

YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE
TO THE SCORING BASICS

Breaking 100908070

Plus
70



By Christopher Smith
with Ron Kaspriske

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The need for speed

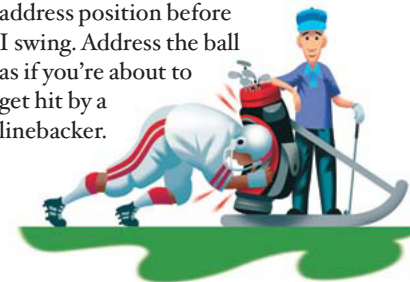
Want the secret to shooting lower scores? Play faster. Slow play doesn't just make you want to kill the foursome in front of you. It also kills *your* game. I play "speed golf," a new sport where competitors use a limited number of clubs and run between shots, trying to shoot the lowest score in the fastest time. Think you have to play slowly to play well? I recently shot 66 in 48 minutes, 30 seconds on the par 71, 6,500-yard Ghost Creek course at Pumpkin Ridge in Oregon. You might never start running between shots, but there is a lot you can learn from playing faster. I'll show you how to break your scoring barrier in record time—literally.

Breaking 100

When I'm working with 100-shooters, I can't help but notice how long they stand motionless over the ball before swinging. You can see the tension building. I wonder sometimes if they are trying to communicate with the ball telepathically. You need to stay relaxed when playing this game. I always tell less-experienced players to swing easy and keep moving.

Brace for impact

Speed golf has taught me to get into an athletic, well-balanced address position before I swing. Address the ball as if you're about to get hit by a linebacker.

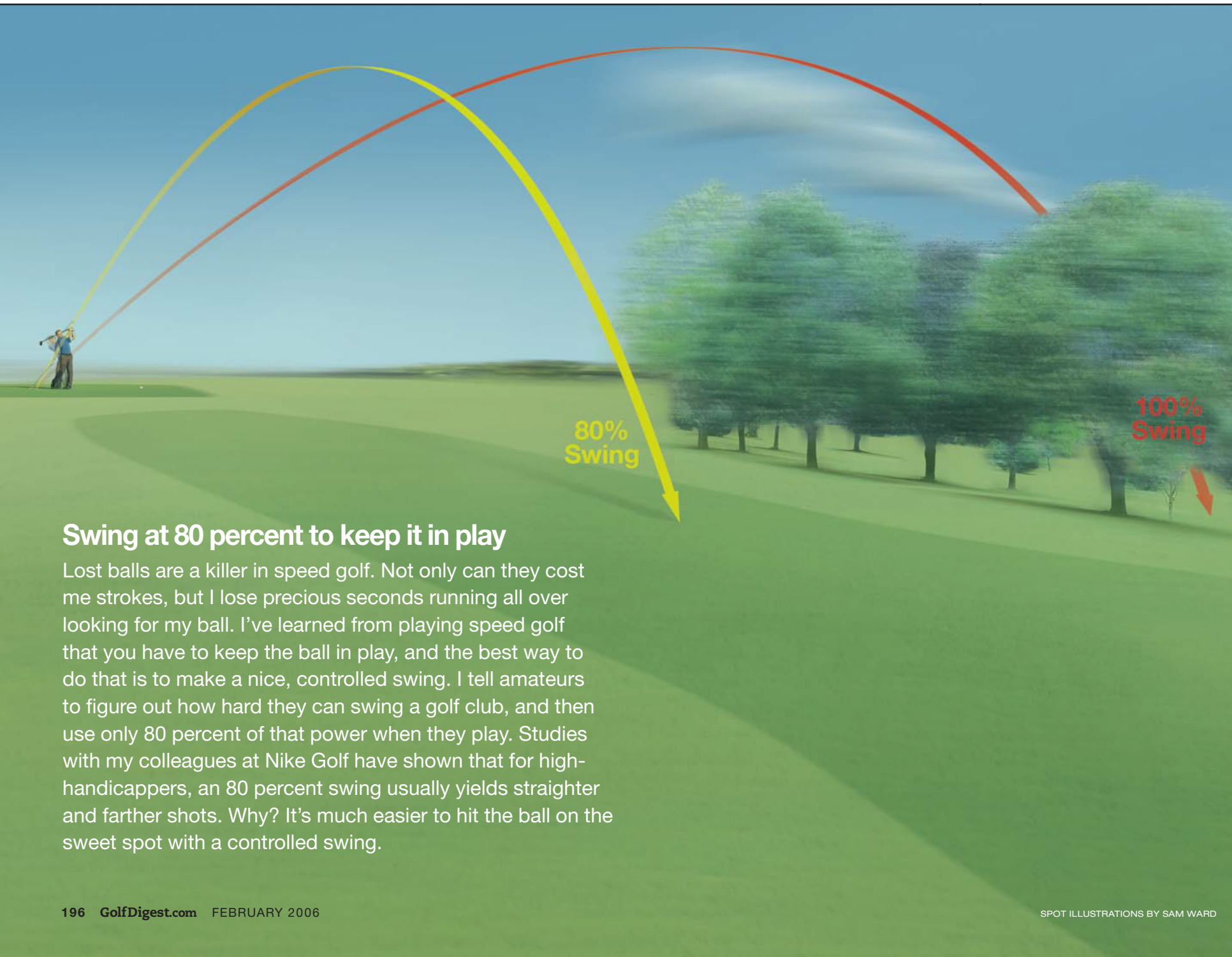
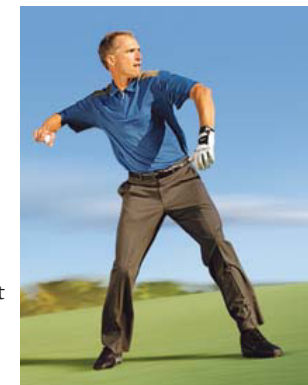


