

Practice Makes... Better?

How much should you work on your practice drills?

Does a drill get more and more effective as you practice it? To find out, we examined three pitching drills we had tested in previous studies. This time, participants practiced one of the drills for three sessions over five days, rather than in a single session.

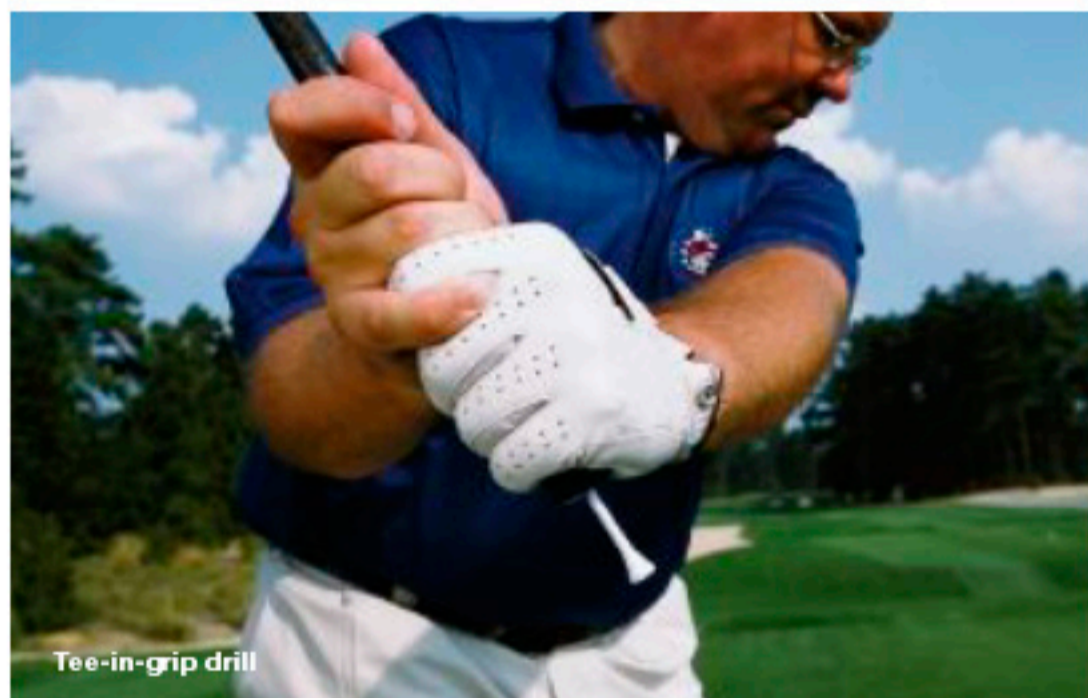
First came the middle-ball drill, in which golfers address a ball, then place another ball an inch from the clubhead's toe and a third ball an inch from the heel. The objective is to strike only the middle ball. Second was the tee-in-grip drill, in which golfers push a tee into the grip and point the tee along the extended target line during the backswing. Last was the hit-the-tee drill: Stick a tee in the ground six inches in front of the ball and try to clip the tee after impact.

THE TEST

Under the supervision of Dr. Bob Christina, 39 golfers were randomly assigned one of the drills; each group was balanced for age, gender and handicap. After a brief warm-up, players underwent a pretest that measured five shots to a target requiring a carry of 55 feet. Then each golfer used his assigned drill to make a practice swing and hit a single pitch shot to one of two targets, picked randomly, at 45 or 65 feet. This cycle was repeated 54 times. Each participant took a day off before returning for an identical practice session, then took another day off and came back for a third session and a post-test. *continued*



Middle-ball drill



Tee-in-grip drill



Hit-the-tee drill



The middle-ball drill was the only one tested that showed improvement with practice.

WHY?

The drills' change in effectiveness from single session to longer term may be due to differences in the participant groups' average handicap. For example, the middle-ball drill may work better for lower handicappers (the group in the longer-term study had a lower average handicap than the single-session group).

However, the effectiveness of some drills may simply improve the more they are repeated. It is also possible that some drills can be over-practiced. Future research may allow instructors to tell you exactly how much practice will maximize your improvement with each prescribed drill.

FINDINGS

Did so much practice significantly affect performance? Yes, but not always for the better. Compared with our single-session study, only one drill led to more improvement with more practice: The middle-ball drill reduced participants' pitching error by 31 percent in the longer-term study versus only 15 percent in the single session. This drill had been the least effective of the three in the single session, but in the three-day study it was more effective than the others.

Meanwhile, the tee-in-grip drill reduced pitching error by only 29 percent in the longer-term study, versus 41 percent in the single-session test, and the hit-the-tee drill improved results by only 20 percent in the longer study, versus 36 percent in the single session. %o



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