

Am I ready to Get Golf Ready? Thoughts from a beginning golfer...

Hello! My name is Dawn Wivell, and I'm a business writer. When Cheryl Heckman, owner of the Manor Golf Club, mentioned that she was thinking about having someone blog about their golf lesson experience, I wasn't sure if it was a subtle hint or a casual comment, but I wasn't taking any chances. I quickly looked down at an imaginary hang nail, so there would be no chance of making eye contact and giving her the idea that I was up for it.

You see, I am one of the least athletic people I know. I have no coordination, no strength, and not a competitive bone in my body. I was literally the last one picked for every team in high school, and that was more than 30 years ago. There's no way my athletic prowess improved since then. If anything, it's declined as my joints have become stiffer and a few (yeah, right, just a few) pounds have crept up on me.

Still, I had been thinking that I really needed to become more active. I was really becoming a couch potato. I kept thinking about that commercial, "A body at rest stays at rest. A body in motion stays in motion." So when I ran into Cheryl at a Women2Women event a few weeks later, I began to tell her that I was thinking about taking the lessons and writing a blog for her. She jumped on it before I could finish my sentence, and said, "Great! Let's make it happen (or something along those lines)."

What could I say? I'm going to learn the game of golf. It's just four lessons, one night a week for an hour and fifteen minutes. How humiliating could it be? Honestly, I kind of doubt that it will become a permanent hobby for me, but wouldn't that be great if it did. Nothing lost. Nothing gained. I figure worst case scenario: I'll be off the couch for at least four Tuesday evenings, and I might even make some new friends.

I hope you'll join me on this journey as Cheryl posts my adventure each week.

Get Golf Ready-Ready or not, here I am! Class #1 June 3, 2014

So, here I am - a few weeks later - taking my first golf lesson – EVER. It's a gorgeous spring evening. The sun is low and the trees are providing some much needed shade. The view of the neighboring green hills is beautiful, and if nothing else, it's great to be outside enjoying a beautiful evening.

I am the first to arrive, but more women quickly filter in – some are in groups, some in pairs, but most are alone. We hesitantly begin talking and connecting; I'm always amazed by what a small world it is - or is that just a Berks County thing? Then we begin asking the all-important question, "Have you ever golfed before?" Thankfully, everyone I speak to says that they had never golfed before; however, I am a little suspicious of the ladies who brought their own clubs.

Eventually, about 14 women are gathered, and our three intrepid instructors introduce themselves – Shane, Eric, and Matt. They tell us that today's lesson will include "putting" and "chipping," and that they're going to divide us into two groups. Seven of the ladies go with Eric to learn how to chip, and the rest of us go with Shane and Matt to "a green" with four holes to learn how to putt.

First, Shane (who we find out later is Cheryl's son) explains the correct stance for putting – feet shoulder width apart, body comfortable and relaxed. He tells us there are several ways to hold a putter, but he's going to keep it simple – left hand at the top of the club, thumb pointed down, with the right hand just below it. He shows us how to swing our arms, cautioning us not to move our wrists. "Like an elephant's trunk," he explains. And we begin to practice our swing.

Someone asks about the difference between golf balls. He explains that new golf balls are better, but other than that, it's the golfer's preference – whatever feels the best. I ask the brilliant question, "Is this the only time you putt? When you're on this round-like-area with the short grass (demonstrating what area I meant with my club)." Instead of making me feel like an idiot (which in hindsight, he had every right to do), Shane confirms, "Yes, the only time you putt is when you're on the 'green' or on the 'collar' or 'fringe' of the green (the area just outside the green).

We practice our swing some more.

Then Matt shows us how to read the green and make adjustments. He kneels down low and shows us how to look for bumps and inclines and slopes. Truthfully, I can't really see much, but I'm hoping that will come with experience. Wait a minute! Did I just think that I might become an experienced golfer?! Hmmm...

Anyway, we practice hitting some more balls, and someone asks how long a putter should be. Shane explains that most people just use a regular putter that should come to about your belt, but that some pros use an "anchor" putter or a "belly" putter. He teases that when we all became pros, we can worry more about the type of balls and the putter we use. We all chuckle. As some of us (not me) start hitting our balls into the holes, we cheer each other on. When we miss, we give each other encouragement.

Then Shane and Matt show us how to fix a "divot" and "mark" our balls and how to have a "good presence" on the green – stay out of another golfer's line of vision when they're putting and don't walk through a golfer's line. They show us how to break down medium to long range putts into smaller putts.

And, we practice some more.

Finally, Shane and Matt try to bring out our competitive sides with a little contest. Two at a time, we take turns at a long putt. Whoever gets it in the hole in the fewest putts wins? Only one person gets it in, in 2 shots. She wins a divot-thingy (I'll have to ask what that's called next week). The rest of us take 3 or 4 tries. But that's okay. I don't remember getting a single ball into the hole till the competition – which I'm very proud to say only took me three putts - but I feel like I have a good handle on the correct way to hold a club, swing my arms, and putt a ball.

Shane says, "I told you everything I know about putting in one night." Personally, I think he knows a lot more, but I'm grateful for what he shared with us. I actually had fun, I was better at it than I expected, and I'm looking forward to next week's lesson about chipping.



Get Golf Ready Instructors

From left to right:

Shane Heckman-USGTF instructor

Eric Koehler, PGA Professional

Matt Hahn-Manor resident instructor