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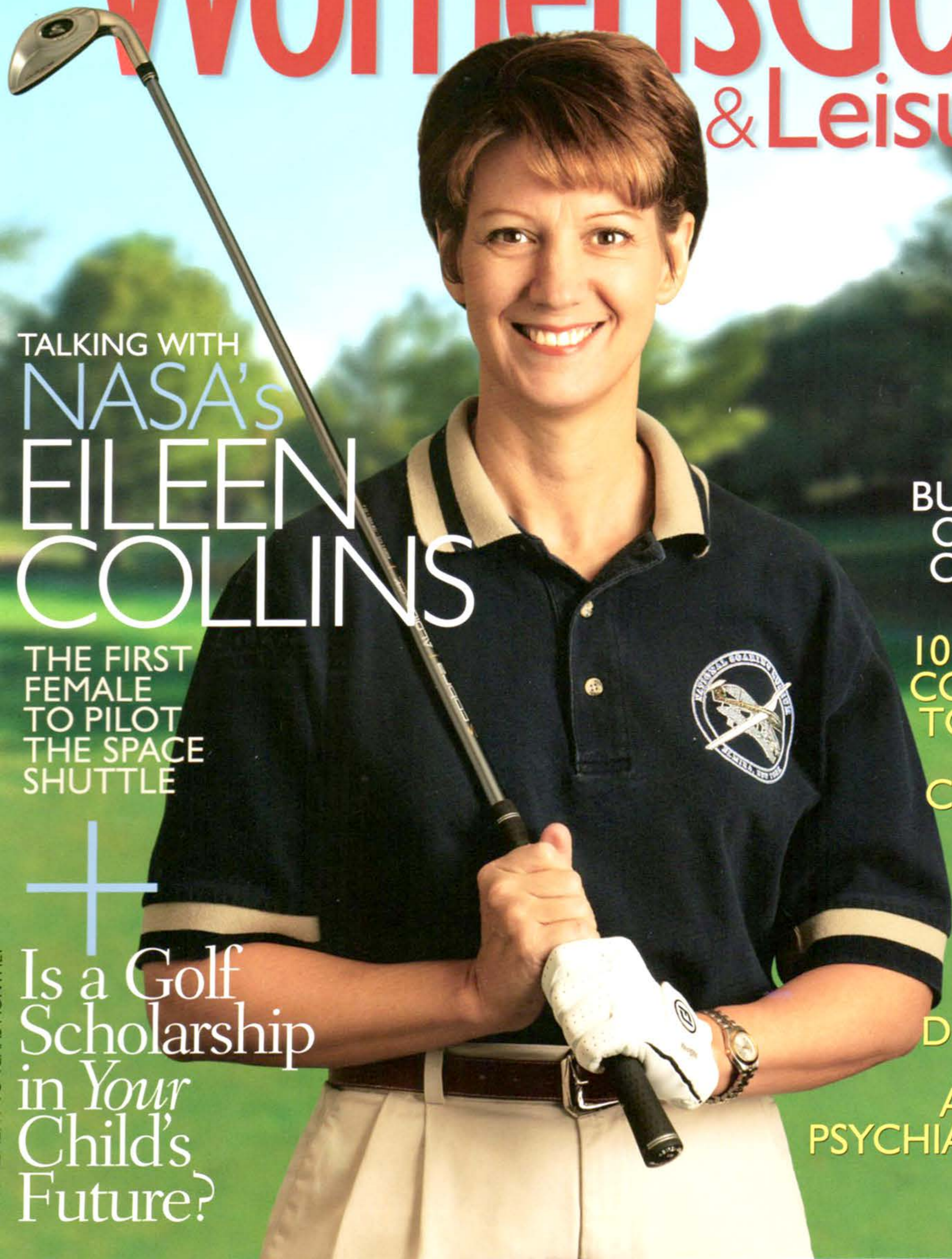
Is a Golf  
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ON THE  
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10 GREAT  
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TO TAKE  
YOUR  
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SINK  
MORE  
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DO YOU  
NEED  
A GOLF  
PSYCHIATRIST?



