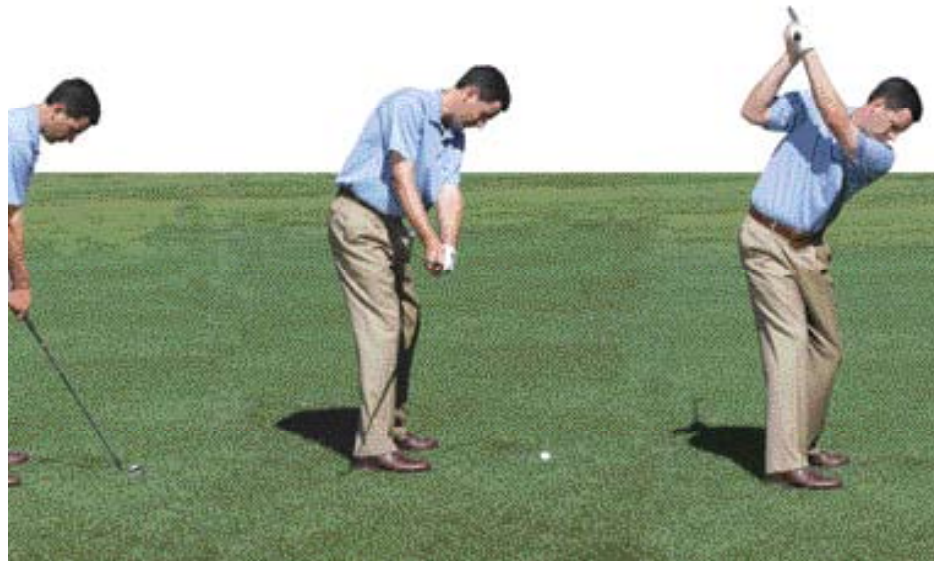




How **5 MINUTES** Practicing At Home Beats **30 MINUTES** On The Range

By Kevin Sprecher



Most recreational golfers are busy people with little time to practice. They may have 30 to 60 minutes a week to hit balls at the driving range. Clearly, this is a roadblock to making changes and improving their game.

However, by using a practice plan consisting of drills that you can do at home in 1 to 5 minutes a day, you can optimize your limited practice time and get some work done each day. Often, seven 5-minute sessions done at home will accomplish more than one 30-minute session a week on the range.

These short drills always incorporate some kind of position practice. Practicing in positions allows players to focus on specific areas of their swing without worrying about making contact. Instead, they can focus on what they feel in each position. Of course, the positions don't have to be perfect — just in an acceptable range. There are simply parameters that the club and/or golfer need to be within.

While not all players need to practice the same positions, there are six positions that are good for everyone.

1. Setup

It is important to start from a good position. Strive for symmetry in your address position. Your weight should be balanced with your arms hanging naturally and your knees slightly flexed. The upper body should tilt slightly away from the target, bent over from the hip and toward the ball.

2. Halfway Back

The clubface should be toe up or slightly face down at this point. The arms should be extended, and the right arm should be slightly bent. The triangle formed by the arms and chest should still be intact because the shoulders have turned back. Your weight should transfer slightly onto the back foot.

3. Top Of The Backswing

A completed shoulder turn and weight shift onto the back foot are crucial at this stage. Check the position of the clubface in relation to the left arm. You want the body to stay close to its original posture.

4. Halfway Down

The clubface position is critical here, as the toe should be up. If the clubface is too open or closed at this position, it will be difficult to get the clubface square at impact.

5. Halfway Through

In this position, you should look for the release of the arms and body. Your weight shift should be near completion, and the arms should have rolled over, with the clubface square to slightly closed. Your eyes should now be looking down the target line.

6. The Finish

Balance is the key here. If you can finish in a balanced position, then you have probably made a decent swing. If you are off-balanced, you may have an improper setup position, the ball placed too far away or your weight too much on the heels.

While these are general positions that most golf instructors use, there are several others that can accelerate the learning process. Just keep in mind that not all positions are good for everyone.



