



HOW GOOD CAN YOU GET?



BY GRAEME McDOWELL
PLAYER OF THE YEAR

G-Mac and his team share the tips and drills that made him the most improved player of 2010. They worked for him, and they will work for you, too.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGUS MURRAY, GETTY

It was too good to be true and Graeme McDowell was honest enough to kill the myth. When he won the 2002 Volvo Scandinavian Masters to break into the winner's circle in just his fourth start on the European Tour, television viewers saw the then 23-year old turn and speak to his caddie before sizing up his winning putt.

So was it true that he told his bagman: "Jingle bells. Christmas has come early"?

"That's a complete misquote," he says with a chuckle. "I didn't say anything like that. I was too nervous thinking about the three-footer I had and what I was about to achieve."

It's a pity it isn't true because the story fits in beautifully with McDowell's reputation as a ruthless finisher with iced-water running through his veins. He is, after all, the man who shot a 15-under 127 on the weekend to win the Celtic Manor Wales Open and then came back out at Pebble Beach just a few days later to become the first European winner of the US Open for 40 years. But he's not a big head.

He's the man of steel who brought home the winning Ryder Cup point for Europe in a stomach-churning endgame at Celtic Manor that turned Hunter Mahan into a blubbing wreck. He's the warrior who survived an attritional final round of the Andalucia Valderrama Masters to win his third title of the year. In short, he's the man who appears to have transformed himself into a world beater in the three years that have passed since he changed management company, moved home to Portrush and took a long, hard look at himself.

Yes, McDowell has changed his backroom team, taken his overall game to new heights with coach Pete Cowen and forged a formidable partnership with his caddie, Ken Comboy. But the secret to his success is not actually a secret at all. It's all about graft.

"I didn't do a lot of things," McDowell explains of his gradual rise from a frequent state of frustration to two-time Ryder Cup player and Major winner. "I suppose it all began with the process I went through at the end of 2007, when I left Chubby Chandler and got a new team of people around me. I've always said that I learn a lot from my down times and everyone has down times in their career. You have those moments of soul searching where you say to yourself: What am I doing? What am I trying to achieve? How am I going to go and get it? So I obviously put a great team together. Pete Cowen came along as my short game coach and Clive Tucker did great things with my golf swing. I really worked hard on my technique for a few years with Clive and when we parted company this time last year, my technique was there and it was all about getting myself back playing golf again, which is where Pete has brought me. He is very much a guy who talks about the ball flight and moving the ball around and just scoring. He gets away from trying to swing the club pretty and gets back to just trying to swing the club effectively and making the ball do what I want it to do."

McDowell's game is all about control – both of himself and his golf ball. Here he lets us in on some of his secrets and how you can apply them to your game.





HOW I IMPROVED MY...

SHORT GAME

CASE STUDY: US OPEN, PEBBLE BEACH

"I always said that my long game was good enough to compete in Majors, but I needed to improve my short game. I've worked hard at it and at Pebble Beach I scrambled really well. My chipping and putting was key to my victory there.

"When I got to the course on Sunday, I realised that the short game facility didn't really resemble the golf course. So I spent a lot of time out on the course, hitting a lot of little chip shots, working on bump and runs and pace putting, understanding which part of the green I had to leave the ball on to give myself the best chance of making par.

"It was a combination of strategy and mental game – keeping the ball under the hole as much as possible. I remember one chip from over the back on 15 on Saturday. It was a little shot I had been working on with Pete Cowen and one I didn't have a year ago.

"I have been working with Pete on getting the golf club in a better position on the way back in my little chip shots. Like with my full swing, I have a tendency to get the club a little closed and a little behind me on the way back. That comes from growing up on links courses where everything is played along the ground.

"I have never chipped with a lot of loft

and Pete has really taught me how to get more loft on my pitch shots.

"So on 15 I was over the back and I had a very fast chip shot. I was able to get the club in a good position and let the clubhead drop on top of the ball and play a very soft, high shot that I wouldn't have executed the way I did a year ago.

"I have many more options around the green now. Major golf courses put your short game under the utmost pressure and Pete has taught me so much about how to control the ball around the greens.

"Of course, you have to hole the putts and from inside 10 feet, Pebble Beach was probably the best I've ever putted. I've worked very hard on that element of my game. I do Phil Mickelson's "around the clock" drill six times every day – starting out about three feet from the hole away working out to about six feet. That paid dividends at Pebble. I holed those five, six or seven footers that are just huge for momentum. They are the par saves that keep you going. I made one in particular on the 8th in the final round which was vital. I was in the right bunker, splashed out and had eight feet, left to right, down the slope; and made it. I just holed out so well all week and that was a big, key moment."

