



ST ANDREWS LINKS GOLF ACADEMY

Overlooking the Old Course with the R&A and 'Auld Grey Toon' as its background, St Andrews Links Golf Academy is a centre of excellence for golf tuition. BY DAVID J. WHYTE

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St Andrews in Scotland is the Home of Golf. No matter what the Dutch, Belgians and Chinese believe, this is where the game of golf took root, grew and flourished. For over six centuries, St Andrews has been the crucible of the game, nurturing, adjusting and cajoling a rudimentary sport of ball and stick into the game that we all now know and love today.

Combining state-of-the-art technology with specialist coaching

that helps prepare golfing pilgrims for what the links of St Andrews will proffer, there are over 60 driving bays, including 22 indoors, and a landing zone that is over 400 yards long. The short game area includes several high-faced bunkers similar to those you will encounter on the links. It also includes a large putting surface that was once the 2nd green on the Eden Course to give you an authentic pre-round encounter of St Andrews' subtly undulating greens.

A visit here is highly recommended, especially when looking for fundamental adjustments to the game or to address a niggling swing problem. This is also where director of instruction, Steve North, and his team can diagnose and address each issue with three swing analysis studios that contains V1 digital swing analysis system, Trackman and Flightscope radar ball tracking system, K-Vest biomechanical system and a full range of innovative instructional aids.

Putting is as important as any aspect of the game and with the large, tricky and fast greens here, it can be the game difference everyone is looking for. With the SAM Putt Lab force plate - an ingenious ultrasound putting system combined with the SAM BalanceLab - one can get the most out of the short stick whenever they need to.



MAIN: Driving bays at St Andrews Links Academy.

RIGHT TOP - DOWN: Consultative diagnosis at the Swing Analysis Studio; Fine tune putting skills at the Putting Studio.

BELOW LEFT - RIGHT: Short Game Area; Open air driving bays.



SWING PHILOSOPHY

Steve is a world-renowned golf coach and formerly David Leadbetter's Director of Instruction at Saujana Golf and Country Club in Malaysia. Here, he offers his swing philosophy along with some simple exercises to get you back to the basics.

POSTURE

At any driving range, you'll be lucky to find one or two people with good posture and almost nobody working on it. Correct posture is the cornerstone of a sound, repeatable swing. What we look for in the ideal posture is for the back to be kept straight but tilted forward (the amount is determined by which club you are using), then add a little flex in the legs so the weight is sitting over the balls of the feet. You are then in a very dynamic position. It's similar to a goalkeeper waiting to save a penalty; he's ready to move in any direction. Golf is a dynamic sport so you need to get your posture right from the outset of every swing.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. To ensure correct alignment, stand fully erect with a golf club against the spine and the grip touching the back of the head.



2. Tilt forward keeping your back straight until you feel your weight on the balls of your feet.
3. Flex your knees slightly.
4. Let your arms hang naturally.

You are now in a well-balanced, dynamic position that is a sound base for your swing. Once you are used to it, it will also build more consistency and ultimately confidence, knowing that you are starting the swing correctly.

PIVOT DRILL

Now that we have a good spine position, it is essential to maintain it throughout the swing. Moving out of a good spine position is why the head moves; it's not the head moving the spine, it's the spine moving the head. Keeping the spine constant and rotating around it pretty much guarantees a sound, centered strike.



ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Take your set up to your golf ball. Then stand with that ball in the middle of your feet and assume your set up position to a second golf ball outside of your spine ball.
2. Move back and assume your set up position to the object ball, then place the club over the back of your shoulders.
3. You are now in a position to work a pivot motion. Our objective is to now point the shaft at the second golf ball outside of the object ball in both the backswing and downswing.

SWING PLANE

Getting your swing 'on plane' is extremely important in terms of achieving good direction and consistency. But what is the correct plane and how do we achieve it? This simple exercise ensures the club finds the 'balance' line.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Take your normal posture with both hands on the club, then remove your left hand and place it behind your back. Then hold a 7-iron between your thumb and forefinger of your right hand and swing the club half way back.
2. If the club is in the correct plane, it's relatively light and you can hold it comfortably between the two fingers. This is the ideal angle or plane that the club should be at.
3. If the club is too flat, it will feel too heavy and you'll struggle to hold it.
4. If the angle is too upright the club wavers around.