The First Move Back

First move off the ball is critical to properly setting up the rest of the swing. What I look for in the first move back is a connected or one-piece takeaway. This means the upper body initiates the movement, so the arms and club move in harmony with the upper body. If you look at your setup position, you should notice your arms and chest form a triangle. In a one-piece takeaway, this triangle will stay in tact for the first couple of moments in the backswing.

During this move, your body should begin shifting weight onto the back foot. Watching yourself in a mirror can help you monitor this movement.

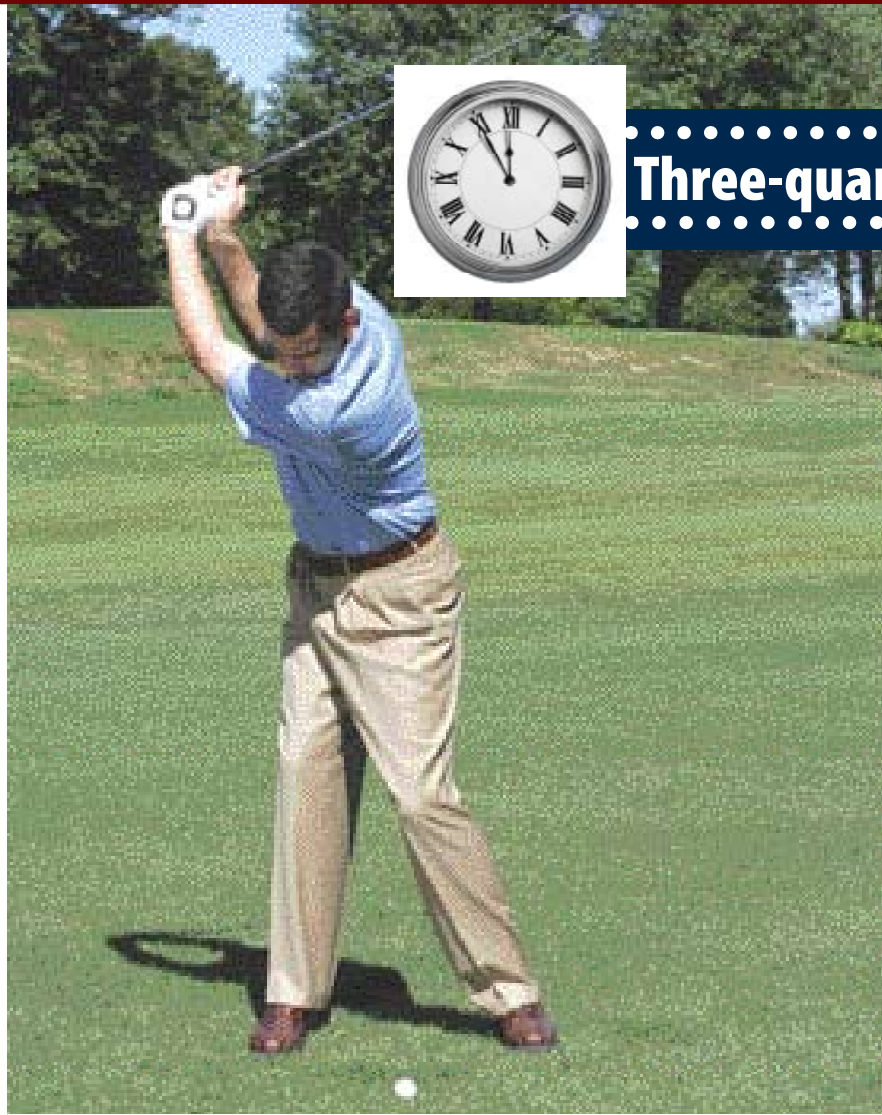
Rolling the arms, which causes the clubface to either open or close too much, is one of the more common mistakes with this move. It also results in the left arm (for right-handed players) separating from the upper body. To combat this, practice with a towel under

your arms to help keep the arms connected to your body.