WHAT YOU CAN LEARN

PRACTICE PUTTING

"With putting it is simply a case of practice makes perfect. But there are things you have to get right. Make sure you get your eye position correct, get your

alignment correct, stand correctly to the putter and after that, it is simply practice. Get some good drills, like that round the clock drill, and just grind. It really is all about getting used to holing out. You make it into a routine that stands up well under pressure."

HOW TO LAG IT CLOSE

Green speeds vary so much from one venue to another that lag putting is something you learn with experience. I work on a drill where I go 20 feet away and place a tee in the ground about three feet beyond the hole. You are trying to get the ball past the hole but not beyond that tee and it's a good way of working on your pace putting.

"I needed to two-putt from about 25 or 30 feet to win the US Open and it was a pretty treacherous little putt. The pin was perched precariously on a knuckle so it was just a matter of trusting my feel. When you are lag putting you have got to make your practice stroke as important as you possibly can. So I make my practice stroke while I'm looking at the hole because it helps me teach my brain. I am looking to give my brain feedback as to how hard I want to stroke a putt and I just work really hard on that."

Loft control

Chipping and crucially putting were the keys to McDowell's US Open success at Pebble Beach.



HOW I IMPROVED MY...

COURSE MANAGEMENT

CASE STUDY: CHEVRON WORLD CHALLENGE

"Sherwood Country Club is a very strategic golf course. There are a lot of narrow target areas that require you to take lots of different clubs off tee boxes. That's one of the strengths of my game. I like it when you are required to think your way around as opposed to just taking out the driver and smashing it.

"I am very good at preparing and breaking a golf course down and my caddie Kenny Comboy is one of the best in the world when it comes to strategy and the mental game.

"We know when to attack and when to defend and in the Chevron that week I had a lot of birdies and eagles, but at the same time I kept the big mistakes off my card. You

have to learn to recognise the green and red lights. Knowing when to go for it and when to protect is very important."

WHAT YOU CAN LEARN

KNOW YOUR COURSE

"Back in my amateur days I used to do my own maps, so knowing accurately how far you can fly a ball through the air is vital. You have to know how far it is to a bunker and how far it is to carry that bunker. It's all about widening your target area as much as possible. I always look for the widest part of the fairway. Where does the course architect want me to hit this? What is he trying to do here? Where is the trouble on this hole? You need to learn how to read a course planner and how to plot your way around a golf course."



HOW I IMPROVED MY...

TRAJECTORY CONTROL

CASE STUDY: CELTIC MANOR WALES OPEN

"Winning the Celtic Manor Wales Open got me into the Ryder Cup team and that victory was all about ball-flight. I just knew I was playing well that week because I had the ball under complete control. I was hitting it high, I was hitting it low. I was hitting it from left to right and from right to left. I was pretty much doing whatever I wanted to do with the ball.

"For 26 or 27 holes over the weekend in Wales I probably played some of the best golf of my life. I shot 64-63 and played twice as well that weekend as I played at Pebble Beach. Obviously it was an easier golf course and an easier test, but it was just the way I controlled the ball.

"So when you are playing like that, what do you do on the range? Practising constructively is something I work on with Pete Cowen. We go to the range and simulate the golf course by doing what we call 'The Nine-Shot Drill'.

"You have three different types of shot:

low, medium and high and three different shapes, fade, straight and draw. So with those, you can come up with nine different shots. We go through the bag, starting with an 8-iron and work down to a 6-iron and then to a 4-iron and then down to the driver.

WHAT YOU CAN LEARN

KNOW YOUR SWING

"Constructive practice is hugely important. The average amateur goes to the range, gets the driver out and starts slashing. There is no structure there.

The key is understanding what it is that makes you hit bad shots. I've swung the club a certain way all my life, so I know what my tendencies are. The club gets behind me. It gets closed and it gets strong. When I play badly, I hit hooks. And I know why that is. I have many drills that I go back to all the time. As soon as I start seeing a certain shot, I know that is probably one of a couple of things and so I start working on my drills.

"Go to the range and try to understand how to make the ball fade and how to make the ball draw. If you can understand how to hit those two shots, hitting the straight one becomes a lot easier."