## Adventures of a High Handicapper

There are no trees  
on the driving range.

By **Patti Putnicki**

**Maybe it's just me.** I go out on the driving range three, maybe four times before a round, and all seems right with the world. While I admit all the shots are not birdie material, at least half sail toward their targets, land pin-high, and, in the real world, would elicit from any golfer that whooping yee-ha! noise that can be heard six holes away. So why don't these wonder shots happen as regularly out on the course?

Very simple. There are no trees on the driving range. No water hazards. No out-of-bounds markers. No errant squirrels. No giant hills, ditches, or cart paths. In other words, no obstacles.

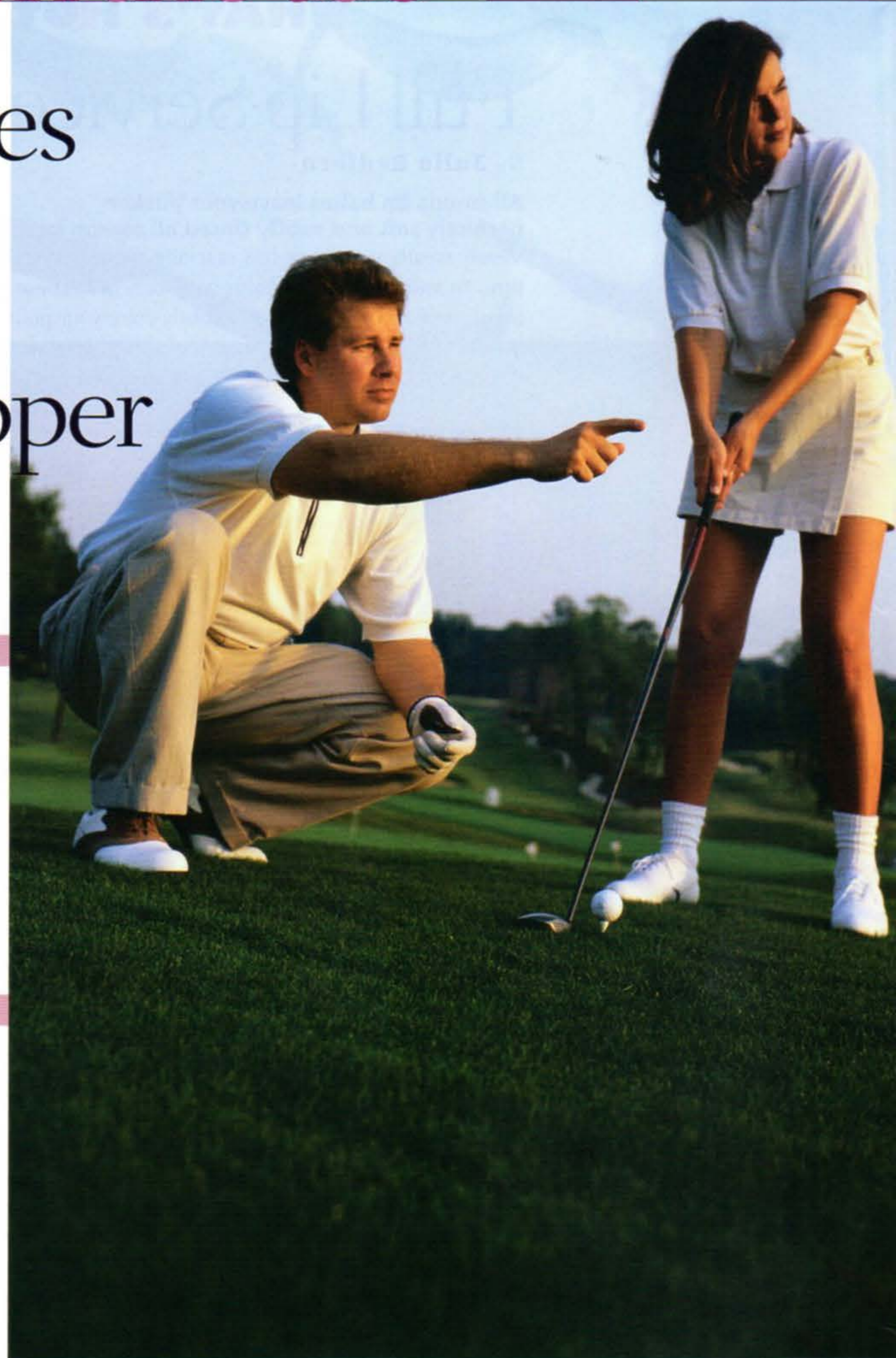
So why limit your lessons—or, as I call them, “coaching sessions”—to the perfect world of the driving range? If you've never done it before, I recommend that you rough it with your favorite golf guide in a playing lesson on the course.