BALANCE

You never see professional golfers out-of-position at the end of their swing. They always arrive at and hold a well-balanced finish. To swing a golf



club competently, good balance is essential. With balance you will achieve consistency, the most important element of a good golf game.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Hit the ball - then count 1,2,3 in your mind, holding the finish position.



Steve North came to St Andrews in 2005 when the St Andrew Links Golf Academy was built and then opened in May 2006. Steve worked with David Leadbetter in the Far East and in his

final year was Leadbetter's most senior instructor in Southeast Asia. Before this he was at Royal Jersey Golf Club for 2.5 years and trained at Seacroft Golf Club in Lincolnshire. Steve heads a team of four golf teaching professionals.



PLAYING THE COURSES



The opportunity to play St Andrews Old Course is one of the highlights of any golfer's lives. Here is some advice from Steve North and Mike Woodcock, St Andrews Links Trust's Communications Manager on how to make the most of your round on the Old Course as well as St Andrews six other courses.

ST ANDREWS OLD

The first thing to be aware of when playing the Old Course is which way the wind is blowing. Before setting foot on the 1st tee, you should think about a game plan based on current conditions. Generally, if you are downwind on the 1st, you know you have to make your score on the way out and hang onto it on the way back. If you wish to score well, you should do this in more detail and consider which holes you are going to attack and which you should play more defensively.

There is a prescribed route to playing the Old Course and although conditions on the day will dictate the finer details, following these guidelines

should help you play well and get the most from your day.

Apart from the first, which is wide open off the tee, the rest of the front nine, certainly from the 2nd to the 7th are best played to the left. This is partly due to most of the danger being on the right. While you can apply this rule to most holes, it is not quite that straightforward. For the better player, the closer to the right you can go off the tee, the better the angle of attack to the green. The skill is to pick a line from the centre of the fairway to the right, but not too much.

Around the turn and back nine the 'left-side' driving rule changes. The Loop'-Holes 8, 9, and 10 - play fairly straight ahead.

The 11th is a straight Par 3 but be aware of the slope on the green and force of wind. Club selection can vary significantly here, especially if the wind is coming straight at you off the Eden Estuary.

Holes 13 and 14 offer more options off the tee. You can play right or left but again, not too far right, especially on the 14th, where it is out-of-bounds. The emphasis remains on setting up a good position to gain the best possible view of the green. With its massive greens, it is the ability to roll the ball up close on the approach shots that makes the difference at the Old Course. Your short game has to be sharp. You have to be able to recover, chip and putt from fairly long distances and get close.

The 15th is best played down the left hand side of the fairway and in between the two mounds known as Miss Grainger's bosoms, which guard either side of the fairway. The green slopes away from you so be cautious on the approach. The 16th is a classic risk-and-reward hole. With out-of-bounds tight on the right it can be risky to play for the middle or right but if you

do you will have a much better line in to the tiered green.

Few holes in golf have the intimidating aura of the 17th hole on the Old Course. Standing on the tee with a former railway shed, now part of a hotel, in front of you is a daunting prospect but once again, boldness can pay off. The angle of the building means that a shot down the right side of the fairway with a slight draw can pay dividends. The pressure continues with the second shot as the narrow green is guarded by the fearsome road hole bunker in front and the road itself behind. A bogey five is by no means a disaster here.

The amphitheatre of the 18th is one of the most welcoming and atmospheric aspects in golf. Beyond the iconic Swilcan Bridge, the wide-open fairway invites you to open the shoulders and nail one down the middle. The only hazards are Granny Clark's Wynd, which crosses the fairway and is considered part of the course if your ball comes to rest there, and the deep swale in front of the green known as the Valley of Sin. You feel as if you have to make birdie or at least par but the subtly undulating green makes dreaded three-putts all too common.

