may still be difficult. Club tournaments are played from these tees. In general, your handicap should be 10 or lower if you're playing the blues. See Chapter 16 for more on handicaps.
- » **White tees** are for everyday, casual play and are the right choice for most men, lower-handicap women, and capable seniors. Most golfers should play from these tees!
- » **Red tees** are traditionally used by women or junior golfers. There is nothing — I repeat NOTHING — wrong or embarrassing about playing from the forward tees. If more golfers did so, the game would go faster and fewer golfer would complain.



REMEMBER

Don't get hung up on the colors I mention above. Many courses use their own color schemes to mark the various tee boxes. The point is to select the ones that suit your skill level.

Playing Step-by-Step Golf

Simply stated, your goal is to get the ball into 18 holes in succession with the fewest number of strokes, using no more than 14 clubs. The lower your total score, the better. That's it.

The game's charm lies in the journey. How many possible ways can a golfer go from the tee to the hole? Let me count the ways: One, two . . . sixty-five million . . . I give up. That's one of the things that makes the game so frustrating and fun. By the time you hit your second shot, your round of golf will be different from every other round you ever played.



TIP

The best advice I can give you boils down to one word: Relax! Stay calm, make prudent decisions, and never hit a shot while thinking about what you're going to have for dinner. You should play with full concentration and no ego. And when the game tempts you to try feats of unlikely derring-do, don't. A good golfer judges her or his talents honestly.

Should you try to make it over the water to a green that's 240 yards away? Or play it safe?

My advice is, don't get greedy. Play the game one step at a time. Figure 1-1 shows a sensible approach. Starting at the tee, you hit your drive to Point A. From there, it's 240 yards to the green, with a lake lurking to the left. (Do lakes lurk? I'm not a hydrologist.) The smart approach is to lay up to Point B, then hit a shorter shot to the green, Point C. Of course, the smart approach doesn't always work — you may shoot for Point B and still yank your second shot into the pond — Point X. But it's the right choice, and that's the key to smart step-by-step golf.

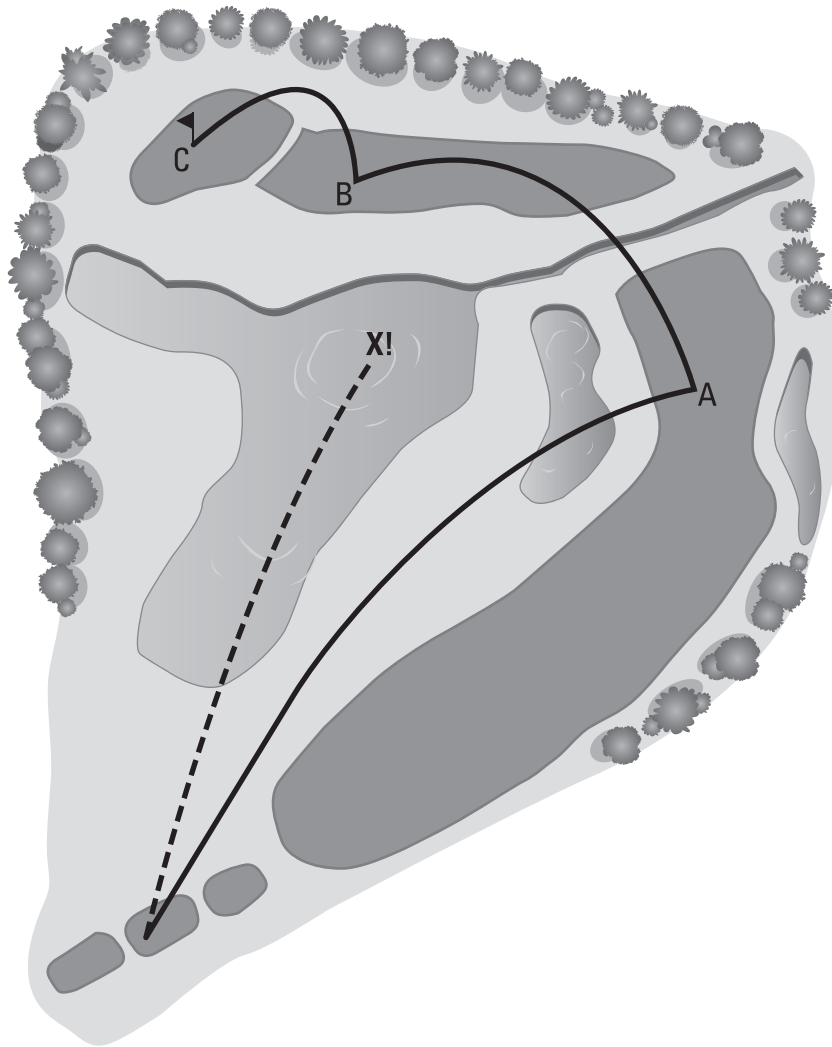


FIGURE 1-1:
A reasonable
plan for playing
a golf hole.

