

Today's **Golfer** american**golf**

IMPROVE EVERY PART OF YOUR GAME

GREEN

- Better chipping
- Bunker escapes
- Lag putts closer
- Hole-out with confidence

SAVE PAR AND MAKE MORE BIRDIES WITH A ROCK-SOLID SHORT GAME



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Welcome...

In this final installment of our instructional series, we focus on improving your game around the green

There's an axiom in golf; 'The shorter the putt, the greater the respect'. It's a notion that can be extended to all golf shots. As the hole gets closer our task appears to get easier, and we can easily lose a little focus and application. In fact, every short game shot you face has a direct and emphatic impact on the score you make, and any mistakes we make here are brutally exposed on the scorecard.

The link between short game and scoring also

raises pressure levels, and that's why it's so important to possess techniques in the three key areas – pitching/ chipping, bunkers and putting – that will stand up to the heat of battle.

This booklet will furnish you with that knowledge through a series of proven technical tips and drills. You will also find advice on matters of strategy and green-reading – equally valuable if you are to make the best score possible on any given day.

Good luck!

MEET THE COACHES

TG TOP 50

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TG TOP 50

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The venue

This GREEN guide was photographed at the immaculate La Reserva layout in Sotogrande, Andalucia. La Reserva joins Valderrama, Real Golf de Sotogrande, Almenara and La Canada in making up Sotogrande's prestigious quintet of golf courses. For more information on Sotogrande visit sotogrande.com or call 0034 856 560 922.



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Strike chip shots pure... every time!

The duffed chip is frustrating, but there's a technique you can use that makes heavy contact less likely. I call it 'Up, Down, In' – a simple way of representing backswing, downswing and followthrough. Here's how it works.

ROLL REVERSAL

This steeper backswing sets up more of a downward pop onto the back of the ball. It also stops you rolling the club back inside, a common contributor to poor chipping contact.

STEEPER PLANE

Move the club back, keeping the shaft and head outside the cane. The 'Up' part of the backswing is not from picking the head up but from this steeper backswing plane. Your hands and wrists should remain quiet.

Backswing Think 'Up'



USE THE SHAFT ANGLE

Take your regular set-up, and focus on the shaft angle. Ideally, stick a cane or shaft in the ground behind the shaft at the same angle, just inside the heel of the club.

Downswing
Think 'Down'



CRISPER STRIKE

This downward attack angle affords a crisper and cleaner strike, but it's important you create it simply through that steeper backswing and not through chopping down at the ball.

LATER LOW POINT

Keeping your hands and arms quiet, feel you strike down on the ball a little more than normal. That straighter, steeper backswing promotes this, but make sure the low point of the club's arc comes after impact.

Throughswing
Think 'In'



LESS FACE ROTATION

Your key thought for the followthrough is to feel the club works inside the ball-target line. Extend down the target line and the clubface tends to rotate; pull inside and you can keep the face squarer for longer, helping both strike and accuracy.



Five Ls for short game success

No part of golf is more flexible than the short game. Different lies, clubs, carries and slopes ensure no two shots are the same. So gather as much information about each shot as possible to get the ball close enough for a single putt. Use the five Ls to cover all bases.

1. LIE

The ball's lie determines the most appropriate technique as well as club selection, so it has to be taken into account first. The more the ball is sitting down, the more you'll have to squeeze it out. Only once you've assessed what type of shot the lie demands can you move on.

2. LINE

Now shift focus from the ball back up to its journey. Read the slopes to identify the line on which you'll need to send the ball. Most golfers underestimate sideslopes, so when you

feel you've picked the perfect line, allow a little more. Also factor in crosswinds.

3. LANDING SPOT

Once you know the line and what the lie will permit, take a look at the shot to picture where you will need to pitch the ball – the landing spot – to make the shot work, and lock it into your mind. Ideally, this should be as close to you on the green as possible.

