



A Ragged Mountain Press
**Woman's
Guide**



GOLF



Everything You Need to Know to Get Started (and Keep Going)

Equipment, Clothing, Tips, and Advice

Women's Voices, A Woman's Approach



SUSAN COMOLLI DAVIS

EXECUTIVE EDITOR, GOLF FOR WOMEN® MAGAZINE

**A Ragged Mountain Press
WOMAN'S GUIDE**



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SUSAN COMOLLI DAVIS

Series Editor, Molly Mulhern Gross

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Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress

Questions regarding the content of this book should be addressed to Ragged Mountain Press

P.O. Box 220

Camden, ME 04843

www.raggedmountainpress.com

Questions regarding the ordering of this book should be addressed to The McGraw-Hill Companies

Customer Service Department

P.O. Box 547

Blacklick, OH 43004

Retail customers: 1-800-262-4729

Bookstores: 1-800-722-4726

Printed on 70-pound Citation by Quebecor Printing Company, Fairfield, PA

Design by Carol Inouye, Inkstone Communications Design

Illustrations by Elayne Sears except for pages 46 and 50 by

Accurate Art

Production management by Janet Robbins

Page layout by Shannon Swanson

Edited by Alice M. Bennett

Photographs by Heidi Sell unless otherwise noted: pages 54, 87 (bottom), and 89 (top) courtesy P. Bianchi; page 115 courtesy BizGolf Dynamics; page 26 courtesy Canyon Ranch; page 111 courtesy Corbis; pages 97 and 99 courtesy J.D. Cuban; pages 11, 27, 30, 45, 54, 81, 85, 94 (top), 113, 119 (top), 121, 129 and 131 courtesy Digital Stock; pages 122 and 125 courtesy Krista Dunton; pages 59 and 60 courtesy *Golf Magazine*/Fred Vuich; pages 53 and 127 courtesy The King and the Bear World Golf Village; page 43 courtesy Lady Fairway; pages 37 (bottom) and 40 courtesy Nancy Lopez Golf; page 124 courtesy LPGA; page 92 courtesy Anthony Neste; pages 38 and 41 courtesy Ping; page 90 courtesy Charlie Samuels; page 19 courtesy Singing Hills Resort; page 39 courtesy Square Two Golf; page 88 courtesy Sun Mountain; page 40 (top) courtesy Top Flite

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To Patricia Sinnett Flammer

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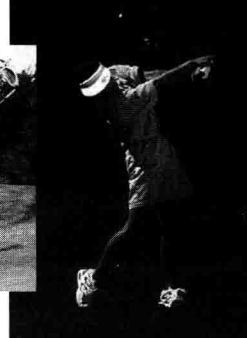
“Even when you’ve been playing for five years, like I have, there are days when you go out to play and can’t do anything right. That’s when you go back to basics. Golf can be frustrating, but it can also be the most fun thing in the world. Just remember, even the pros have bad days. Then there are days when you go out and everything falls into place and you’ll have an exceptionally good round. Never let the game get you down, and always, always, always have fun.”

—Janet Black, grandmother and avid golfer

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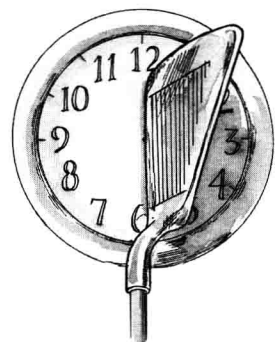
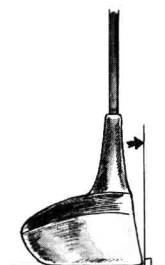
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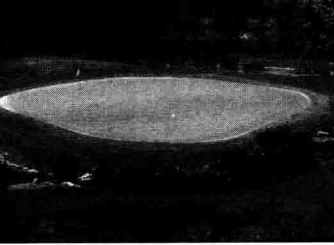
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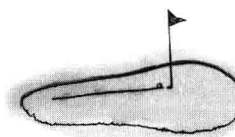
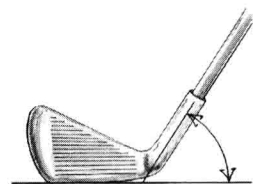
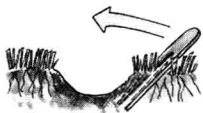




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Acknowledgments



It's hard to know where to begin. The opportunity to write this book would not have existed had my husband, Michael Davis, not introduced me nearly a decade ago to this sport he loves so much. He has patiently mentored me ever since, from my first whiff to my first birdie, for which I am deeply grateful.

