

YOUR GAME



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Get the baby steps right first and watch your game grow.

Erika Larkin with her seven-month-old son, Michael, at International Country Club in Fairfax, Va.

Do Your Homework

The fall season means back to school and back to work on the fundamentals

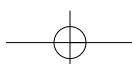
While most golfers are usually concerned with faults and fixes, fall is a great time to focus on the fundamentals. We've often read about how Jack Nicklaus would annually spend the offseason working on the basics such as grip, posture and alignment. The game's best player was not afraid to have his teacher check his elementary homework and now is the time for you to brush up on the basics.

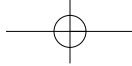
In northern Virginia, we are fortunate to have a lengthy golf season with a few winter months, which creates a great opportunity to go back to school and refresh the fundamentals. Whether I'm teaching a beginner or a single-digit handicap, it's not uncommon for me to dedicate a great deal of time to grip, posture, alignment and even the feel or rhythm of the golf swing.

Featured below are several of my favorite tips that help simplify the swing and make the game easier to learn and more enjoyable to play. Take advantage of the back-to-school season, revisit the fundamentals and next time move to the head of the class.



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ASSIGNMENT 101 – THE GRIP



During pre-shot, position the club at an angle to ensure the correct top hand position.



A sound grip sets up the rest of the swing.

The grip is the most critical part of the golf swing and too often overlooked. I am open to a variety of hand positions, i.e. the overlap, Vardon grip, interlocking or even the 10-finger grip. But ultimately, the key is your ability to set the glove hand on the club properly in order to later create the correct wrist hinge.

At the address position, without swinging, I ask students to

slowly raise the clubhead so that the shaft reaches a 45-degree angle in front of their body. Gripping the club with the glove hand helps to ensure a correct position and proper wrist angle. An incorrect grip makes it impossible to hold the club vertically with ease. The right angle between the club shaft and the forearms can be attained with a good grip.

ASSIGNMENT 102 – ALIGNMENT



While practicing, take the guesswork out of alignment by employing aiming guides.

Besides placing your hands on the club properly, aiming is another often overlooked fundamental that can cause inconsistent results if the correct alignment positions are not clear in your mind and constantly checked.

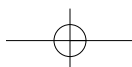
During your practice session, use two reflective poles to see and feel how you should be positioned parallel to the target line. Place the first pole near your toes and the second parallel to the first, just beyond the path of the golf ball.



Use a helpful aid like a tee in the ground to ingrain the feel of the ideal path through the swing.

With regard to alignment, another key point is adding an intermediate target, such as a golf tee, approximately eight to 10 inches in line with the path of the golf ball. This visual encourages you to swing along the target line by reaching for the tee after impact. Setting up a practice station like this can really help you develop a nice visual of the proper alignment and correct swing path.

PHOTOS BY PETE WOFFORD (8)



VIRGINIA GOLFER

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YOUR GAME

ASSIGNMENT 103 – POSTURE



Take some time to study impact and your through motion.

The third fundamental that all students can benefit from is achieving the correct posture. For beginners, posture means getting into an athletic position – flexed knees and a forward tilt in the hips with the arms hanging freely from the upper body. For more advanced players, posture is critical to avoid undue stress on the back, hips, and less flexible body parts.

My favorite drill is rehearsing the golf swing in front of a full-length mirror. Using the frame of the mirror as a reference point, study your reflection at the top of the backswing. Ideally, your head would not move off the top of the frame. Also use the mirror from a side angle, simulating the forward swing in slow motion, again using the frame of the mirror as a reference point. This will help prevent your spine angle from changing during the swing, leading to more consistently solid shots.



Use a mirror to check your top-of-the-swing position.

EXTRA CREDIT – BALANCE

With your fundamentals in order, including a good grip, athletic posture and proper alignment, now is the time to set it all in motion. Developing rhythm in your golf swing is the quickest way to jump to the head of the class.