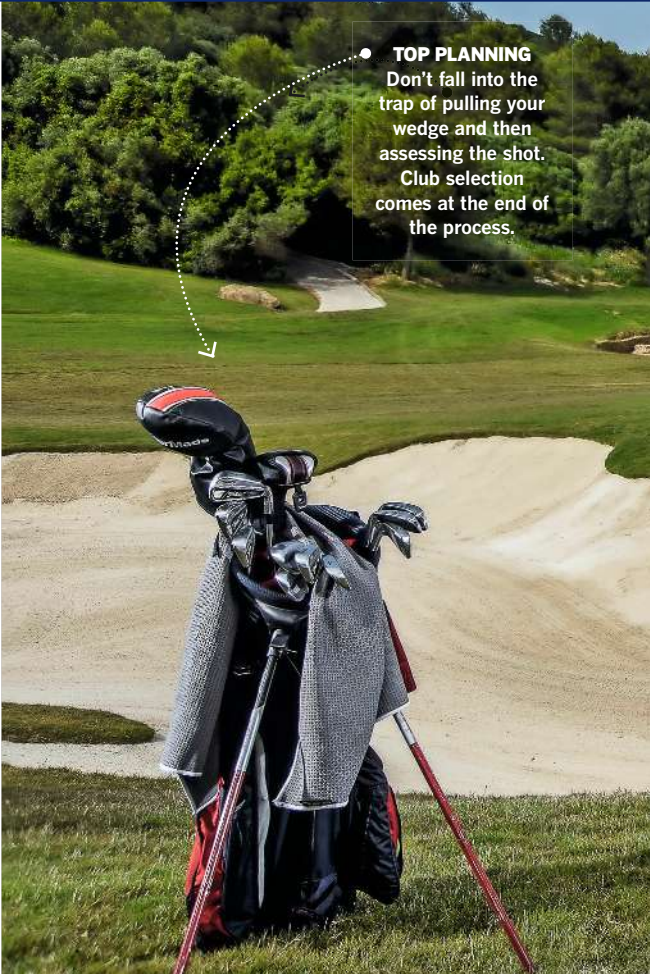
4. LOOK

After establishing the lie, line and landing spot, you can now take a step back

to remind yourself of how the entire shot needs to look – from the ball leaving the face to landing on your spot and rolling out down the line you chose. Make sure all the pieces fit your picture.

5. LOFT

With that picture of the shot fresh in your mind, select the club that will deliver the flight, carry and roll you've visualised. Of course, this club selection must also take the technique you identified in Step 1 into account; a squeezing attack may need more loft.



TOP PLANNING
Don't fall into the trap of pulling your wedge and then assessing the shot. Club selection comes at the end of the process.





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Add spin... or take it off

In the short game there are times where you want the ball to run out and times when you want it to check up. While spin control may seem an advanced

skill, it's actually within the compass of most players. All you need is to adjust your set-up and change how you deliver the club. Try these tips.

WHEN YOU WANT TO ADD SPIN...

Use this technique when the pin is cut close to the front of the green, or the green runs away from you.

SET-UP: CREATE LOFT
Spin creation comes from applying loft with a gentle downward attack angle. To achieve this, keep your shirt buttons, the butt of the club and the ball in line at address. That means playing the ball centrally in your stance.

LEVEL SHOULDERS

Aligning chest, handle and ball also has the effect of dropping your lead shoulder slightly. This helps promote that slight downward strike while maintaining loft on the clubface. Your weight favours your lead foot.



RELEASE THE SPIN

To feel the correct spin-creating delivery, place a peg in the butt of the club and swing with your lead arm only. Let the peg point back to your belt buckle as you swing through. This ensures you maintain face loft through impact.

SET-UP: TAKE LOFT OFF

To lower spin we need to reduce face loft and shallow the attack angle. So move the ball back in your stance to deloft the club; play it off your back toe cap. Keep your weight even and check your shirt buttons are forward of the ball.



WHEN YOU WANT TO TAKE SPIN OFF

Use this technique when you have a lot of green to cover to reach the pin, or you're chipping up a slope.

SHALLOW BACKSWING

Also, grip the club a little firmer. This tends to immobilise the wrists, which helps you make a wider, wrist-free backswing. This creates a shallower arc to your action, which helps you keep spin off the ball.



RETAIN THE ANGLE

Again, place a peg in the butt of the club but this time swing with your trail arm only. This time you need to keep loft off the face, so maintain the angle in the back of your trail wrist and keep the shaft vertical; the peg will point up to the sky.