I'm also grateful to Leslie Day Craige, the editor-in-chief of *Golf for Women* magazine, for believing in me and for supporting my role in this project. I want to thank my editor at Ragged Mountain Press, Molly Mulhern Gross, for her patience, flexibility, and encouragement every step of the way.

I did not write this book alone. It's with tremendous gratitude that I acknowledge Krista Dunton, Katherine Marren, Heidi Bianchi, and the many women—from the wonderful teaching professionals I've met through my job at the magazine to my friends and family who love the game as much as I do—who took the time to share their expertise and golf experiences with me. Their collective wisdom is found throughout these pages. My thanks also to Heidi Sell for taking such wonderful photos.

I also want to thank my sister, Priscilla Fitzsimmons, who took up the game as I wrote the book and provided much inspiration for it.

Most importantly, I am so grateful to my mother, Patricia Sinnett Flammer, for having shared her love of the game with me and for all the wonderful times we spent on the golf course together, experiences I will forever cherish.



TEN HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL GOLFERS

Golf is a lifetime adventure with you as the star. There are thrills (“I got the ball in the air! I broke 100!”), alien forces (“I could putt yesterday!”), and scary moments in the spotlight (“I have to tee off in front of all these people?”).

“Golfer” is a demanding role, and there’s no understudy. There is, however, a big supporting cast to help you learn the game, with all its quirky traditions and etiquette. The fun is up to you.

For three and a half years I’ve played a supporting role at *Golf For Women* magazine by writing and editing stories aimed at helping women to start playing, improve, and have fun golfing. But that’s not how my own golf adventure began. When my boyfriend—now husband—gave me a set of golf clubs and a week at golf school for Christmas eight years ago, I never imagined that I had stumbled into the fastest-growing sport among women. (For number crunchers, the latest statistics from the National Golf Foundation [NGF] say there are 5+ million women golfers out of some 26 million players and that women and juniors make up the fastest-growing segment of the sport.)

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“Playing nine holes is the ideal way for me to keep a foot in the game.”

—Karen Moraghan, owner, Hunter Public Relations, 25+ handicap

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"It was almost like starting all over when I began playing golf again. Yet my swing returned, and so did the childhood lessons like 'brush the ground on your backswing.' My love of the game returned as well, pleasant memories evoked by golf's magic moments: the smell of freshly mown fairways, the sound of a well-struck ball, sprinklers coming on at dusk, fresh footprints on a dewy morning."

—Cori Kenicer, golf and travel writer, 23 handicap

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umphs in tennis and Little League, but now she calls to tell me she shot 105 and missed making her first birdie by two inches.

Just as quickly as some get hooked, however, others become disenchanted. For one thing, it's not like skiing, where you can hit the slopes and see signs of progress the very first day. Developing sound golf skills takes time—and infinite patience. One minute you think you've got it; the next, the alien forces take over and you're convinced you're the most uncoordinated person on earth. Whenever these rogue emotions take over, remember there's never been an expert who didn't start out as a rank novice.

Turning more people away from the game than the issue of skill, according to the NGF, are time and cost. It's particularly hard for many women to carve out four hours—the average time it takes to play an eighteen-hole round—while balancing work and family

Even more than eight years ago, today golf is the sport to play. It has emerged from its fuddy-duddy image to become hip, hot, and happening. *In Style* magazine has devoted pages to fashionable golf duds—Prada and Tommy Hilfiger are just two of the top designers who offer golf apparel. Celebrities from Celine Dion, who owns her own course in Montreal, to soccer superstar Mia Hamm (who shoots in the 80s and dreams of one day becoming a golf pro), are addicted. And in just three months my once tennis-obsessed sister has become a golfing maniac. We used to talk on the phone about my niece's and nephews' tri-

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"I think because I started the game so young, at age 6, I don't have the hesitation that some adult beginners have. However, this doesn't mean I'm not nervous every time I step up to the first tee. That moment when you feel the grip of your driver is always intimidating. It wasn't until recently that I began spending time on the range warming up before a round. I couldn't believe the difference it made in my confidence level. I play about thirty rounds a year."