Yes, playing lessons are more expensive and probably not something you want to invest in every week. But when combined with your regular lessons, they can help you cope with the stark realities you face on the course during play. My ball, for instance, has a love for wood, which is why it always lands directly behind, to the side of, or, on occasion, embedded in some tree on the right side of the fairway.

A driving range lesson works to help you not hit to the trees. A playing lesson allows you to practice what to do when you do hit the ball by a tree. It's like knowing CPR: You hope you'll never have to use it—but if the situation arises, you'll be glad you have the skill.

In my opinion, the only way to struc-

ture a playing lesson is to make sure the pro plays too. You get double benefits. First, you get a pro you trust helping you get out of trouble situations and showing you actual techniques that can save your score from the dreaded “snowman.” Second, if you play with a pro, you will also work on your mental game. Here's a



news flash: The pro will probably be a much better golfer than you are. You will plug away for three, maybe four shots to

I can't say that one playing lesson solved all of my problems, but I can say that I no longer have an anxiety attack when my ball rolls behind a tree, sits on a slope, or is deeply embedded in the lip of the sand trap.

catch up to his or her drive. You'll also be able to observe how a person who teaches and breathes golf for a living approaches various shots—and do it up close and personal, without having to go to a major tournament event. It's a real learning experience.

On a Saturday afternoon, Joey-the-pro and I set out on the club's longest course, known as "The Masters," for a little hands-on instruction. Here's what I learned: If you have a playing lesson with a club pro, half the club membership will come running up to watch him play. The bad news is that a lot of people will be around when you hit your ball. The good news is that, honestly, not one person gives a hoot about how you're hitting the ball. It's a bittersweet thing, particularly if you hit a nice shot.

Joey's first drive sailed for miles, straight down the fairway, landing a short iron's distance from the green. My shot darted over to the right, into high grass and a clump of trees. "Joey's Army" went back to their own business, and we headed off to deal with that second shot, with absolutely no one behind us and no one along for the ride.

Joey showed me how to hit one over the trees—use a 7-wood, put the ball forward in my stance, and make a slow and steady swing. Over the tree it went. Then he showed me how to punch the ball out: Use a long iron, ball back in the stance, take the club three quarters back, and stop the swing as soon as you make contact. Okay, so I wasn't so good at this. But we kept practicing—from behind a real tree—until I had it under control.

My next shot landed in a bunker. I stopped and watched as Joey's ball sailed safely past the hazard, landing about a foot from the pin. Then we both hopped

into the sand trap to work on improving this part of my game.

You get the idea: A regular lesson is like using concealer to cover the blemishes. A playing lesson is a chemical peel. Every ugly part of your game is exposed. The goal is to find ways to get you out of the dilemmas without giving up too many strokes. You just have to be willing to stand there with all of your flaws hanging out. In my case, it was pretty ugly.

I can't say that one playing lesson solved all of my problems, but I can say that I no longer have an anxiety attack

when my ball rolls behind a tree, sits on a slope, or is deeply embedded in the lip of the sand trap. I don't always make the shot, but at least I know what to do.

Although the perfect world of the driving range is still a safe haven for working out swing mechanics and experimentation, the playing lesson is now a big part of my pre-tournament routine. I'm playing with the pros, baby. And my game's all the better for it. **TWG&L**

**Patti Putnicki** is a freelance writer with two published humor books. Visit her Web site at [pattiwrites.com](http://pattiwrites.com)



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