



REGARDLESS OF
where you are on
the golf course, a
proper setup is a
crucial element to
your success.



The Cardinal
Rules Of Golf
(Part 3)

Solid Setup

The Secret To A Sweet Swing

In the last two issues, we examined how to develop a good thought process to play the course smartly and how to place your hands on the club for consistent shots. By mastering these two cardinal rules of golf, you should be seeing improvement in your game and in your scores.

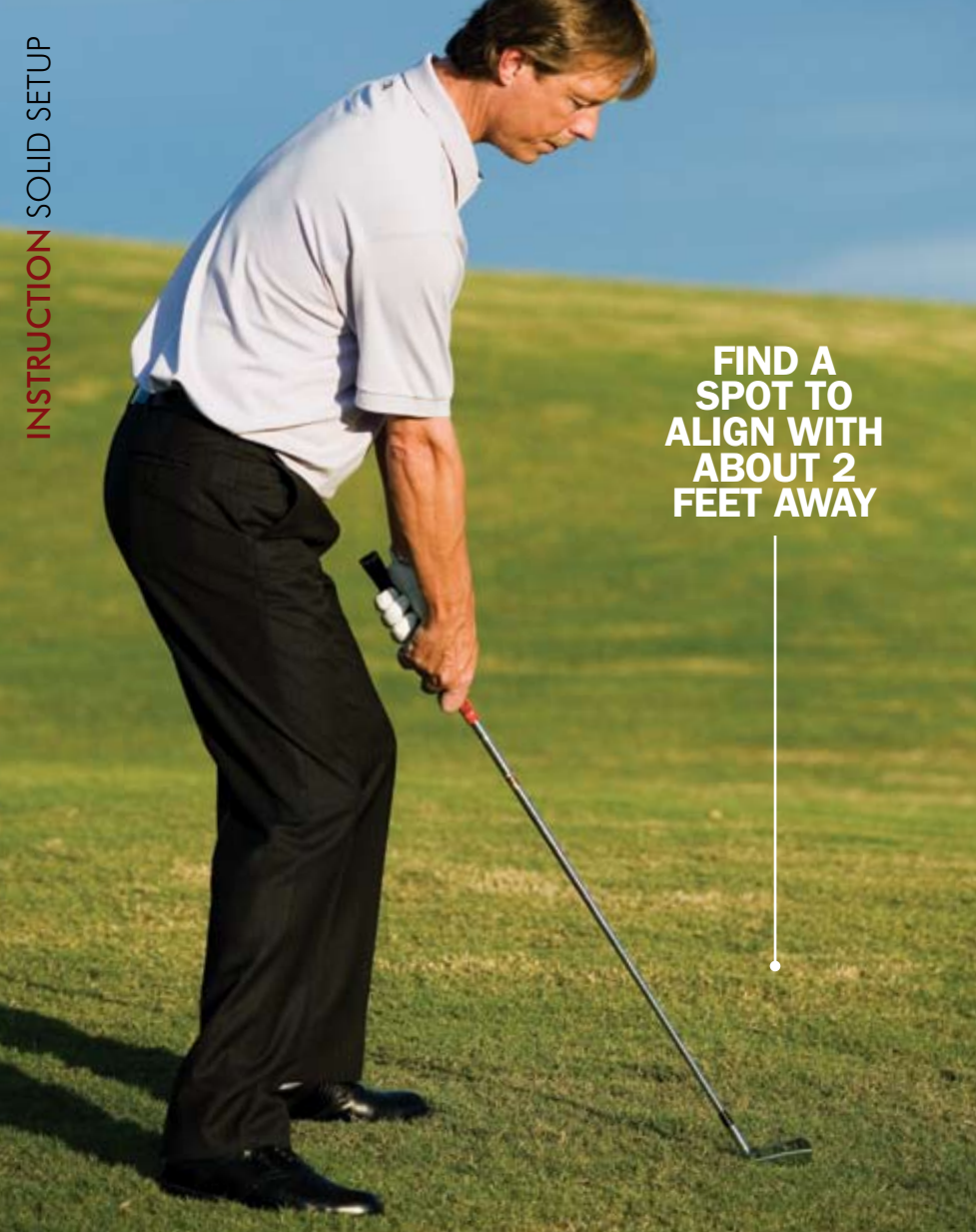
However, there is still one last rule to follow. It ties the first two together and places you in a position to maximize your potential as a shot-maker. Once you have a clear understanding of this rule, golf will become a much easier game.