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The go-to chip shot

There are all kinds of fancy lob and cut-up techniques out there, but the vast majority of chip shots just need a stock back-through motion. If you can build a simple action with fewer moving parts, you will improve your consistency around the green. Follow these set-up and swing cues.



GRIP DOWN

Grip the club so your lower hand thumb and forefinger are at the bottom of the grip. Moving your hands closer to the clubhead helps you control it, while 'shortening' the club removes some of its power.

THAT'S TYPICAL!
Most greenside shots need little more than carrying the ball to the green and letting it run out to the pin. It's a straightforward shot needing only a simple technique, so don't overcomplicate things.

LESS SPEED, MORE CONTROL

If you can take the pace and power out of the clubhead, you can make a positive, authoritative action without sending the ball too far. So base your go-to chip technique around taking speed out of the club.





BODY CONTROL

If you can control your action with your torso rather than your hands and arms, you'll create a much more dependable and consistent motion. Feel how this works by placing the butt into your stomach, gripping down and rotating your core to move the club back.

TURN THROUGH

Now rotate through, keeping the club against your stomach and the feel of body rotation moving the club. Note how stable and controlled the clubhead feels, in contrast to the sudden speed changes created by hands and wrists.



CLOSE CONTROL

Keep your stance narrow – no more than a clubhead's length apart. This helps you make a more controlled action, your weight centred. Again, this keeps moving parts to a minimum and helps take speed out of the club.



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Improve your feel and timing

The only true way to improve short game feel is to enhance your awareness of the clubhead, and face. Grip too tight – an easy trap to fall into given these are your scoring shots – and awareness evaporates. But here is an easy way to improve your feel – and the rhythm of your action.

THUMBS OFF

Take your wedge, and grip normally. But just before you start the club back, lift both thumbs away from the handle. The club will now rest in the fingers of both hands, and you will immediately gain a better sensation of the weight of the head.

UNCLENCHED

Your thumbs provide an opposing force to your fingers, allowing you to clench the club. With their influence removed, your hold of the club naturally relaxes.



LAG TIME

Go ahead and hit a series of chip shots with your thumbs off the handle. You will instantly notice how, instead of any snatching, the clubhead almost lags as your hands and arms swing back.

SOFTEN YOUR ARMS

To tune up the feeling of softness, feel and flow, start the swing with your arms slightly flexed. It will help remove any remaining tension in your hands and arms.

FEEL AND FLOW

As well as boosting your awareness of the weight of the clubhead, this lagging helps you establish a smooth and unhurried rhythm to your action.



TURN THROUGH

Keep your thumbs off right through to the end of your action. Feel how this also adds a little lag to your change of direction, helping the club release consistently at the right time. After grooving this softness, try to repeat the feeling with your regular grip.



Master the lob

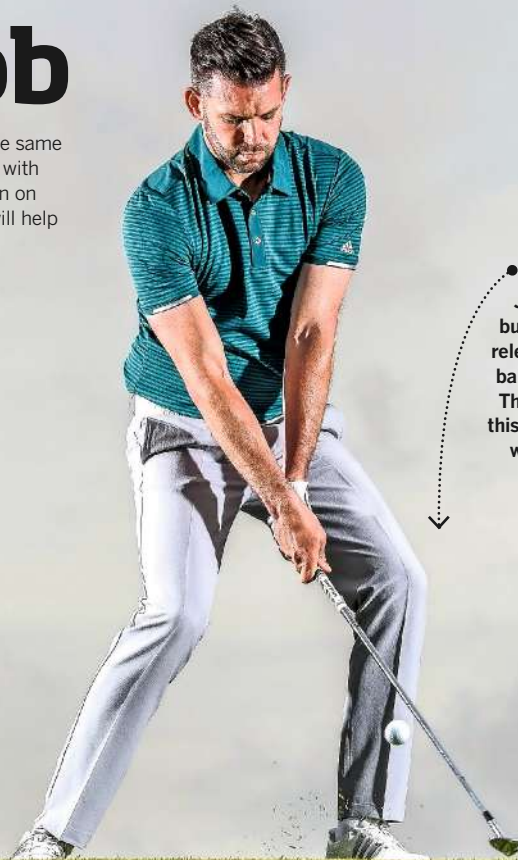
The high-flying, soft-landing lob shot is a truly useful shot to have in your bag – and chances are you already know how to play it. That’s because the technique is very similar to the

greenside bunker shot, using the same feeling of cutting under the ball with loft, and the flip release we learn on page 23. These tips and drills will help you get on top of the shot.