GRAEME McDOWELL

TEAM McDOWELL



FATHER KENNY McDOWELL

Ask Kenny McDowell what makes his son such a special golfer and you'll hear about a kid with a huge heart and brains to burn.

"He's got a great engine," he says of G-Mac's ability to thrive under pressure. "That's what I always say. When he needs to dig deep, he can do it."

The golfing world saw that quality at Celtic Manor when McDowell produced a crucial birdie at the 16th to set up a Ryder Cup-winning victory over Hunter Mahan. Or in the final round of the US Open in June, when he kept his head as everyone around him was losing theirs.

His golfing love affair began when he was eight years old and he and his little brother Gary begged Kenny to take them down to the pitch and putt course attached to Royal Portrush.

Lessons followed and McDowell soon showed he was a special talent.

"Whenever they went for lessons with the local professional, he used to line them all up and have a target from maybe 100 yards and say, 'Right, the closest to the target gets a Mars bar' Well after about six goes, Graeme was about another 50 yards back. They kept moving him back a bit because he was so good. He ate a lot of Mars bars."



AGENT CONOR RIDGE

"Graeme was born to be a Major champion. The bigger the stage, the better he gets. Obviously experience helps. But there are some players that just have the ability to deal with pressure and thrive on it – Graeme McDowell has this rarest of qualities, and that is a key component to success.

"He is a great guy. Everybody likes him. It sounds like a sales pitch, but anybody who knows Graeme will tell you that he is extremely marketable. His core strength in marketability terms is that he is just a really nice guy. He is a regular down to earth person, who does extraordinary things – this appeals to people.

"There is huge corporate interest in Graeme right now, particularly in the US and Asia. He is 31, coming into the prime of his career, and is now recognised as one of the best players in the world. He's articulate, intelligent and has a great image. While global markets are still in recovery mode, we have agreed some highly lucrative corporate relationships with a number of truly global brands, which will begin in January 2011."

TEAM McDOWELL



**CADDIE
KEN
COMBOY**

Ken Comboy had seen it all in his 18 years as a tour caddie – except a Major win. But when Graeme McDowell lifted the US Open at Pebble Beach to become the first European winner of that title since Tony Jacklin in 1970, the Mancunian caddie's thoughts drifted back to two huge weeks in 2008.

The first of them was the Barclays Scottish Open at Loch Lomond, which McDowell won in style to secure his Ryder Cup debut at Valhalla the following September.

"I think Valhalla proved to him he could do it on the big stage," Comboy said when asked where McDowell first believed he could win a Major. "I wouldn't say it was the key. Winning at Loch Lomond was the key because that was the first really, really big tournament he'd won and he won it fantastically well in the middle of the golf season the week before the Open. It was a huge win for him then he played at Valhalla and performed very, very well on the biggest stage. From that point on he's always believed he could do it."

Comboy and McDowell have become close pals since they started working together four years ago and the honesty of their relationship has been the key to their success. But that's not to say that he believed he was going to work for a Major champion in waiting. "When I first picked up the bag, no, but he's made vast improvements. You could never fault his attitude, his potential to improve and his work ethic. He does exactly what is required to improve. If something needs to be addressed, I'm honest with him, he's honest with me and we go down the path of improving it. We felt his short game wasn't good enough to compete in these Major championships so we decided we needed to go and see Pete Cowen and that was a work in progress. Obviously it's proved to be good and that was something he felt he needed to improve on and we've worked hard over the last couple of years to achieve that."



EUROPEAN
TOUR

2.3M	70.44
MONEY (\$)	STROKE AVERAGE
68.01	286
DRIVING ACCURACY (%)	DRIVING DISTANCE (YARDS)
74.11	30
GREENS IN REG (%)	PUTTS PER ROUND
1.76	34
PUTTS PER GIR	SAND SAVES (%)