THE NEW COURSE, ST ANDREWS

The New offers a traditional links challenge where you have to be straight off the tee and precise with your approach play. It also offers tighter, smaller greens so there's less room to work with than on the Old! Finally there's more gorse and less bunkers but those that exist are more penal. Like the Old, if you're on the wrong side of a green it can leave difficult, long putts across surfaces that are quite subtle and tricky to read. The Par 3's are all challenging on the New and correct club selection is crucial. The New Course was set out by Tom Morris in 1895 and is widely regarded as one of the true classic links courses. Plotting your way round is the key to the New Course and often playing an iron from the tee to ensure accuracy can be the best approach. Finding the correct angle of attack to the greens is crucial to good scoring. Generally, the New Course is more of a subtle challenge than the Old - but certainly no easier.

THE JUBILEE

The Jubilee is the longest of all the courses on St Andrews Links. With more elevated tees and greens, certain holes are exposed to both the Eden Estuary and wind coming off the sea. On a 'normal' day at St Andrews, wind is always a considerable factor. The back nine produces an interesting stretch of holes, 14, 15, 16 that play through the dunes. They're not necessarily long Par 4's but they are tricky where again, positioning off the tee is vital. You can put yourself out of a hole on this stretch just by landing in the wrong position. Severe rough, tricky greens and subtle borrows on small greens add to the Jubilee's challenge.

THE CASTLE COURSE

When it opened in 2008, The Castle Course had a number of fairway mounds along with long grass rough that made it appear very intimidating from the tee. Since then there has been a great deal of play on the dramatic cliff top course and feedback from the customers has led to some of the harsher features being adjusted. Many of the fairway mounds have been removed and others reduced. The long, snarling grass has all but disappeared so now The Castle appears fairly wide open off the tee. Some of the fairways are nearly 80 yards wide. It's definitely much friendlier but still tough! In essence The Castle is a short-game course. As long as you're reasonably straight tee to green, you'll fair well. When it comes to approach play however, the greens are large, some raised, others sloping and all quite undulating. This calls for flexibility. On some you have to fly it in, on others run it up. Imaginative approach play is crucial but once you get used to it, you can score well. Another thing to bear in mind is The Castle is fairly exposed and affected by the wind so the pace of the greens is kept slightly slower than they might appear.

THE OTHER COURSES

Compared to many golf locations, St Andrews is actually one of the most flexible. Whatever your level of golf, you can come to St Andrews and play a course to suit your game. People have an image of St Andrews as being exclusively

Academy Packages:

LEARN GOLF IN A DAY (1-Day Golf School)

This programme breaks down the intimidation barrier for new golfers. We help players understand basic principles of the swing including set-up, motion and balance, and the key factors that lead to a consistent swing. We will also provide participants with helpful information such as the Basic Rules of Golf.
£165 per student

3-Day Golf School

DAY ONE: Full swing analysis, chipping and bunkers
DAY TWO: Putting, driver and fairway woods
DAY THREE: Pitching, Shot making and review
9am - 1pm each day
£280 per student

5-Day Golf School

DAY ONE: Full swing analysis, Blueprint for the future
DAY TWO: SAMPutt Lab, Putting Analysis, Bunkers
DAY THREE: Driving and ball flight, improving distance, finding the fairway
DAY FOUR: Short game school, pitching and chipping
DAY FIVE: Playing golf and course management, shot selection & scoring
9am - 12pm each day
£330 per student

for low-handicap players playing the Old Course. This is far from the case! You can come with your family or your wife who's just learning the game.

There are seven courses in all under the auspices of St Andrews Links Trust. The Strathtyrum and Balgove courses are ideal for beginners or those working on some aspect of their game they have learned at St Andrews Links Golf Academy. These courses are easily accessible and very reasonably priced. During the high season, a round on the Balgove is £12 while the Strathtyrum is £25.00

The Eden is a more serious challenge enjoyed by St Andrews locals and visitors alike. It's the ideal next stage course, more of a hybrid of links and parkland in nature but a good test nevertheless for all levels of play.

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