Choose wisely

I only use six clubs when I'm running from shot to shot. I have total confidence in these clubs, which is an important consideration for players trying to get in the 90s. Become proficient with a few clubs before expanding your repertoire. Tee off with a 5-wood, putt from off the green, get really good with a pitching wedge. Use only clubs that work best for you.

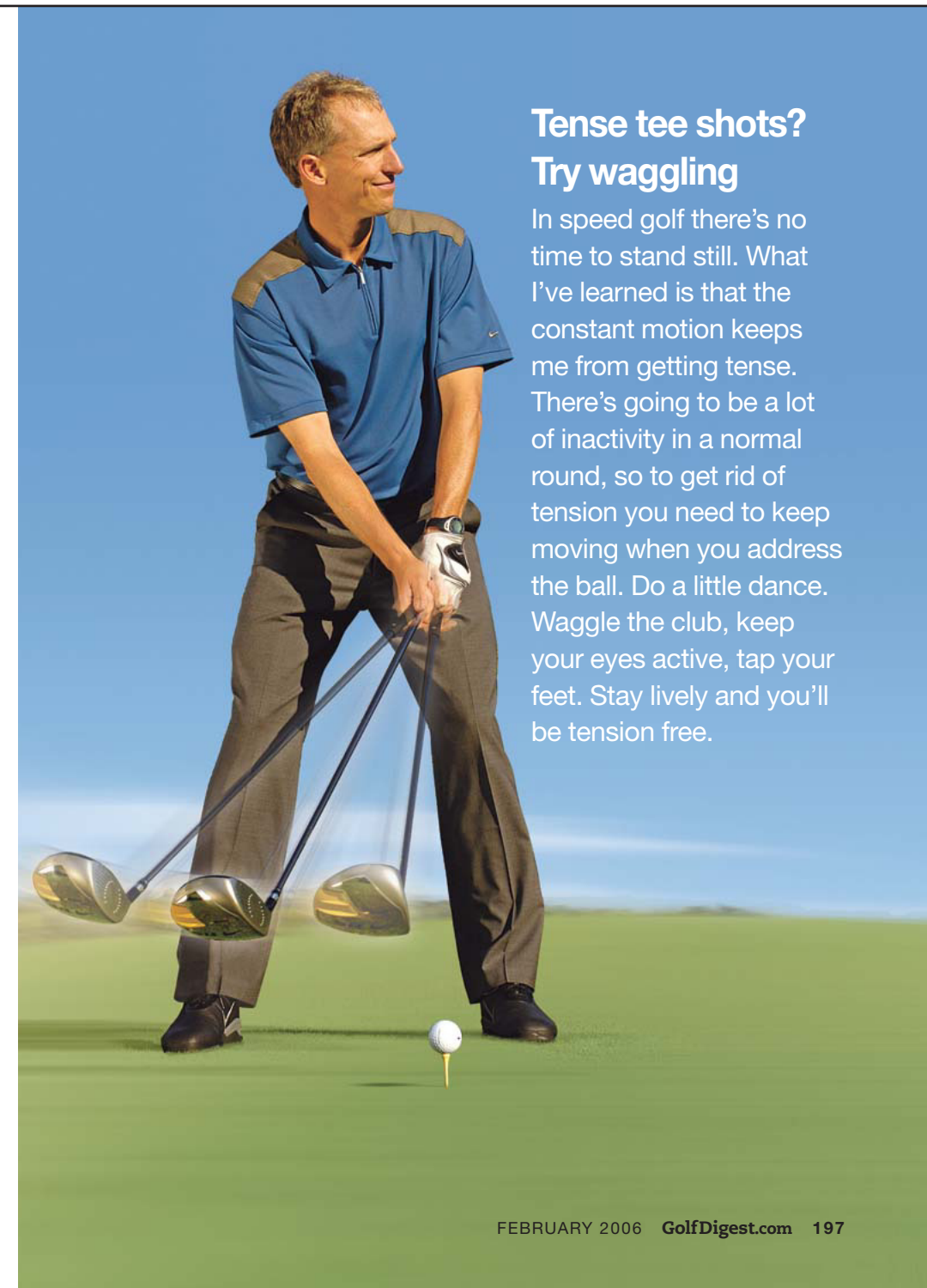
Don't think, just swing

Remember, golfers are athletes, and most sports activities are performed without conscious thought. When you throw a ball, you don't think about weight shift, but your body shifts instinctively. Keep your mind out of the way.



Swing at 80 percent to keep it in play

Lost balls are a killer in speed golf. Not only can they cost me strokes, but I lose precious seconds running all over looking for my ball. I've learned from playing speed golf that you have to keep the ball in play, and the best way to do that is to make a nice, controlled swing. I tell amateurs to figure out how hard they can swing a golf club, and then use only 80 percent of that power when they play. Studies with my colleagues at Nike Golf have shown that for high-handicappers, an 80 percent swing usually yields straighter and farther shots. Why? It's much easier to hit the ball on the sweet spot with a controlled swing.



Tense tee shots? Try wagging

In speed golf there's no time to stand still. What I've learned is that the constant motion keeps me from getting tense. There's going to be a lot of inactivity in a normal round, so to get rid of tension you need to keep moving when you address the ball. Do a little dance. Waggle the club, keep your eyes active, tap your feet. Stay lively and you'll be tension free.

Breaking 90

Speed golf is all about seeing and reacting. There's no time to second-guess yourself. You have to run up to a ball, catch your breath and then hit a shot. This teaches you that the first plan that pops into your head is almost always your best option. You see a target, figure out what club you need to get the ball to that target, and you swing. That's it.

Be prepared

Hall of Fame basketball coach John Wooden used to say that failing to prepare is preparing to fail. You can't roll out of the car, throw on your golf shoes and sprint to the first tee and expect to play well. Instead, eat, hydrate and warm up properly before you play.

