

✓CHECKLIST

Before you tee off...

✓**RECON:** Talk to someone who has played that course. Ask about the tough holes.

✓**ARCHITECT:** Know the tendencies of the designer. Are his greens tough or forgiving?

✓**CONDITIONS:** If the weather is poor, play more conservatively.

✓**ATTIRE:** If you're cold, you won't play well. Don't underdress. Think layers.

✓**EQUIPMENT:** Rely on your most accurate clubs to counteract new-course tension.

✓**KNOWLEDGE:** If the course has a yardage book, buying one is a must.



✓**EGO:** If you're feeling confident about your game, go ahead and take some risks. That's part of the fun of playing golf.



STRETCH OUT THE KINKS: Take your address position and lock your wrists so the back of each hand is facing the other (right hand under the left). Then mimic your backswing, pulling the left shoulder under your chin with your right arm. Now flip the hand positions and mimic the follow-through by pulling the right shoulder under your chin with the left hand.



Learn the green speed



ROLL CALL: Ask if the practice green is the same speed as the greens on the course. If it is, putt a few balls long and short in different directions to gauge the speed.

Check the type of sand



SAND CHECK: When you reach the first green, take a minute and check the type of sand. Is it fluffy? Wet? The softer the sand, the farther behind the ball you'll want to hit.



How to look for clues

Some sprinkler heads tell you the yardage only to the center of the green, but that's just part of the story. Look at this sprinkler head. It gives you the yardage to the front of the green (upper left), the back (upper right), and the middle. The distance from front to back is 34 yards. That's a three-club difference, depending on the pin position.



DANGER AHEAD:
IS THERE WATER
IN FRONT OF THE
GREEN?

Probably the biggest source of frustration for a golfer playing a course for the first time is the hidden hazard. Here I just split the fairway with my tee shot, and I'm preparing for my approach to the green. From the viewpoint above I can't see that there's water in front of the green. Luckily I have a yardage book and can check to see what's ahead. But if you don't have a yardage book, look for clues like reeds or vegetation that might be found around water. The plants growing here are a warning to hit a longer shot.



YES
LOOK FOR TELLTALE
SIGNS, THEN
USE MORE CLUB.

How to Outsmart A Course

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RICK SMITH, voted No. 5 by his peers in *Golf Digest's* ranking of America's 50 Greatest Teachers, coaches PGA Tour winners such as Phil Mickelson, Rocco Mediate, Lee Janzen, Jerry Kelly, and Matt Kuchar. He also has designed eight award-winning golf courses around the country, including his Signature course at the TreeTops Resort in Gaylord, Mich.