SET UP FOR A QUICK LAUNCH

As in the sand, play the ball just forward of centre and open the face to add loft. For quick height you need to deliver loft on a shallow angle; to promote that, widen your stance and increase knee flex to lower the handle.



UNDER AND UP

Just like the greenside bunker shot, the clubhead releases under and past the ball when you play the lob. The only difference is that this time the sole of the club works against the grass rather than the sand.



**Flip release drill
1: split hands**

Take your regular gloved-hand grip, but place your trail hand at the bottom of the rubber. This split-hand grip encourages the lower hand to release under the ball, adding loft to the face and height to the shot.

SKY HIGH

Aim to finish with your forearms crossing and the clubface facing the sky. Hit 10 shots like this before reverting to your regular grip and repeating the feeling.



**Flip release drill
2: peg drop**

Grip the club normally, but insert a tee peg between the heel of your gloved hand and the grip. Make that full flip release on the way through and the hand's heel will come away from the grip, allowing the tee peg to fall.





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Hit the spot!

When you practise your short game, it's only natural to focus on the result of the shot. However, I'd like you to shelve that for a while and instead spend your next three chipping

sessions focusing only on your ability to land the ball on your chosen spot. Your ability to do this is crucial to the shot's success, so here are two complementing drills to help.

Drill 1: Three clubs, one landing spot

Round-the-green shots demand versatility, and changing clubs is part of that. But with different clubs creating different flights, hitting your chosen landing spot becomes a little trickier. To work on this, pick your 8-iron, wedge and sand wedge hit them in turn to one, chosen landing spot.

MIX IT UP

Once comfortable hitting your spot with each club, make things harder by selecting a club randomly for each ball. This gets you closer to the on-course challenge, and will further improve your feel with each loft.



PRACTISE CLUB BY CLUB

Hit eight balls with each club, getting a feel for how hard you need to carry each club near your spot. Of course the shot flies lower and runs more as the loft reduces, so take note of run-out distances and consider which types of shot that carry-run ratio might be valuable.

Drill 2: One club, three landing spots

Now we're going to turn things around and learn how to send the same club different distances. Start with your favourite chipping club and create three specific landing targets at three, six and nine strides.

PICK A TARGET

Start by focusing on the nearest spot. Hit eight shots to this one, before repeating the drill with your mid and long targets. Assess which one is weakest and factor this into your on-course shot selection. All the time, you'll build your feel for how to judge carry distance.

INSTINCTIVE FEEL

As with drill one, proceed to picking random targets. Feel how the length and pace of your action is now almost instinctively changing as you move from one to the other. Take this landing spot focus to the course and it won't take long for you to see the improvement.





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The long bunker shot

Sand shots of 40-60 yards need a very different approach than greenside shots. This time you're looking to catch the ball clean – and that means changing your set-up, attack angle, delivery and even the club itself. Use these set-up and swing keys.

SENSIBLE STRATEGY

The shot is known as one of the toughest in golf, and with good reason. So select your target accordingly, allowing more margin for error than normal.