Dragging the clubhead back is another common error in this position. It results in the club dragging along the ground, causing it to lag behind the hands and arms. This translates into a very late wrist hinge, looseness at the top of the swing and a disconnected golf swing. Practice pushing a ball or a board in the backswing to help alleviate this problem.

Some golfers may also suffer from an early wrist cock with no arm movement. This usually results in the club being pulled too far to the inside of the swing plane and the clubface being closed excessively.

The best way to fix this mistake is by laying a club on the ground parallel to your stance line (where the ball would be) and then keeping the clubhead from crossing the shaft.



Three-quarters Of The Way Back

At this point in the swing, you want a good body turn that allows the arms to remain extended. This makes it easier to hinge the wrists correctly and get the club in a balanced position. It also increases your chances of reaching the top of the backswing in the proper position.

Many players do not have enough wrist cock at three-quarters of the way back in the swing, which makes the club feel heavy and results in a delayed completion of the wrist cock at the top of the swing. This delay forces the club to drop and can cause you to lean to the left at the top of the swing. The delay also makes it difficult for the arms and club to stay in sync with the rest of the body.

To help achieve a proper wrist cock of between 45 and 90 degrees, hold the club in the middle of the shaft and practice pointing the grip at the ground.

Other players may have their arms bent too much or too close to their body in the three-quarter position. This mistake is most commonly caused by a lack of body turn. If the upper body does not turn enough in the backswing, the arms are forced to bend or to be pulled in. The result is a power leak and a lack of consistency in ball striking.

A good drill to prevent this is to put the butt of the club in your sternum and turn back. This forces your arms to stay straight as you turn. Once you have completed the turn, hinge your wrists. Now you are in a great three-quarter position.

Another common error at three-quarters of the way back in the swing is having the club shaft too steep or laid back. When the shaft is in either of these two positions, it becomes difficult to control the club because it is out of balance.

By laying down two clubs, one on the target line and one on the stance line, you can learn to fix this problem. Hold a club just below the grip and make a three-quarter backswing, pointing the butt of the club between the two shafts.