After HSBC Champions

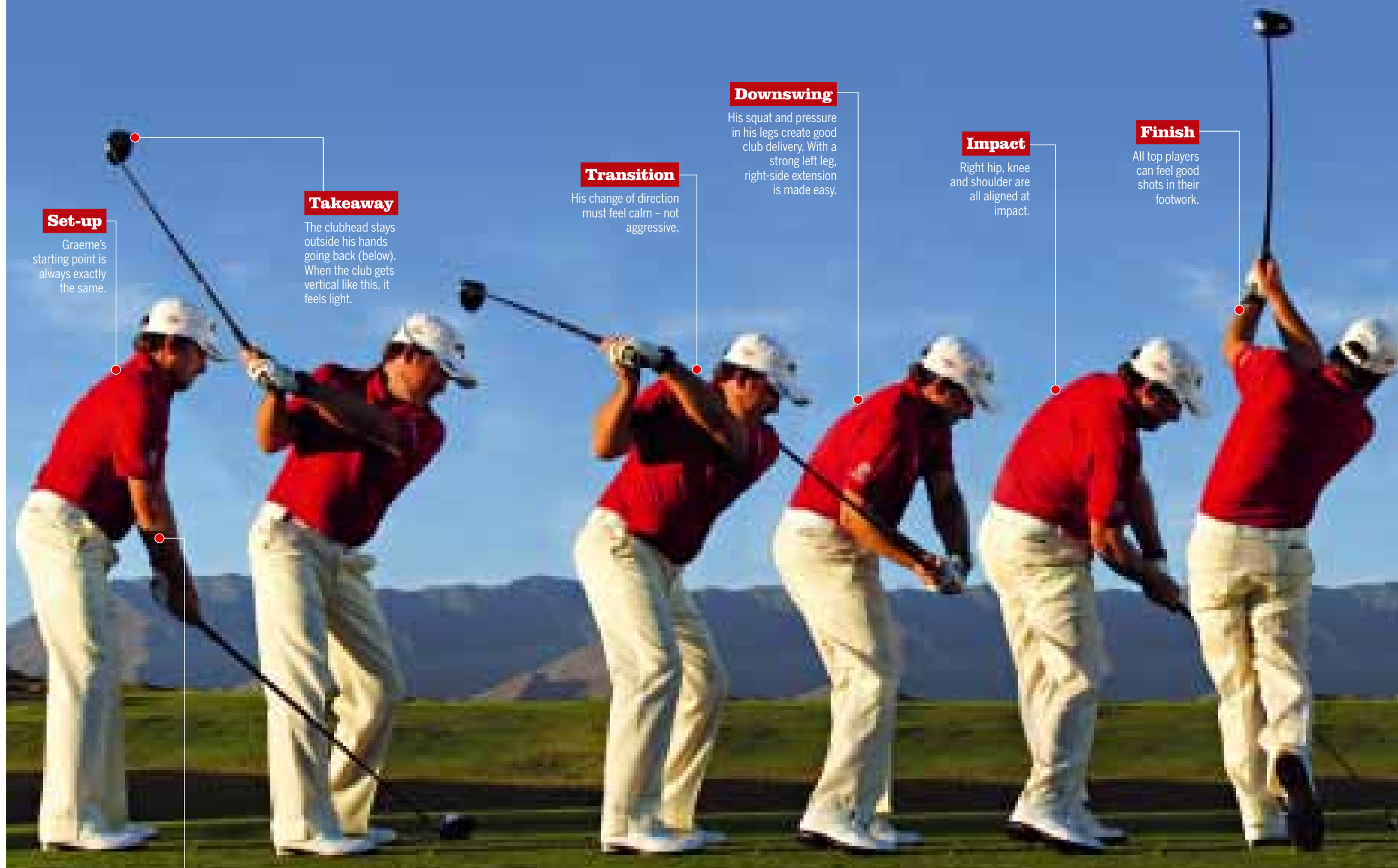
PGA TOUR

1.6M	70.07
MONEY (\$)	STROKE AVERAGE
67.06	291
DRIVING ACCURACY (%)	DRIVING DISTANCE (YARDS)
66.85	29.33
GREENS IN REG (%)	PUTTS PER ROUND
1.78	45
PUTTS PER GIR	SAND SAVES (%)

After HSBC Champions

WORLD
RANKING
IN 2010

JAN	42
FEB	49
MAR	47
APR	51
MAY	44
JUN	13
JUL	11
AUG	14
SEP	13
OCT	10
NOV	10



Set-up

Graeme's starting point is always exactly the same.

Takeaway

The clubhead stays outside his hands going back (below). When the club gets vertical like this, it feels light.

Transition

His change of direction must feel calm – not aggressive.

Downswing

His squat and pressure in his legs create good club delivery. With a strong left leg, right-side extension is made easy.

Impact

Right hip, knee and shoulder are all aligned at impact.

Finish

All top players can feel good shots in their footwork.

Set-up

Arms hang relaxed. Left shoulder is strong, not open.