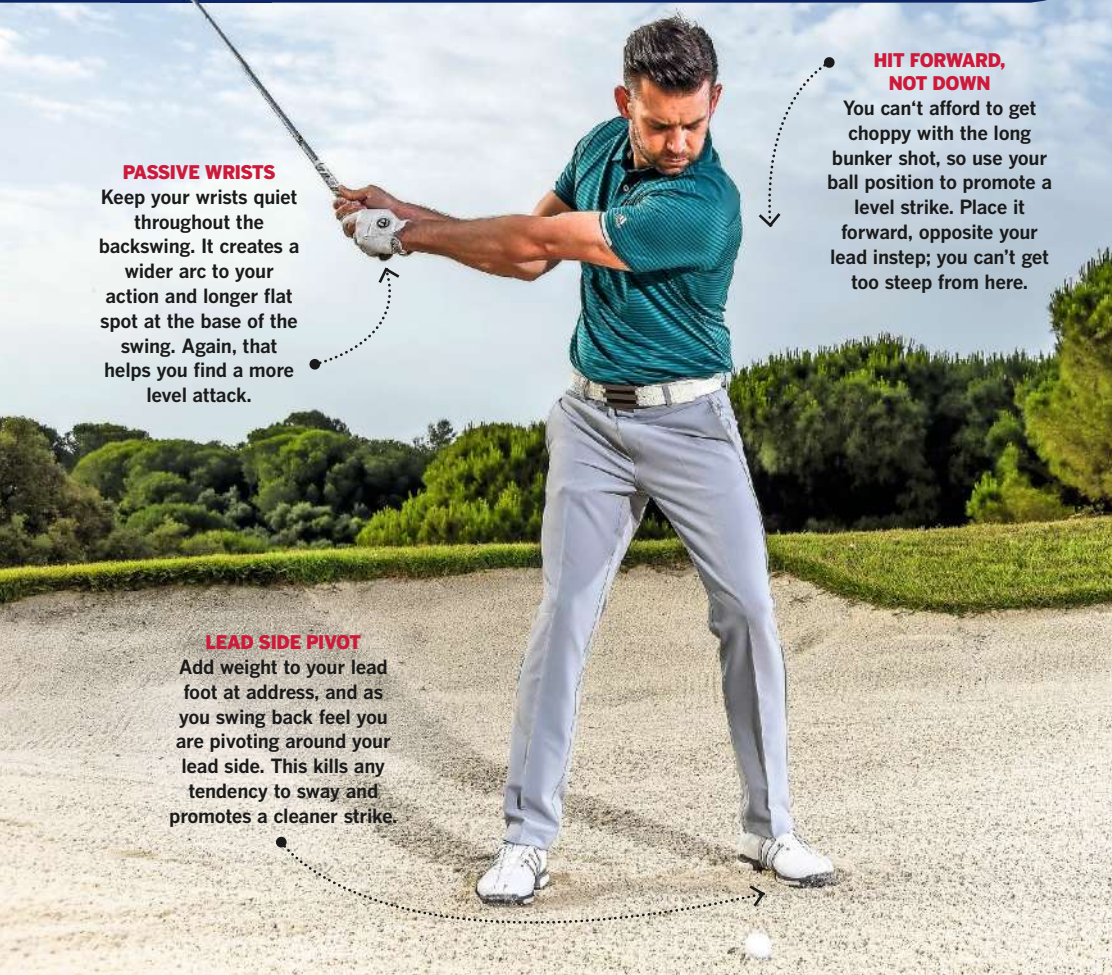
BALL FIRST

With greenside sand shots you take the sand from under the ball, an approach that needs a more U-shaped swing. Here, with the emphasis on a clean strike, you need a shallower attack that minimises trapping sand between the ball and face.



LET THE CLUB DO THE WORK

Unless you have a really steep lip in front of you, take a straighter-faced club – for example a 9-iron instead of a sand wedge. It lets you make a shorter and more controlled swing.



PASSIVE WRISTS

Keep your wrists quiet throughout the backswing. It creates a wider arc to your action and longer flat spot at the base of the swing. Again, that helps you find a more level attack.

HIT FORWARD, NOT DOWN

You can't afford to get choppy with the long bunker shot, so use your ball position to promote a level strike. Place it forward, opposite your lead instep; you can't get too steep from here.

LEAD SIDE PIVOT

Add weight to your lead foot at address, and as you swing back feel you are pivoting around your lead side. This kills any tendency to sway and promotes a cleaner strike.



FEEL 'WIDE' THROUGH IMPACT

Your ideal strike is ball first, then a little sand. That strike comes easier when you create a feeling of width on the follow-through. Try not to let the clubhead overtake your hands on the way through for a more solid, driven connection.