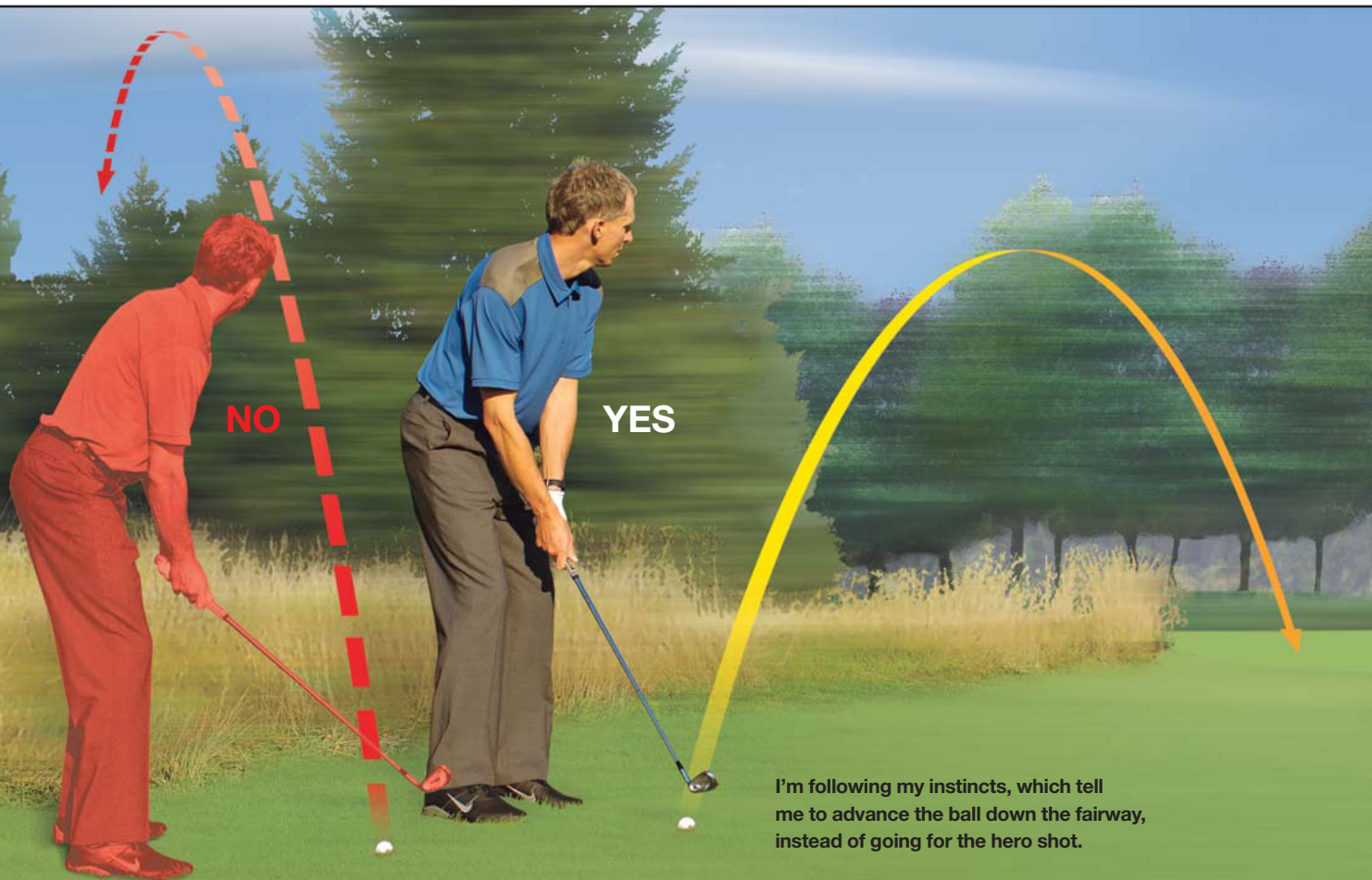
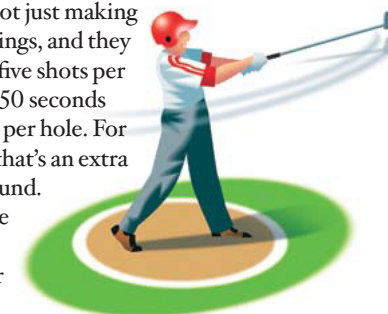


How to finish strong

When you run on uneven ground, you have to focus on every step. You can't look ahead to the finish line or you'll fall. Likewise, if you want to break 90, don't start thinking about your final score on the 15th tee box. Stay in the present. Heed the words of Albert Einstein: Never think of the future—it comes soon enough.

Practice not practicing

If each member of a foursome takes 10 seconds per shot just making practice swings, and they do that for five shots per hole, that's 50 seconds per person, per hole. For the group, that's an extra hour per round. No practice swings means faster rounds.