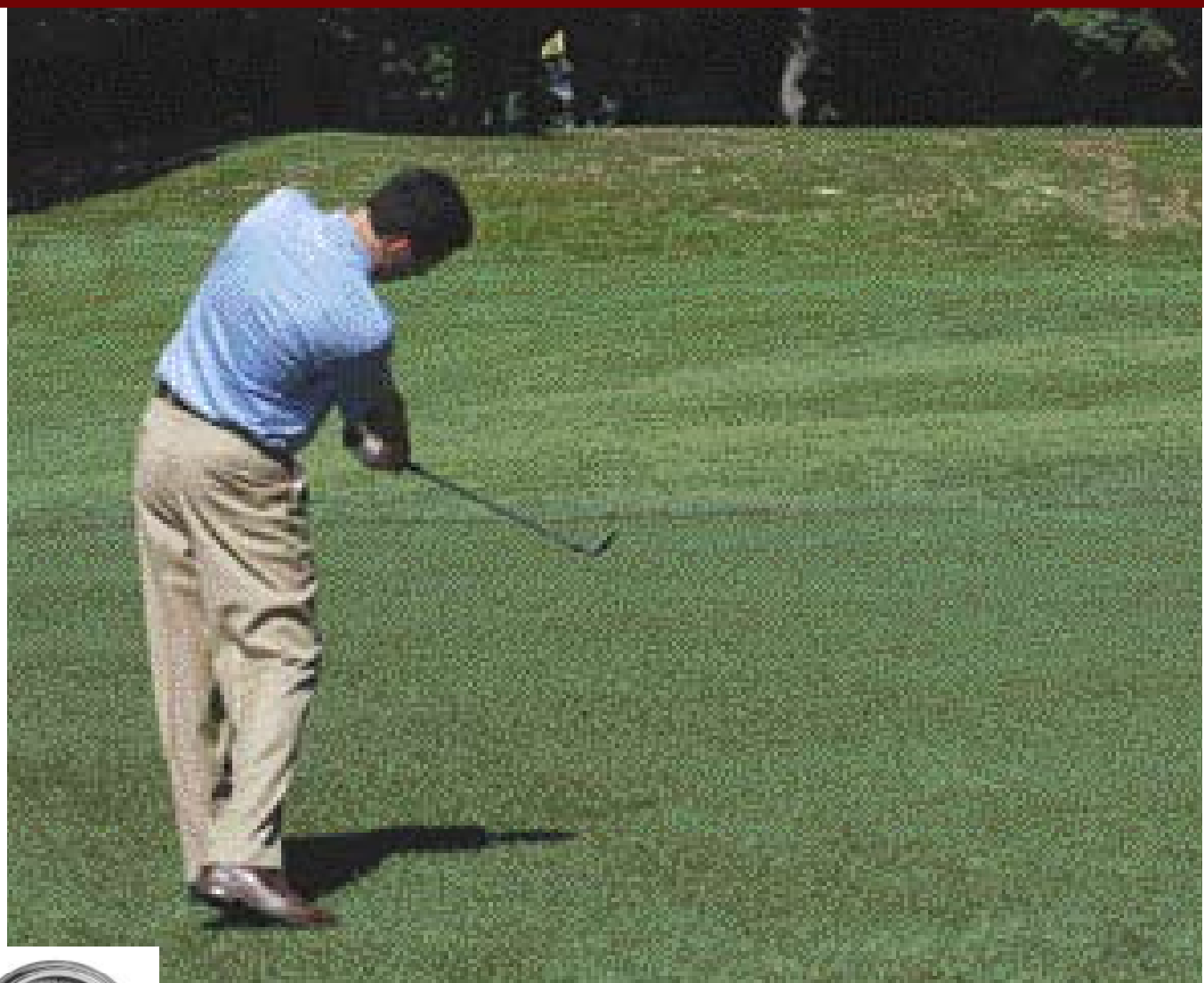


Impact

Impact is the most important part of the swing. The most common mistakes here include a poor weight shift, the left wrist breaking down and your head being in front of the ball.

To work on your impact position, set up at the edge of a mat or something else that can create resistance. From your address position, go directly into an impact position with no backswing. You should see that your weight is at least 70 percent on your front foot with the right foot rolled in or the heel in the air. Your head should be behind the ball, while the clubface is square. Your hands should be low and in front of the ball, with your left wrist flat. The right shoulder should be lower than the left, while the left arm is straight, and the right arm is slightly bent. Your hips should also have rotated, with the left knee straightened but not locked.

The drag drill is another way to improve your impact position. To perform it, take your setup position and place the clubhead on the ground behind your right foot. Drag the club to impact, making sure to shift your weight and turn your hips. Put enough force on the clubhead to cause the club shaft to bend a little bit. This will create some resistance on the ground, which forces the left wrist to stay bowed, and will help utilize the hips on the forward motion.



Post Impact

The results of the downswing are evident right after impact. What you want to see in your post-impact position is 80 to 90 percent of your weight on the front foot, the hips and shoulders rotated toward the target, the left leg straightening, the arms fully extended and the right arm beginning to roll over the left. Your eyes should also be beginning to look down the target line, while the clubface is square to your swing path (facing left).

After impact, the clubhead needs to be square to the swing path, not to the

target line. Keeping the clubface square to the target line results in an open clubface and a high and right ball flight.

When the shaft swings outside the target line or is pulled to the inside too much, this is usually the result of a swing path that is too much from the inside or from the outside. It can be caused by trying to steer the ball to the target.

Another mistake that golfers often make after impact is having the arms bent or too close to the body. This occurs when the club is pulled to the left or the

body moved in front of the ball.