The third cardinal rule of golf is to never sacrifice your setup position. No matter the condition, lie or shot selection, your setup position places your body in a position to maximize the efficiency with which you execute the shot. Your setup, or address position, is the one item you can make consistent to ensure consistency with all your shots.

The odds are very high that you will hit a poor shot if you have not set up correctly to your shot. This rule applies to all shots — putts, chips, pitches, irons, woods and trouble shots. Regardless of where you are on the golf course, a proper setup is a crucial element to your success.



By John Hughes
Photos by Russell Kirk Photography,
courtesy Mystic Dunes Golf Resort and Golf Club, Celebration, Fla



**FIND A
SPOT TO
ALIGN WITH
ABOUT 2
FEET AWAY**

TO PROPERLY ALIGN yourself to your intended target, find a spot about 18 to 24 inches in front of your ball to align your club to and then place your body as dictated by the club position behind the ball. Also, use the leading edge (bottom) of the club and not the topline for alignment to the target line.

back to the target.

To properly align yourself to your intended target, find a spot about 18 to 24 inches in front of your ball to align your club to and then place your body as dictated by the club position behind the ball. Be sure to allow proper distance from your ball to line it up with your target and the spot in front of the ball. Your eyes need at least 6 to 8 feet of distance when you're standing behind the ball to properly align the ball with your intended target and the spot in front of the ball. In some cases, 8 feet might not be enough.

Most players stand too close to the ball and not on the target line. Standing too close to the ball does not allow enough space to get all three objects aligned — the target, your ball and the smaller target in front of your ball. Giving yourself more room behind the ball will help you see your shot intentions more clearly, as well as see your target line more distinctly.

Also, use the leading edge of the club and not the topline to align the club to the target line. The leading edge is the bottom of the club, the part of the club that is first to arrive at the ball. Many players unknowingly close the clubhead at address because they use the topline to aim the club to the target line.

When you align your club using the leading edge, the club may look as though it is "open" to your target. However, because of the loft of the club, it should look a bit open when using the leading edge to align the club. You must convince yourself that this is a proper position.

You can have someone help you with this image by placing a small stick or magnetic lie-angle probe on the clubface as you set up. Aim as you normally would using the topline. By looking at the stick on the clubface, you will see that the club is pointing closed to your target. Now place the club behind the ball using the leading edge to aim the club. You will now see that the club is aimed online, and the toe of the club looks slightly open.

Keep in mind that the spot you pick in front of your ball should be no more than 2 feet away from the ball. This allows you to see the spot within your setup or

While there is a plethora of information on the setup position, we will highlight the four major issues that apply to all shots — grip, alignment, ball position and posture/stance.

Grip

As discussed in the last issue, the hands have only one conscious function — holding the club correctly. This is the very first item in a preshot routine that you should ensure is correct.

Alignment

Placing your body in a position that allows every club to work down and through the target line is essential to great shot-making. Poor aiming of your body right or left of the target sends mixed signals to your brain in relation to how well you will execute the shot. In turn, these signals initially send the ball traveling left

or right of the target.

Most players stay in the incorrect aiming position, which sends these incorrect signals to the brain. Your brain then sends signals back to your body, called "compensations," which tell your body to change the way it swings the club to launch the ball on a trajectory intended toward your target.

The bottom line is that if you aim left or right of your target, chances are the ball will travel in that direction unless your swing includes the necessary compensations to adjust for your poor alignment.

For example, if you aim your body right of your target, it's likely the ball will initially begin right of the target. It will take extra energy and unnecessary movement on your behalf to redirect the club back on your target path to get the ball started on line. Likewise, it will take a closed club (for the right-handed player) to curve the ball

address position without having to lift out of position. If you lift your head and body to see the spot, you will see the spot as out of line. This image will entice you to move your feet and, in turn, jeopardize your alignment.

It's also a bad idea to use the club as a guide to help you see the line better while standing beside the ball. Many players place the club on their hips, trying to see where the club is pointing. They will adjust their bodies so the club actually points at the target. This practice will have you align closed to your target. Moreover, placing the club on your hips will not give you a true read as to where you are aiming.

Of course, you can use the club to help you, but you must place it on your shoulders. Criss-cross your hands, placing them on the opposite shoulder, while you hold the club to your shoulders. As you look down the club toward the target, you should see the club point to the left of your target (if you are right-handed). The farther away you are from the target, the more left you will see your club pointing.