—Amy DiAdamo, 20-something, avid golfer

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“Time is the toughest issue with women because they always have so much going on in their lives. Go out and play nine holes late in the day when you’re not taking up such a big chunk of time. Let golf be the time for you to relax, to let out stress, to get exercise, build friendships, and enjoy a great game! Find friends who love to play or join a league or a club to meet new people who play. Golfers are very passionate and love to share the game with others, so it’s never hard to find people with a similar interest.”

—Krista Dunton, LPGA and PGA teaching professional

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life. But you don’t have to play golf that way. You can play nine holes or fewer, and you can practice effectively in your living room or backyard. In short, you can create your own golf experience without becoming a card-carrying member of the United States Golf Association (USGA).

And yes, you can easily plunk down \$1,500 or more for a set of golf clubs and pay \$300 for a round at a swanky resort. But you can also buy a good set of clubs for \$300, and the average green fee for a weekend round of golf at an eighteen-hole municipal course in the United States is \$27.

At the magazine we hear more about women having trouble finding playing partners (there are lots of leagues for women; see chapter 9). Others cite the umpteen rules (thirty-four, to be exact) as intimidating (you need to know only a few to get going; see chapter 8). And unfortunately, most women at some point will feel they’re not always welcome on the golf course. This discrimination can be subtle: a group of guys is allowed to tee off before you even though you had an earlier starting time, or the guy in the golf shop says that the women’s clubs, a minuscule collection, are over there in the “pink” department. Or it can be blatant: forbidding women to become members of certain private clubs—an astonishing practice in this day and age.

Why don’t I play as much as I’d like to? I live in New York City. But even that’s not a good excuse any more. America’s cities are being transformed into gigantic playgrounds. Living in Manhattan, I can thwack golf balls at Chelsea Piers, a five-story driving range, take a lesson at a golf store two stories above Madison Avenue, or ride the subway to one of the city’s 13 municipal golf courses. And outside urban areas, access is not an issue. In 2000, 300 courses opened—80 percent of them public—and there are 1,500 more new ones in the pipeline.

Whatever may have stopped you from trying the game or from playing it as often as you’d like, here’s a ten-step action plan for turning your budding interest in golf into a lifetime commitment. And lifetime is no exaggeration. At *Golf For Women* we’ve written about ninety-year-old Margaret Dewberry, who plays golf every day in her hometown of Augusta, Georgia, and recently shot her age—quite an accomplishment.

1. Make a commitment—to yourself

Many women and girls take up the sport, as I did, because a boyfriend, husband, father, or boss wants them to. That's a fine inspiration, but you must play because you want to play. As teaching pro Melissa Whitmire of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) says, "You need to have a deep, heartfelt purpose for playing to be successful." I was addicted to learning something new and had plenty of motivation and desire of my own. And I still do.

Once you make that commitment to yourself, find a time in your schedule when you can carve out about ten to twelve weeks during which you will take a lesson at least once a week—and practice a few hours between lessons. Commit to this process of developing your skills before you decide whether or not to stick with the game.

2. Find a guardian angel

Playing with people who are better than you helps you become a better player. Your golf guardian, or mentor, can be your mom, a friend, a spouse, or a partner. Mine was my husband. Your guardian should not be a teaching professional (imagine the bill!) but rather a regular playing partner who can clue you in on the nuances of the game—observing its common courtesies, driving a cart, speeding up play, understanding the lingo, and learning the traditions and rituals. To a beginner, this information is often more valuable than the mechanics of the swing.

3. Don't take free advice

Golfers are a friendly bunch and love to "help" beginners, dispensing tips whether asked for them or not. Women are highly susceptible to this behavior. Not all golf tips apply to you or your swing, and there are dozens of teaching methods, often contradictory. I think golf magazines should add a caveat to each article that says, "Consult your teaching professional before trying this tip."

