



Be Cool in the Breeze

Let the prevailing gale be your friend this fall by learning to play a wind-cheater

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Photos by **SCOTT K. BROWN**

Fall is here, which means it's time for beautiful foliage, and a season that is a favorite time of year for many golfers.

The dawn of autumn also means that golfers are going to encounter some windy days on the course, often resulting in skyrocketing scores. We have plenty of experience with the breeze here at James River Country Club, where shots are susceptible to the whims of the nearby body of water which gives our club its name.

Whether facing a headwind or playing downwind, with a few adjustments to your setup and swing, your game can flourish, even when faced with a constant breeze.

Mission: Control

When a headwind blows, one common error I typically see is that golfers overswing, either trying to combat the wind or by trying to get that extra 10 yards off the tee. When a golfer swings too aggressively, their body gets out of sequence, resulting in inconsistent, "spiny" shots that the conditions play havoc with on windy days.



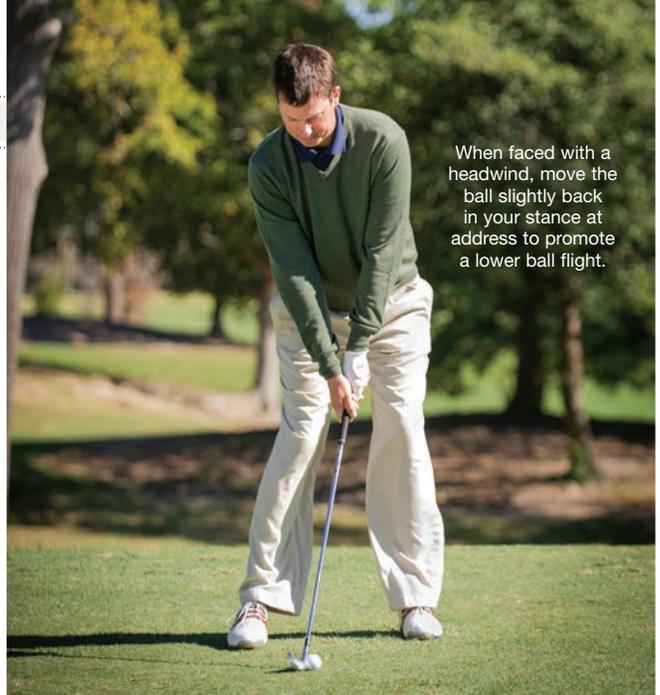
Take one more club when the wind is in your face and swing easier.

Caution in the Wind

When the wind is helping, most golfers automatically reach for one less club. While this can sometimes work, be realistic about your abilities and judge exactly how much the wind is favoring. If the trouble is near the front of the green, use your regular club. However, I tell my students to grab one more club for every 10 mph of headwind.

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When faced with a headwind, move the ball slightly back in your stance at address to promote a lower ball flight.

Instead of trying to battle Mother Nature, the key to playing shots in windy conditions is to focus on making solid contact, especially when faced with a headwind. Maintain a light grip pressure and grip down on the club a few inches to help with control. Relaxed forearms and soft hands allow the club to rotate to the toe-up, handshake position on the follow-through, allowing you to fight a left-to-right crosswind.

Most players grip the club too tight, resulting in a casting, over-the-top move. The result? Golfers tend to hit a big pull or a fanned shot to the right. You want to shorten your backswing and finish lower on the follow through, feeling as though you're swinging at 75 percent of your normal pace.

Cover It Coming Through

Position the ball a few inches back in your stance to ensure a "ball first" contact that will help keep the ball flight down. At impact, feel as though you're "covering" the ball to drive it lower.

Maintain a consistent tempo and complete your backswing, especially when the wind is gusting over your left shoulder. Take a few practice swings to ingrain the feeling of the correct pace and balance, which are crucial for hitting good shots in the wind.



Hit crisp shots on windy days by taking a three-quarter backswing, and feel as though your right side stays high through the strike in order to trap the ball. Finally, continue to accelerate and finish lower when you need to keep the ball under the wind.