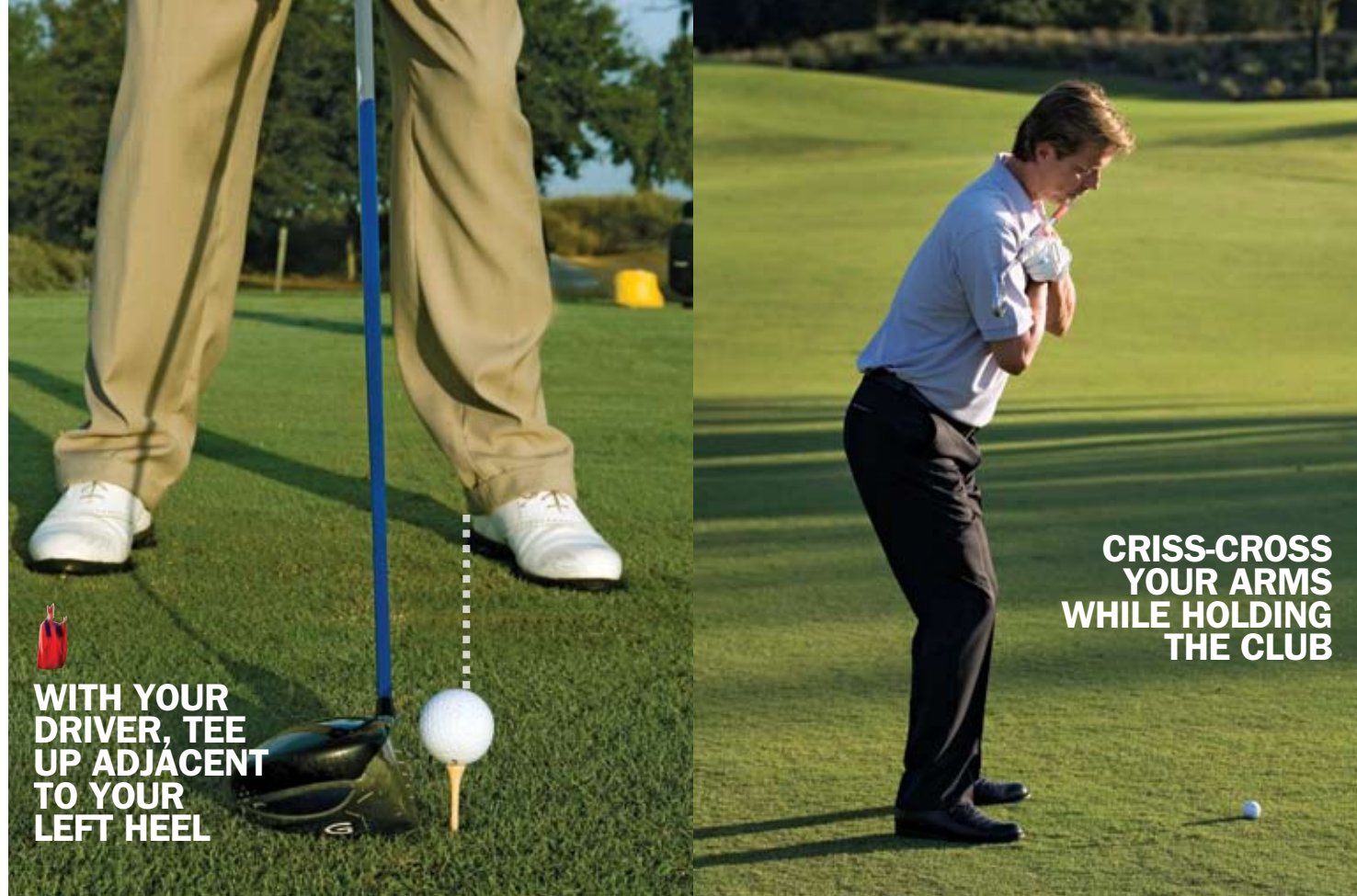
A good reference point is when standing 150 yards from your target, you should see your club pointing approximately 6 to 8 yards left of your target.

Ball Position

Without good alignment to the target, you sacrifice good ball position. Once you ensure your alignment is on target, you can then properly place the ball in your stance to optimize the club's descent and impact with the ball.