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"What's kept me in the game is recognizing that this is something I do in my leisure time; though I aspire to do it well, it's something I'm choosing to do, not something I have to do. It also helps to know that this is a sport I can play for a long time, and it sure beats sitting down eating junk food. I've been playing for ten seasons and play nine holes twice a week with my husband. As a beginner I feared making a fool of myself, and I still do today. My fear has been lessened slightly by realizing that other golfers don't care what your game looks like because they're struggling with their own."

—Dr. Deborah Bright, author and stress management expert

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In short, learn to recognize what's right for you, and take lessons from a pro, who will get you golfing better faster. Education is the best investment you can make for your golfing longevity, and working on proper form will also help you stay injury-free. (See chapter 2 for how to find a golf pro and how to take a lesson.)

4. Practice, and make it meaningful

Develop your skills! As teaching pro Melissa Whitmire says, "You need a good foundation, or the house is going to crumble." I can't think of any other sport where this is so apropos. Golf professionals are always going back to the basics to keep their swings on track. To maintain your swing, the checkpoints should be few (maybe one or two), exact, perfectly clear, and appropriate to you. You must also devote practice time to all the strokes in golf, from putting to chipping to the full swing (see chapter 5).

5. Say no to hand-me-down clubs

Treat yourself to equipment that fits your swing and body. I still can't believe the number of women who say, "Oh, any old club will do for now." Not true. If you use clubs that are too heavy or stiff, you'll be starting out at a disadvantage. The women's equipment market is in an upswing, and there are plenty of professionals who can measure you for a proper set of clubs without breaking the bank (see chapter 3, Gearing Up).

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"The most challenging part of the game for me is finding the time to practice. I need serious practice time to get better."

—Tara Gravel, associate editor,
Golf Magazine

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"Never, never, never let your husband teach you to play golf. Always take lessons from a golf professional. And never give up! Even when you've been playing for five years like I have, there are days when you go out to play and can't do anything right. That's when you go back to basics. Golf can be frustrating, but it can also be the most fun thing in the world. Just remember, even the pros have bad days. Then there are days when you go out and everything falls into place and you'll have an exceptionally good round. Never let the game get you down, and always, always, always have fun."

—Janet Black, grandmother and avid golfer

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6. Set specific, attainable, and measurable goals

Okay, duh. But like anything in life, do set goals. Recognize that golf is a challenging game that will take some dedication (read practice) before you'll see improvement. Manage your expectations and set your goals according to your skill level.

7. Learn to play with your significant other

This may be the most important lesson you take away from this book. Too many golfing relationships have been spoiled by well-meaning spouses giving inappropriate advice. To learn how to lay the ground rules, see the section on couples' golf in chapter 2.

8. Take baby steps

Stay away from playing eighteen or even nine holes on a busy course until you are ready. This may sound curmudgeonly, but you will be much happier if you stay off the course until you've built a solid foundation. Your lessons should expose you to the course and the object of the game, but I see far too many people playing golf who can't make contact with the ball. There's

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"There are many reasons I love golf, but you *don't* have enough time to hear all of them, so I'll only give you a few. First is the fact that you do not have to be a certain size, shape, or age to play. Second, my husband and I can spend quality time together while enjoying the outdoors. Last but certainly not least is the pure excitement of being part of something that enables women to excel in a sport and be just as good as her brother, husband, or father!"

—Heidi Olschefske-Lusby, an avid new golfer

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"I always start a beginner with putting. I want them to know that golf is about getting the ball in the hole, and I want them to establish that perspective and become 'hole friendly' from their first experience. You can explain and experience golf on the putting green, from the rules and etiquette to the order and pace of play to scoring—you name it. Also there is the advantage of starting with a small motion that then leads to chipping that leads to pitching that leads to full swings. I think it's a travesty when a beginner only gets full swing instruction with a 7-iron."

—Lynn Marriott, golf educator and cofounder of Coaching for the Future golf schools, Phoenix, Arizona

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