A fun and enlightening drill is doing some ball-striking with your eyes closed. The loss of sight enhances your awareness of body balance and the timing of the back and through motion that helps to ensure that your swing is not rushed.



Encourage a fluid rhythm by hitting some shots with your eyes closed.

HighFlyers



A look at the premier performances from summer championships and events

Compiled by Andrew Blair

Whitney Neuhauser: The 21-year-old Barboursville resident advanced to the quarterfinals of this summer's U.S. Women's Amateur Championship at Eugene Country Club in Oregon.

Neuhauser shot 2-under-par 142 in stroke play qualifying to earn the fourth seed for match play. A rising junior at the University of Virginia, she opened match play with a 3 and 2 win over 2007 U.S. Girls' Junior winner Kristen Park of Buena Vista, Calif., before ousting 2008 Southern Women's Amateur champion Lucy Nunn of Lawton, Okla., 5 and 4. In the round of 16, she bested Stephanie Kono of Honolulu, Hawaii, 1 up.

One of four Virginians to compete in the national championship, Neuhauser advanced the furthest, before eventually falling to Belen Mozo (Cadiz, Spain), 6 and 5 in the quarters.



VSGA PHOTO

Richmond's Natalie Easterly accepts a congratulatory hug from fellow Country Club of Virginia member Lindsay Wortham following the championship match at the VSGA Senior Women's Am at The Homestead's Old Course.

Natalie Easterly: The central Virginian used a mid-match surge to post a 4 and 3 victory over stroke play medalist Mimi Hoffman (Springfield) and win the 51st VSGA Senior Women's Amateur Championship at The Homestead's Old Course in Hot Springs.

A finalist last year, Easterly recorded her first VSGA Senior Women's Am triumph. Already a five-time winner of the Richmond Women's Golf Association Amateur Championship, she

took home the most significant title of her VSGA career.

"It's such an honor. They're all different, but this is something I've dreamed of someday being able to win," Easterly said.

Trailing 1-down after five, Easterly claimed four of seven holes between Nos. 6 and 12 to build a 4-up advantage, playing that stretch in one under.

Jessica Hollandsworth: The 18-year-old Floyd resident carded a final-round 3-under 68 to notch a comeback victory at the 39th VSGA Junior Girls Championship at Portsmouth's Elizabeth Manor Golf and Country Club.

Hollandsworth, who opened with 72 and began the final round four shots off the pace, concluded the championship at 2-under 140 to post a one-shot win over Meredith Swanson of Roanoke, who also fired a closing 68.

Hollandsworth calmly knocked in a birdie comebacker at No. 18 to capture the last VSGA Junior Girls' Championship for which she is eligible before passing the age limit. Hollandsworth is headed to the University of Maryland in the fall.

Virginias team at the Virginias-Carolinas Women's Team Matches: The 24-golfer Virginias team outscored their Carolinas counterparts 18-15 in final day four-ball competition to post a wire-to-wire 12-point win (55½-43½) at the 52nd Virginias-Carolinas Women's Team Matches at The Dunes Golf and Beach Club in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Possessors of a nine-point advantage after day two, Virginias posted six wins, including two shutouts and halved another match in final-day action. Virginias took home its fifth win in the past six meetings between the two teams dating back to 2003.

Virginias squad at the Virginias-Carolinas Junior Matches: The eight-golfer Virginias team won five of eight final day singles matches against their Carolinas counterparts to claim the 26th Virginias-Carolinas Junior Matches at The Club at Irish Creek in Kannapolis, N.C.

With the matches tied 4-4 after the first day, Virginias outscored their opponents 5-3 in singles matches to register a 9-7 victory. Virginias claimed its second straight win in the series and recorded its first win on Carolinas soil in the matches since 2004 when the team triumphed at The Old North State Club in New London, N.C.

For complete results and recaps from all VSGA championships, please visit www.vsga.org.