For all clubs, the optimal ball position is where the club dynamically reaches the bottom of its swing arc. This might

HAVING THE BALL position for the driver adjacent to the instep of the front foot is the optimal position to consistently hit the ball with the most power and the squarest possible clubface.



WITH YOUR DRIVER, TEE UP ADJACENT TO YOUR LEFT HEEL

CRISS-CROSS YOUR ARMS WHILE HOLDING THE CLUB

YOU CAN USE a club to help you get aligned to the target, but you must place it on your shoulders. Criss-cross your hands, placing them on the opposite shoulder, while you hold the club to your shoulders. As you look down the club toward the target, you should see the club point to the left of your target (for right-handed golfers). The farther away you are from the target, the more left you will see your club pointing.

be contrary to the belief that the ball position for a driver should allow the club to swing upward when contacting the ball. However, there are too many high-speed video studies proving that a golf club reaches maximum velocity at the bottom of its swing arc.

In addition, physics tells us that for something to go up, something else must come down. For the ball to climb at a proper trajectory after impact, the club must be on its way down or at the absolute bottom of its arc.

With middle and short irons, you'll notice that these clubs will ascend to the ball at a steeper angle. Combine that with the rotational forces at work with your body and you will want to place a shot with these clubs slightly forward of the middle of your stance.

Longer irons and fairway woods take longer to reach the bottom of their swing arcs. Therefore, the ball position for these clubs should favor a more forward position than that of the irons.

The driver is the longest club in the bag and thus requires a longer space and time to reach the bottom of its swing arc. Having the ball position for the driver adjacent to the instep of the front foot is the optimal position to consistently hit the ball with the most power and the squarest possible clubface. These ball positions also help facilitate the rotation of the body through impact.

Posture/Stance

Your posture is critical in your swing. It allows the club to rotate around a consistent axis, ensuring consistent movement of the club through the swing. It also enables you to keep a consistent center of gravity, maintaining a balanced swing from start to finish.

Placing yourself in a good posture position is much easier than you think. Simply stand beside the ball with your feet no more than shoulder width apart. Next, lock your knees and hold the club at arms length in front of you, parallel to the ground. Now bend forward at the hips,

letting the club lower to the ball. Stop bending when the club is about 2 to 3 inches above the ball. Finally, unlock your knees, allowing the club to ground behind the ball.

The key to this drill is bending from the hips, not the waist. If you bend from the waist, you will tend to put too much curvature in your back and throw your center of gravity too far forward, placing excessive weight on the balls of the feet.

Your stance includes where you put your feet and how your feet balance your body before, during and after the swing. Your feet will probably never be wider

than the outside parameter of your shoulders. Anything wider than this will slow down your hip turn and prevent you from transferring maximum speed to the ball. This is a good reference point for a driver stance. You might find it more comfortable to be a little narrower with the width of your stance as the clubs get shorter.

Your feet are a crucial part of the swing. Consider that great athletic movement begins at the ground and works its way up the body. In addition, successful athletic movement never has the body moving backward. In order to maintain dynamic balance as you move through the swing and have the swing transfer energy forward to the ball, your feet must be able to maintain your balance and start critical moves in the swing.

A well-balanced setup will position your weight equally from toe to heel for both feet. You will also need to favor the inside of the back foot in your side-to-side weight distribution. This allows for the proper loading of weight to the backside of the body at the top of the backswing and for a good lower body rotation as the swing transitions from the backswing to the downswing.

Remember, a golf swing is more of a created action than a reaction. Therefore, having your weight equally distributed from heel to toe eliminates any unnecessary movement that can throw off your balance.

If you're not balanced throughout your swing, your equilibrium will find a way to balance you whether you want it to or not. The most likely movement your equilibrium will trigger when you are out of balance is to slow down your swing. In other words, getting out of balance in your swing will greatly hamper your ability to hit the ball far.

There are other setup positions you will need to grasp relating to short-game shots, uneven lies and other abnormal situations. However, no matter what the situation dictates to you, you should always set up correctly to ensure that you are in a good position to make your swing as efficient as possible and to maximize each shot's potential.

Now that we have detailed the three cardinal rules of golf, all you have to do is apply these rules to every shot you take. Together, they make for a great pre-shot routine for those players who do not have one, as well as a great enhancement for golfers looking to take their game to another level. ❧

PGA master professional John Hughes is the vice president and national director of instruction for the Advantage Golf School in Orlando, Fla. He can be reached online at www.advantagegolfschool.com.