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Master the high, soft-landing bunker shot

For many bunker shots, the problem isn't getting the ball to the pin but stopping it going too far. Short-side yourself and you'll need to play a shot that rises quickly off the blade and lands softly, keeping the ball as close to the hole as possible. Here's how.

CURB YOUR AMBITION

As with any bunker shot, the most important thing is getting out first time. Get too cute and can leave the ball in the sand. Accept that 10-15ft past is a good result from a tough bunker.

HIT THE HEIGHTS

To get the ball to rise quickly and land softly, you need to apply the clubhead to the sand with plenty of loft. Achieving that is all about altering your set-up and creating the right attack angle.



SET-UP: SHAFT ANGLE FOCUS

Play the ball forward of centre. Open the face before taking your grip, and lower the handle to add loft. Create a vertical shaft by ensuring your hands are level with the clubhead, not the ball.



BACKSWING: SHARPER WRIST COCK

To apply clubface loft to the sand, we need the wrists to cock and then release coming into impact. Set this up by cocking the wrists more sharply than usual on the way back. Create at least a right-angle between your lead arm and shaft.



IMPACT: RETURN SHAFT TO VERTICAL

Your one key thought for this shot is to match the shaft's set-up angle at impact. That means releasing the club to a vertical position through impact, the clubhead passing the hands as it enters the sand.

HOLD SWAY

Avoid lateral movement to control the swing's low point and promote a consistent entry point. Make an accelerating rotation to create the energy that moves the ball up and out.



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Find perfect sand contact

Watch any elite golfer from sand and you'll see a similar and slightly confusing pattern – a definite 'thud', but apparently only a subtle ruffling of the sand.

This is because the player is striking the sand with the back of the sole, or the bounce – which keeps the sand divot shallow and allows them to control the ball. Here's how they achieve it.

THE PERFECT SAND STRIKE

This is a terrific image of what should happen through impact in a greenside bunker. The clubhead actually travels under and past the ball, which rises on the divot of sand the club took.

SHALLOW DIVOT

Note how shallow that sand divot is. That's achieved partly from a shallow attack angle and partly because the back edge of the sole is being applied to the sand. A back-edge strike delivers more of a skimming impact.

FLIP RELEASE

To find that shallow attack angle – and to use the back edge of the sole – you need to develop what's called the 'flip release'. This asks you to fire the clubhead past the hands through impact.

How to train a flip release

HINGE BENEFITS

Aim to finish off with your trail palm and glove badge skywards. This is the opposite to the way our wrists work in the full swing, but it's ideal for the right sand contact.

FORWARD FLIP

To gain a basic grasp of what the flip release is all about, press your palms together and form a golf stance. Now simply hinge your wrists forward as shown.

TEE TIP

Having got used to the feeling of flipping your wrists forward, try it with a club. Use your glove flap to secure a tee peg, pointing at the target, and aim to finish with the peg pointing to the sky.

FACE VALUE

As you swing the club through the sand, feel how that flipping motion shallows the attack and presents the trail edge of the sole to the sand. Look to finish with the club's leading edge horizontal.



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Three alternative putting grips

While the orthodox reverse overlap putting grip can work perfectly well for many golfers, there are three increasingly common alternatives that can help players who struggle to control their hands through the ball. If putting is your Achilles heel, try all three of these and see which delivers the best results.

1 Palms facing

Neutral feel with neither hand below the other

HOW TO FORM IT

This grip asks you to place your palms opposite each other on the grip, the fingers of one hand wrapping over those of the other

according to preference. The trail hand usually ends up a touch lower than the lead, with the thumbs almost touching down the front of the grip.

WHY USE IT?

The chief advantage of palms facing is that it levels the shoulders. This gives you a natural feeling of symmetry and neutrality,

which can help with alignment and attack angle. Users also report that with the palms facing, your hands are less likely to fight each other in the stroke.



2 Claw

Trail hand webbing guides the putter back and through

HOW TO FORM IT

Hold the putter with your regular lead hand grip. Point the fingers of your trail hand down and introduce the hand sideways to the grip, placing it against the fleshy area between your thumb and index finger knuckle.

WHY USE IT?