Never say 'I should have' again

If I had it my way, I'd erase the word "should" from the dictionary. How many times have you said, "I should have punched out of the woods," or "I should have gone for the green in two"? In almost every case, your first impression is the correct one. You might still fail, but if you go with your gut, at least you won't be standing

over a shot wondering if you made the right choice. Don't give yourself a choice. Golf isn't about what you *should* do; it's about listening to your "adaptive unconscious." In speed golf, there's no time to contemplate whether there is a better option. I have to trust my first vibe, and that's what I recommend for every golfer.



See target, hit target

When I was a kid, I used to love trying to hit the range-ball picker as it drove across the practice area. (I still do.) If the cart were on the move, I'd quickly throw a ball down and make a swing in reaction to the picker's position. It's like speed golf: You see a target, quickly assess what kind of shot you need to reach that target, and you swing. Golfers should practice reacting to targets rather than trying to hone swing mechanics. See the target and swing the club. Your body will naturally adjust.

Breaking 80

The Marines have a motto when facing a tough situation: Adapt and overcome. I like that mindset for breaking 80. Golfers who are confined to shooting in the 80s are really stubborn in adapting to the ever-changing course conditions and their own bodies. A 7-iron that goes 150 one day might go 130 the next. Be adaptable.



Go for the middle

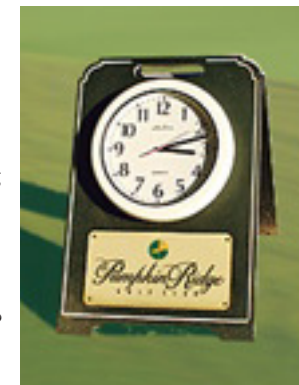
Unless I'm 100 yards or closer, I'm aiming for the middle of the green every time. I can't afford to miss when I play speed golf. Think of it this way: If there were no flagstick on the green, where would you aim? Employ this strategy, and your scores will drop.

Don't limit your goals

If runners finish a course in 48 minutes, the next time they run, they don't say, *I'm going to try for 47:59*. They try to run as fast as they can. So I don't like to hear golfers who haven't broken 80 say they want a 79. Forget 79. Why not 75? Or even par? Don't limit yourself by setting goals that are just good enough. Go as low as you possibly can.

Time trials

One thing speed golfers have in common with traditional golfers is the time spent actually hitting a shot. It's virtually the same. So why do you need five hours to play a round that takes me 48 minutes? The best golf is always played faster.



Remember the first five seconds

Overanalyzing situations creates doubt, and doubt is the root of missed putts. Ben Crenshaw, one of the all-time best putters, says that people accurately read almost all putts in the first five seconds. As I see it, any time spent reading the putt after the first five seconds is a recipe for missing. In speed golf I catch my breath by walking the line and collecting the necessary information before I putt. There's no hesitation when I get over the ball. I even read the green as I'm running up to it. Make a decisive assessment quickly, and trust it.



Shape your shots

Practicing isn't just about hitting a bucket of 8-irons at a flag. At least not if you want to break 80. Instead, try hitting some golf shots! Hit some high, some low; hit some that fade, some that draw. I like to hit a dozen or so out of a divot just to see how the ball reacts. I also hit off uneven lies and bury a few in the grass. Because I carry only a few clubs when I play speed golf, I have to know how to hit a variety of shots with the same club. Your ability to adapt to course conditions and the ball's lie will make a huge difference.

Breaking 70

Earl Woods used to try to distract Tiger in his backswing just to prepare his son for the type of concentration he would need to compete at the highest level. Phil Mickelson makes 100 putts in a row in a circle before completing a practice session. These are good examples of the rigorous practice habits needed to break a scoring barrier such as 70.

Practice harder than you play

Players from Bobby Knight's undefeated Indiana University basketball team of 1976 used to say their practices were so grueling they couldn't wait for the games to start. After a round of speed golf and its severe physical demands, playing a regular round seems easy to me. The lesson here is to make your practice sessions more difficult. Breaking 70 requires a mental toughness that can only be honed from doing things like playing "worst ball," where you hit two shots and play the worse of the two for your next shot, and so on. Normal golf will soon seem like a breeze.

Best ball

Worst ball