

Making the Cut

WE KNOW not everyone can find the time – or spare change for that matter – to visit their club professional each month. So we're bringing the expert to you with the third instalment of our popular *Making the Cut* series – your anytime, anywhere free online video coach.

Check out the tips on the following pages and then go to our website www.thecutmagazine.co.nz to watch the full video versions.

Making the Cut's expert host is Auckland-based Class AA PGA pro Craig Dixon, who calls the shots at the Waitemata Club in Devonport. Dixon also runs his own talent-stacked junior academy (see www.craigdixonpga.co.nz for details) and looks after the North Harbour Special Olympics team.

Dixon's popularity derives from his 'practice with a purpose' and holistic approach that covers every facet of the game, from correcting postural imperfections to installing the right dietary habits.

If you missed Dixon's first three *Making the Cut* episodes, don't worry. Just go to www.thecutmagazine.co.nz and click on the series' link.

There you'll find the 'Short Game Shortcuts' which featured in our March issue, and Dixon's 'Putt Like a Pro' clips from last month, along with, of course, the videos of the drills featured on the following pages.



Drill 1: On your knees for greater power

The pull and the slice are common faults for many golfers. And while those shots may head in opposite directions, they actually stem from the same problem – a faulty swing path.



Here is an easy-to-follow drill that will help you understand how the correct swing path and plane should feel. It will also help identify the arm freedom necessary to swing the club at optimum speed plus the free release of the clubhead, which squares the clubface at impact.

Next time you are at the driving range or practice fairway, drop to your knees and tee up the ball a little higher than normal. Use a driver for this drill. Make sure you swing at about 80 per cent of your usual tempo. You'll probably feel a little embarrassed on your knees at first and you might whiff the ground with the first few swings. But stay with it. When you stand up again, your shots will soar long and straight.



Photographs: Niels Schipper

✓ **Correct swing sequence**



All I want you to do at first is take a swing and feel you are swinging in a big circle, like you are taking a baseball swing. If you come over the top you will be unable to hit the ball because you'll make contact with the ground about a foot behind the ball. And the same thing will happen if the club gets too inside.

Once you can hit the ball consistently, stand up and hit the ball with the same rotational feeling you had when you were on your knees. This drill is particularly good for juniors, who are often so agile their bodies are too active in the swing. It's also great for older golfers, who need to feel how to use the clubhead to synchronize the moving parts of their body.

It's important that this is done on a regular basis to ingrain your new swing plane. Remember, practice with a purpose and your slice or pull will be gone forever.



✗ **Incorrect swing sequence**



**Drill 2:
Power-charge your set up**

Ball position is a crucial element in any player's game. It influences the club's point of contact with the ball, trajectory, distance and spin control.

There are three distinct ball placement positions I teach my clients – wedge, full swing iron and driver. There are others relevant to finesse, recovery and special shots, but I like to ensure my players have the basics before worrying about those. Besides, if you get the basics right you won't be have to play recovery shots as you will be down the fairway happily hitting to the greens.

In this lesson, I am going to explain not only where the ball is positioned but why it is positioned there. I like to empower my players with knowledge so they can use the information I give them to full effect.



The Driver:

Many players already know the ball position for driving should be further forward in the stance than for a wedge and a full swing iron, and they are correct. The ball position off the tee is always off the front heel. This is because the club will reach the bottom of the swing about two inches forward of centre and then catch the ball on the upswing, producing a nice high launch angle. It's at this point you also have maximum clubhead speed – not at the bottom of the swing as most people think – and that's a critical component to maximising your length off the tee.



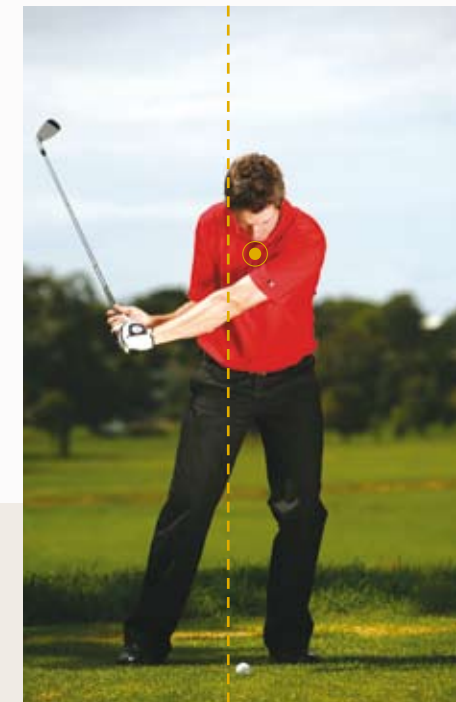
Full swing irons:

Many of you may have been taught to play your three-iron forward in your stance and then work the ball position back in your stance gradually as the lofts start increasing. But I believe the ball position should remain the same for a full swing iron, no matter what iron you are using. The loft and length of the club influence the trajectory and distance.

The ball position for a full iron should be two inches forward of centre in your stance. For a right-handed player, this is two inches towards the left foot. The swing centre is positioned in the upper half of your spine (T4 and T5 are the bones).

Wedges:

A good wedge player can slash strokes off every round, from nailing approaches to within 'gimme' putt distance, to getting themselves out of tree trouble when they stray from the fairway. With wedge play, you must ensure that the ball position is in the middle of the stance. This is because unlike the full iron swing, there is no power move but something I call the control move. The swing centre remains centred during the backswing, which is easy to do, as the wedge swing is around 20 to 30 per cent shorter than that of a full swing. By having the ball position in the centre, you can then make crisp and controlled contact every time.



When you make the backswing, you need to rotate through the thoracic to produce enough rotation to create power. As you are doing this, the swing centre should remain in its original position as much as possible (a centred swing). During the start of the downswing, however, to create power the swing centre moves slightly towards the target by two inches. This is the reason the ball position is situated there. This will ensure you make a solid, powerful and controlled contact every time.

▶▶ To see the video versions of these drills, log on to www.thecutmagazine.co.nz