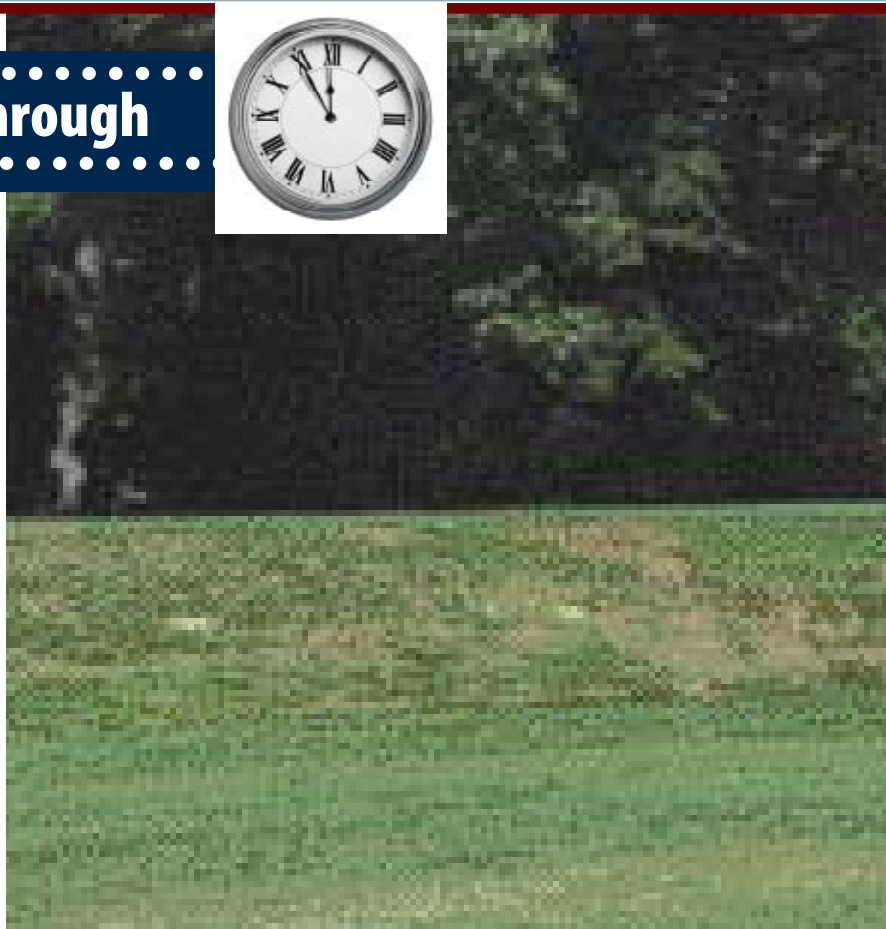
You can check this part of your swing in a mirror by starting with the club in the post-impact position. From there, make a full, but slow swing and try to feel yourself swing through the position from which you started.

