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Practice, sleep, and golf (In that order!)

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I'm sure you've noticed that Tour pros often hit the range after a round to "work on some things" in their swing. This is just one of the many ways they differ from us hacks. Sure, most of us loosen up with a small bucket before a round. And the ill-advised among us might even try to "work on some things" before teeing off. Then, after the round, instead of hitting the range, we hit the 19th Hole.



Why do Tour pros postpone any serious "work" on their swings until after the round? An obvious answer is that they don't want to screw themselves up before teeing off, filling their heads with a host of new swing thoughts.

A less obvious answer is that the effects of practice are enhanced by subsequent sleep.

A recent series of studies by [Dr. Sian Beilock, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago](#) and her colleagues suggests that memories of practice might be consolidated during sleep. Performance on some tasks after sleep, they have found, is significantly better than performance after the same tasks that is not separated from practice by a good night's sleep.

Beilock and colleagues, who have also conducted [influential studies on why athletes choke under pressure](#), trained novice golfers to putt with either their dominant or non-dominant hand. Improvement in the non-dominant hand group (lefties, as all participants were righties) was nominal immediately after training, and non-existent after a 12-hour waking interval. Improvement in the dominant hand group was significant immediately after training, and also significant after a 12-hour waking interval.

What is really interesting, though, is that after a night's sleep, the left (non-dominant)-hand-trained group performed just as well as the right-hand-trained group. And this increased performance occurred whether sleep came shortly after training (people trained at 10pm at night) or a full day after training (people trained at 10am in the morning).

In other words, the folks in the left-hand-training group got BETTER while they slept.

When asked how the results might relate to real golfers working on major swing changes, Dr. Kimberly Fenn, one of the co-investigators in the study, was quick to point out that the team's research is still in its initial stages, and that the results could not be confidently applied to very different skills or situations.

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However, Fenn did say that the existing evidence, along with these new results, "strongly suggest that sleep will consolidate the newly-learned skill in a way that will improve performance over levels achieved directly after learning."

The moral, then, for us weekend warriors is to practice AFTER a round, rather than before. And if you take a lesson, it would seem to be sound advice to "sleep on it" before heading out to the course to practice the new swing plane, grip, stance, etc.

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