The claw reduces the lower hand's influence, stopping the two hands from fighting each other. Rather than supply a hitting force, the lower hand supports and guides the club back and through. If your trail hand tends to take over, this could be worth a try.



3 Lead hand low

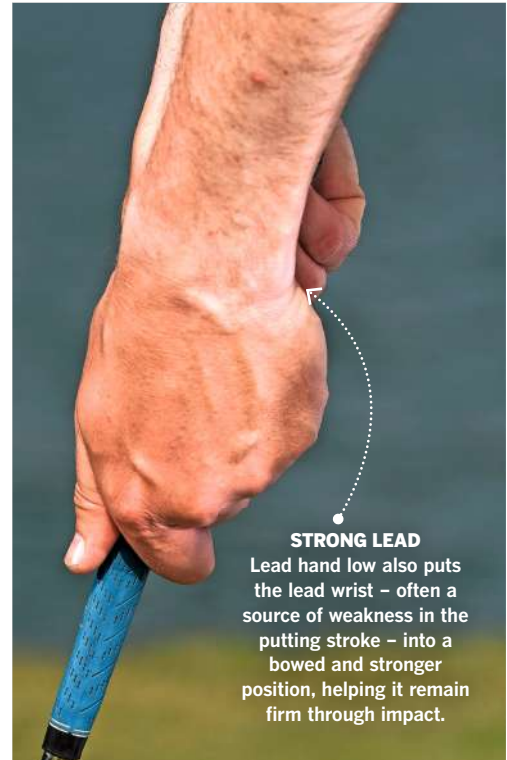
Leading hand extends down the grip, below the trail hand

HOW TO FORM IT

Hold the putter at the top of the grip with your trail hand, palm facing the target. Take your index finger off the grip. Now put your lead hand below the trail hand, its little finger against the trail hand's middle finger. Overlap the trail index finger over the lead hand fingers.

WHY USE IT?

It lets you pull the putterhead through, rather than the standard pushing feeling. Advocates say improves head stability, in the same way it's easier to pull a shopping trolley in a straight line rather than push it.



STRONG LEAD

Lead hand low also puts the lead wrist – often a source of weakness in the putting stroke – into a bowed and stronger position, helping it remain firm through impact.



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Hole out with confidence

Your confidence with short putting will soar when you know you have that lead wrist under control. While a firm wrist holds the face square, a weak one can quickly break down under pressure, throwing the blade offline. Here are three ways to put some steel back into the wrist... and gain the upper hand.



LEADING INFLUENCE

Your lead wrist motion strongly influences how the putter's face moves. To keep the face square through impact, the wrist must avoid any flicking or rotating while moving positively through the ball.



Wrist control 1: Vertical handle

Check the putter runs down your palm, not across it, and the lifeline in the middle of your inside wrist is against the grip. This immobilises the lead wrist, helping to keep the clubface stable and under control.

Wrist control 2: Train a firm lead wrist

Wedge a ball between your forearm and handle. Hit a series of putts. If your wrists are flapping, the gap

between ball and wrist will grow and it will fall. Hit 10 putts keeping the ball in place before trying without the ball.



Wrist control 3: Forward press

Your set-up can put the lead wrist in a buckled and vulnerable position. Take charge of this by pushing it towards the target. As well as giving the wrist a straighter and stronger alignment, this works well as a trigger to set the stroke in motion.





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Tee drills for better putting

If you have a kink in your putting stroke, getting technical to find the solution isn't always the best idea as it hinders the stroke's flow. Instead, Use simple feedback drills to identify the problem and train the solution. Here are two effective solutions that need nothing more than a pair of tee pegs.

Drill 1: Train a square face at impact

Strike two pegs simultaneously to keep the blade looking at the target

FRAME THE LINE

Set up to a six-foot putt. Stick two tee pegs either side of your ball-hole line, a couple of inches forward of the putter's face and just wider than the ball. Make sure the pegs are square to the line.



SQUARE PEGS, ROUND HOLE

Go ahead and strike the putt. If your blade is open you'll strike the inner tee first; if it's shut it'll be the outer peg. A square delivery sees them impacted at the same time. Use this drill to identify your issues and train a square delivery.