TEAM McDOWELL



**COACH
PETE
COWEN**

Graeme credits Clive Tucker with helping him develop the mechanics for his repeatable golf swing, but for the past 12 months the US Open champion has turned to one of Europe's hottest teachers, Pete Cowen. At first, the pair

focused on improving McDowell's short game. "When we started, I told Graeme his short game was a three out of 10," says Cowen. "Today, he's a five-and-a-half or six." Cowen is now overseeing all aspects of McDowell's swing, and his long game is consistently among the best in the world.

"One thing all golfers can learn from Graeme is that the swing doesn't have to look perfect, it just has to be consistent," says Cowen, who also works with Lee

Westwood, Henrik Stenson and, recently, Sergio Garcia. "I've tried to get Graeme away from over-technical stuff, but what he does very well is maintain a constant left wrist without shutting down his clubface. We also worked on improving his footwork so he feels shots with his feet. If you talk to many of the great players from years ago, they'll tell you they felt shots with their footwork more than the position of their clubhead."

McDowell developed his game on the windy links of Northern Ireland, where hitting low, penetrating shots is crucial. There's footage of Graeme's bowed left wrist as a 10-year-old, and that "constant," as Cowen calls it, is one reason he was consistently so accurate in winning the US Open. "His good shots were always good enough to win an Open," says Cowen, "but his bad ones weren't. Everyone can learn from that."



HOW I IMPROVED MY... PLAY UNDER PRESSURE

CASE STUDY: THE US OPEN & THE RYDER CUP

"I can compare coming down the stretch at Pebble Beach with the nerves I felt at the Ryder Cup. And I'm no different from the handicap golfer. Just like anyone else, I see the water hazards and the trouble. So when I was standing on that 18th tee at Pebble Beach I was just saying to myself, 'Don't hit this left. Don't do it.'"

"We are human beings and that is just a natural response. And it's important to recognise those negative thoughts, put them to the back of your mind and get back to focusing on what you are trying to do."

"Pick the target. Pick the type of shot you want to hit. Be very decisive and commit to your shot."

"I really had a great target picked out at Pebble Beach. There was a merchandise tent there and the corner of that tent was my target. I know left is trouble and I know right is no good. So I have just got to pick a great target and get into my bubble, which is my pre-shot routine. These are simple and effective techniques I've learned from working with sports psychologists Karl Morris and Bob Rotella, and I use them on a regular basis. At their best they're unconscious and I can do them without thinking; but sometimes I get sloppy and I need to work on them again. Working on your thinking is no different to working on your swing – you can fall out of good habits, so sometimes you need to practise!"

WHAT
YOU CAN
LEARN

GET A ROUTINE

"If you look at any top player and video their pre-shot routine, it's scary how repetitive they are, from taking the club out of the bag, to the waggles, to the ball coming off the bat. Pre-shot routines are something we

work very hard on and it is important that they don't change under pressure. When I get nervous under pressure, I have a tendency to slow down my routine. So I try to speed it up a little to make it as similar as possible to my normal routine."

"Whether it's practice, nine holes with my mates, a small tournament or a big one, I am trying to make every shot feel the same. If you can give every shot the same value, then when you do get into the ultimate pressure, your brain goes 'hold on, this is familiar, I know what this is'. A pre-shot routine is like a fingerprint; no two are the same. I like to stand behind the ball to visualise the shot, but it's no idle glance – I really get in there with the image. I maintain that visual over the ball, and as I grip the club I try to feel the shot in my fingers. I usually have a couple of very simple swing thoughts, but really I'm trying to let feel take over, and go. Work on this and you, like me, can create a little bubble to get into over the shot – and that can shield you from the pressure of the moment."

BREATHE PROPERLY

Under pressure, you can forget to breathe. Holding your breath creates tightness and tension; letting it go helps you relax. I use breathing at two key moments:

WALKING INTO THE SHOT. Just before I ask myself 'What type of shot am I trying to hit here?', I take a good, deep breath. I relax, the picture clears, and the shot emerges. Breathing helps me visualise.

PUTTING. Just before I take the putterhead back I try to have a really good out-breath. It relaxes my whole body. I'm convinced taking this breath helped me hole that crucial downhill on 16 at Celtic Manor to go 2-up on Hunter Mahan with two to play. Hold the breath and you're uptight; let it go you release everything, your chest, your posture, and you give your body a chance to do what it does best.

DON'T WRITE A SPEECH ON THE 10TH TEE

Fear – both of success and failure – can put you under pressure. This usually comes through projecting ahead; an upcoming hole you feel you should birdie, or one which could ruin your card... Instead, use your senses to keep you in the moment and focused on the one thing you can control – your next shot. Hear the birds chirping, see the trees moving, feel yourself taking a breath, remind yourself of your routines... all these will help you play the best you can under pressure.