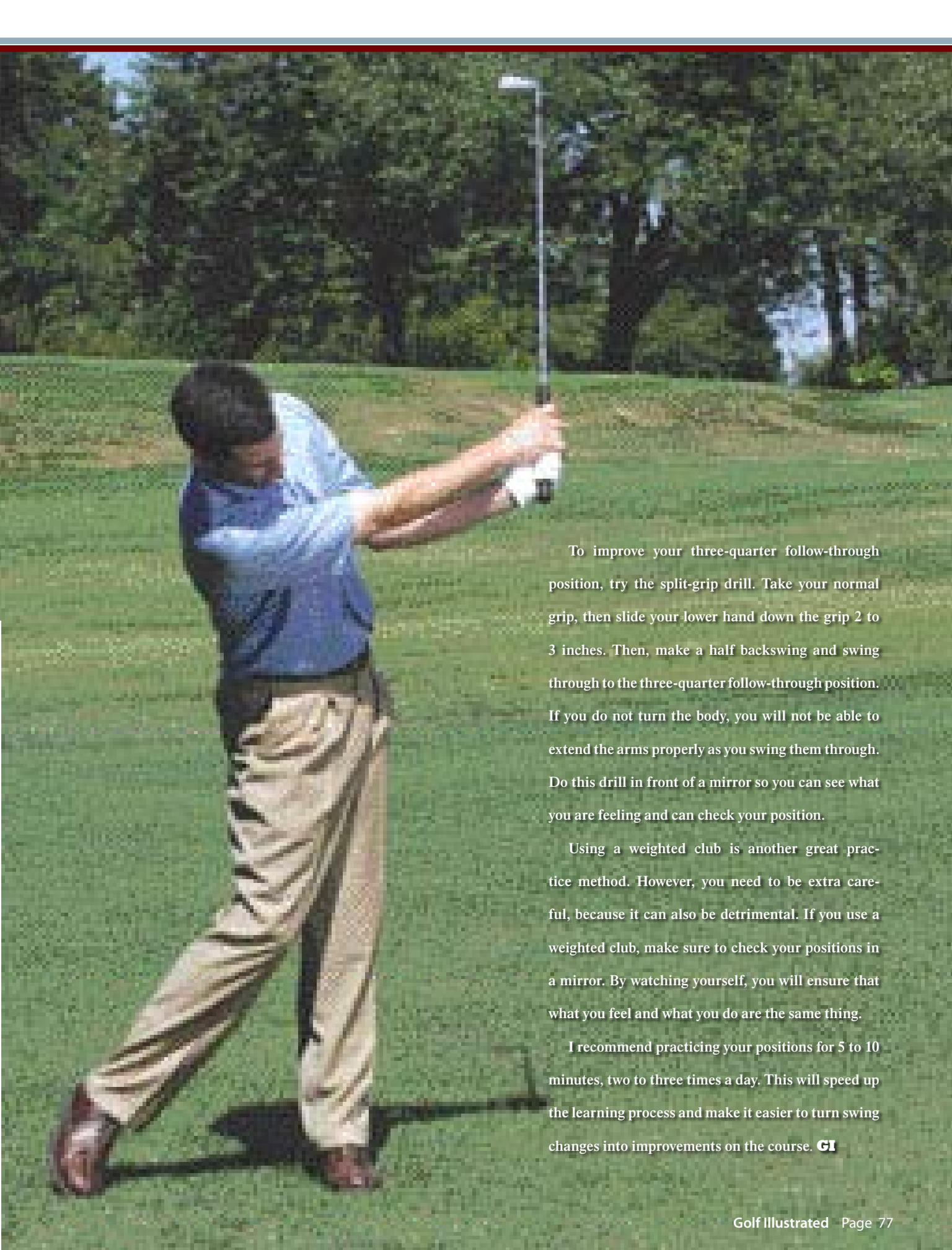
You can also lay down a club along the target line and then take the club back to a halfway position. Next, make a slow forward swing, stopping in the post-impact position. Now check to make sure you are in the correct position.

Three-quarter Follow-Through

This position can also be used to analyze the swing. It is a great place to see the results of the swing, because any compensations made during the swing are nearly completed.

At the three-quarter follow-through position, the weight shift should be nearly completed, the right knee should be almost up to the left knee, your body should be facing the target, and the eyes should be looking down the target line or at the target. Your right arm should also be extended, with the left elbow slightly bent or beginning to bend, allowing the arms to release properly. The upper left arm must be connected to the upper left chest at this point to prevent overextension or arm run-off. In addition, your body should be tilted to the right, with the right shoulder lower than the left.





To improve your three-quarter follow-through position, try the split-grip drill. Take your normal grip, then slide your lower hand down the grip 2 to 3 inches. Then, make a half backswing and swing through to the three-quarter follow-through position. If you do not turn the body, you will not be able to extend the arms properly as you swing them through. Do this drill in front of a mirror so you can see what you are feeling and can check your position.

Using a weighted club is another great practice method. However, you need to be extra careful, because it can also be detrimental. If you use a weighted club, make sure to check your positions in a mirror. By watching yourself, you will ensure that what you feel and what you do are the same thing.

I recommend practicing your positions for 5 to 10 minutes, two to three times a day. This will speed up the learning process and make it easier to turn swing changes into improvements on the course. **GI**