Drill 2: Train a centred strike

Deliver the putter through a narrow gate to find the sweetspot

DEAD CENTRE

Strike a series of putts from here. A tendency to catch the outer tee means a heel strike; if you keep hitting the inner tee, impact is out of the toe.

Consistently miss them both and you are finding the middle of the putter. Use this drill whenever your striking is off.



NARROW GATE

This time, address the putt as normal but insert the two tees either side of the putter's blade. Be very tight with this, leaving only a small margin either side of the toe and heel. Make sure the ball is opposite the putter's sweetspot.



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On the right lines

The vast majority of six-foot-plus putts you face will have some degree of break and need careful reading to find the right line. But in reading the putt, the amateur player rarely allows for enough break and misses on the low side. These images help explain why... and what you can do about it.



ANATOMY OF A BREAKING PUTT

This image should help to show you why it is we come up low of the hole so often. The orange cane represents the ball-hole line. The white string is stretched out along the ball's ideal starting line, projecting to hole-high. The arc of balls illustrates the path the ball needs to take to drop.



THE APEX ILLUSION

Most of you will have heard off the 'apex' of a putt – where the ball's position is furthest from the ball-hole line. On this putt, the apex is the fourth ball from the putter. The apex usually becomes the golfer's aiming point. But take a close look to see if you can work out why this leads to low putts.



Key difference

Here is the same putt from a different angle – looking back down the ideal starting line. Again, look at the fourth (apex) ball: see how far it is inside the starting line projection (white string)? If you started the putt at that fourth ball, it would clearly finish low.

LOW LINE

Note it well; because the ball starts to break towards the target as soon as it is hit, the apex point of a putt is always lower than your ideal starting line.

NEW TARGET

So rather than line up to the apex, extend your starting line to hole-high and aim at that point; it'll help you allow the break you need to get the putt rolling at the hole.



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Improve your lag putting

Your ability to control distance is at the mercy of your quality of strike. With toe and heel contacts losing distance and creating inconsistency, it's important to find the

centre of the face as the stroke gets longer. The biggest problem here is letting your head and body move about during the stroke. These tips and drills will help.

Drill 1: Cane clash

Keep your lower body more stable during the stroke



CROSS PURPOSE

Place an alignment cane upright, a foot or so in front of your lead foot. Use a bungee cord to attach the second across the front of your knees. Set up with the knee cane a few inches in front of the upright one, as shown.

GAP MAINTAINED

A rock solid lower half allows your upper body to hold its position, promoting an accurate and centred strike. Maintain the gap between the canes to train that stability.

WARNING SIGN

Strike the putt. The cane across your knees becomes an instant messenger of unwanted body rotation; twist too much and the canes collide.



Drill 2: Club prop

If you don't have canes, this drill works too

LET'S NOT TWIST AGAIN

For a simpler way of achieving the same effect, lean a mid-iron against your lead thigh after you take your address. Twist excessively during the stroke and the club will fall to the turf. Keep steady and side-on and it stays up.



Drill 3: Coin strike

An easy way to keep your head still

EYES DOWN

Keep your eyes glued to the coin after the putter has removed the ball. This removes any tendency to lift up and out of the putt early, a common tendency which compromises the blade's aim and the strike's contact point.



COIN TEE

Start by placing the ball on top of a coin. Then take your regular set-up but focus on the coin. Strike the putt.



How to practise

Your short game needs sound technique to play with consistency and precision. However, you also need to develop the art of scoring. Unfortunately your attention

can only be in one place at a time, which is why the two areas don't really mix. Your short game work will be most effective when split into three discrete categories.



1

TECHNICAL PRACTICE

In technical practice you are working repetitively, to train new mechanics and muscle memory. With your focus on the new move you're working on, contact with the ball and the shot's result should take a back seat.

2

TRANSITIONAL PRACTICE

This starts moving you away from simple technique and more into on-course situations. When you hit shots, start to vary the lie, length of shot and the desired landing spot. Also, start paying attention to the quality of the strike.

3

TOURNAMENT PRACTICE

Play one ball – which must be dropped – from one spot. This mode is all about scoring, so try games like par 18 – nine shots around the green, how low can you score? Ban technical thoughts and use your score to check progression.

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