HOW I IMPROVED MY... DRIVING ACCURACY

CASE STUDY: 16TH TEE IN THE RYDER CUP SINGLES

"Driving the ball straight has always been one of my strengths and it gives me an opportunity to attack flags. Hitting the 16th fairway against Hunter Mahan in the singles at the Ryder Cup gave me the chance to attack the flag and make the birdie that put me two up with two to play."

SWING WITHIN YOURSELF

"The best advice I can give the amateur golfer is to drive the ball under control and in balance. Don't go throwing yourself at the ball. You'd be surprised how little ball speed you gain by doing that."

"Work on balance and playing within yourself – say 85 per cent. Picking a great target down the fairway will help you get the ball in play more often."

"You have to swing under control and know when to apply the power. It's in the two or three feet before and after that impact where you want to get maximum clubhead speed. Work on a drill that makes you crack the whip. Getting the club to its maximum speed at impact is

key. A really good drill for that is turning the club upside down and swinging it with your left hand. Henrik Stenson worked on that drill when he won The Players at Sawgrass (in 2009). It really gives you an understanding of how the club works at impact. Hearing that high-pitched sound will help you get the club moving at its maximum speed."



MOTIVATION FOR 2011

"In 2010 I achieved two of my life's dreams – winning the US Open and holing the winning putt in the Ryder Cup. But I think it's important to realise that when you achieve a dream, a huge goal, you have to reset your goals."

"There's a story about Byron Nelson. The legend goes he was trying to build himself his dream ranch in Texas. He was buying cattle, putting the house up, painting fences... and winning tournaments to fund it all. The moment his ranch was finished, he never won another golf tournament. I think that shows what motivation and goal setting is about. You have to have something that is driving you, whether it's buying a new car, winning the club championship – and if you achieve that you have to move on, ask yourself 'What do I want to do now?'"

"For me, in 2011 I'm going to be a PGA Tour player for the first time. I want to win a regular PGA event. Obviously, the US Open is one, but I'd like to become a PGA Tour winner as a member of that Tour. From here I want to compete in the FedEx Cup play-offs, and use what I've learned my experiences and give myself opportunities on Sunday afternoons in Majors."

"Other than this, I am looking to improve as a player, continue climbing up the world rankings, and make progress in my quest to be the best player I can become."

IN THE BAG

DRIVER: Callaway FT-3 driver (9.5") or FT Tour

3-WOOD: Callaway FT-i Squareway (15")

IRONS: Callaway X-Forged irons (4-9)

WEDGES: Callaway X-Forged (47", 52" & 58")

PUTTER: Odyssey White Hot #7

BALL: Callaway Tour ix



GRAEME McDOWELL

TEAM McDOWELL



GEAR IAN DRYDEN

"The wedges have been key to his golf this year," says Callaway's European Tour Supervisor Ian Dryden. "As the season has gone on and he's played at different courses with different turf we've adjusted the leading edge or the bounce or the grind – just small tweaks that make a big difference."

"The 3-wood was another crucial club for him this year. We did a lot of work before the Wales Open, also using the Trackman. It had been the only club in the bag that we didn't feel was completely dialled in so we did a lot of shaft and loft experimenting prior to the event with his 15-degree XTour. It clearly worked out well as he played probably the finest golf of his career that weekend."

"In terms of driver, he switches between FT Tour and FT3 depending on the course. He first used the FT Tour at the US PGA, with an extra inch on the shaft to gain some more distance. If it's tight and he needs to control the ball in the wind, as at Valderrama, then it's FT3."

"But it's not just about choosing driver A or driver B – we can adjust the driver set-up to suit conditions, and the Ryder Cup was a classic example of this. In the days leading up to it we worked really hard on fine-tuning the loft of his FT Tour to ensure maximum carry in what we expected to be very wet conditions. He drove the ball solidly all week and said afterwards that the drive he hit on 16 in his singles match (which went 313 yards) was probably the best he'd ever hit. That's when we know we've done our jobs well."

"In terms of putter, G-Mac has been using the same Odyssey White Hot #7 for years. Originally it had a special XG insert but at the end of 2009 he changed to a White Hot insert as he preferred the sound, feel and touch. We also modified the finish, adding a dark, butane finish that gives a greater contrast to the two white sight lines on the back and eliminates any sun glare."