Score is what counts. As you'll see in Chapters 9, 10, and 11, most golf shots occur within 100 yards of the hole. If you save strokes near the green, your score will be better than that of the glory hog whose sole purpose in life is to hit the ball as far as possible. So in addition to choosing the right route from tee to green, you need to practice putting, sand play, chips, and pitches twice as much as you practice driving. Your hard work will pay off, and your friends will be the ones dipping into their wallets (if you're wagering, as I discuss in Chapter 17).

Becoming a “Real” Golfer

To me, a “real” golfer has three great virtues:

- » You understand the game.
- » You can play it a little.
- » You never dishonor the game's spirit.

Anyone can smack a ball around a course. (I can already hear my fellow pros saying, “Yeah — like you, McCord!”) But that doesn't make you a real golfer. There's more to this game than hitting the ball with a club.

How can you join the ranks of real golfers? It's easy. First, read the rest of this book. You'll find everything you need to get started, from equipment to instruction to common problems, etiquette, betting, and everything else you need to know. I guide you through the aisles of your local pro shop or sporting-goods store, with tips (and quips — there will always be quips) to help you avoid shelling out thousands of dollars on stuff you don't need. (Check out Chapter 2 for tips on what you do need to get started.)

After you're swinging the right set of clubs — a starter set at first — I show you how to grip the club. Far too many beginners get the grip wrong, and it sets them back, sometimes for years. The wrong grip has led millions of golfers to think the game's way harder than it is. But the golf grip is simple and fundamental! (See Chapter 6 for more on this gripping — pardon the pun — topic.)

When you've got the grip down pat, you're almost ready to swing. And believe me, the swing isn't as easy as it looks. That's why I devote Chapter 7 to developing your own swing.

Once you know how to grip the club and hit the ball, you'll delve into how to keep score, proper etiquette, and other parts of the game. You've probably heard about

golf etiquette, handicaps, and one- and two-stroke penalties — and maybe even such goofy-sounding concepts as nassaus, skins, barkies, and even mulligans! If not, don't worry. Part 3 gives you the lowdown on these and other topics.

Making Golf Part of Your Life

As any golf nut will tell you — often at great length — there's lots more to the game than hitting the ball. There's the fun of watching the sport on TV or in person, following it online, playing mini-golf, video golf, simulator golf or new, fun variations like Topgolf, and even playing while you're asleep! (In my dreams, I shoot 59.) See Part 5 for my guide to many of the best off-the-course ways to stay tuned to the game.

But beware: Once the golf bug bites, you may never be the same. If you become a real golfer, you may experience more anger, frustration, wonder and delight than you ever expected. You'll be one of us.

WHO KNEW?

Many golfers fancy themselves experts on the game's long history, but how many know the delightful details? Entertain your golf buddies with your command of the game's early history:

- Dutch historians have claimed that golf originated in Holland around 1300. A game called *spel metten kolve* (or *colf*, which means "club") was popular in the late 13th century. *Colf* is believed to have been played mostly on ice. But it was in Scotland that early golfers began hitting a rock or wooden ball at a hole in the ground.
- Golfers play 18 holes because the Old Course in St. Andrews, Scotland, was shortened from 22 holes to 18 in 1764. Eighteen has been the standard since St. Andrews became the capital of the game in the late 1800s.
- In those days of golf, a small dollop of sand, acting as a tee, was placed under the ball. Wooden tees weren't invented until 1899.
- According to Scottish lore, the hole is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter because that was the size of drainpipes in St. Andrews when Old Tom Morris, the legendary greenskeeper at the Old Course, used a drainpipe as the first cup liner.
- Golf's first major tournament, the Open Championship, was held with only eight players at Scotland's Prestwick Golf Club in 1860. Old Tom finished second to Willie

Park, whose prize was a year's custody of the Championship Belt and a purse of £0 — that's right, zero pounds. The honor of victory was supposed to be prize enough.

- America's first golf club was formed in 1888. The St. Andrews Golf Club in Yonkers, New York, named for the game's capital in Scotland, had a three-hole layout that ended near a large apple tree. The club's golfers became known as the Apple Tree Gang. They hung their coats on the tree before they teed off.
- The PGA Tour was born in 1968, when a group of touring professionals led by Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus split off from the PGA of America, which represents teaching professionals and still runs the PGA Championship, one of the game's most important tournaments. The PGA Tour's total purse in 1968 was about \$4 million. Currently it's more than \$450 million.
- A local telecast of the 1947 U.S. Open in St. Louis marked the advent of televised golf — a red-letter day in golf history if ever there was one. TV would give me a job that wasn't dependent on my golf score!

