

Part 2

Get on the Green and in the Hole

Save Shots with Your Short Game

How to knock the ball close to the pin and sink more than your fair share of putts when you miss on your approach

With Eric Johnson

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Site of the 2010 U.S. Women's Open

HITTING THE BALL LONG OFF

the tee and nailing approach shots close to the pin is a lot of fun, but if you care about shooting your best scores possible you'll have to learn to get the ball in the hole. This is a lesson we all learn as we continue to pursue the game, and it can definitely be frustrating. Why are the short shots so maddening? In part it's because the target you're shooting for is so small, but also because the strokes on and around the green seem to count for more than the longer ones.

On the following pages we'll cover some simple drills and tips that will help you get the job done once and for all. Pay close attention to the putting tips that deal with speed control, stroke technique and aiming the putterface. These are key areas that you need to master if you want to be a solid putter. And don't forget to review the chipping, pitching and bunker drills—if you can't get the ball on the green, you can't get it in the hole.

**NEW
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Turn and
Open →

1 Turn Misses Into Pars

Your approach missed the green. Big deal! These pitch and bunker plays will get you back in the match.



2 Chip It On, Chip It Close

Chip shots are like superheroes—flying in to rescue your score. Here's how to save the day.



3 Choose the Right Putt

If you don't start off right or get the right pace, it can't go in the hole.



4 Make a Confident Stroke

Adopt the right mind-set and the right stroke mechanics to hole more putts.



BLAST IT CLOSE FROM SAND



Step into any practice bunker, take your address and swing. If you're like most golfers, you forgot a very important step: digging in with your feet. Sure, you shuffled your feet to get comfortable in the sand, but you likely didn't dig those puppies deep into the sand. **The more you dig your feet into the sand, the more you lower the bottom of your swing arc** below the surface of the bunker. This allows you to enter the sand behind the ball, swing directly underneath the ball, and exit the sand in front of the ball without worrying about how to manipulate your wedge to make it all happen. —*Top 100 Teacher Mark Hackett*

TIGHTEN UP YOUR PITCH SWING



A tee tells you if you're correctly hitting pitch shots with your body turn.

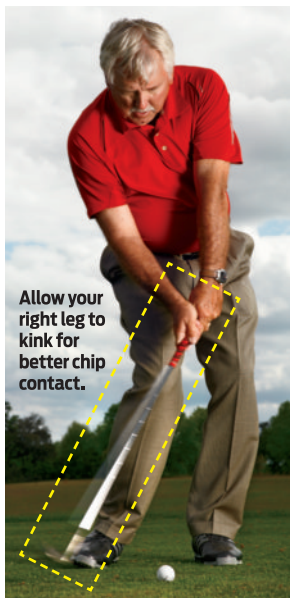
Stick a tee through the hole on the top of your grip and make what you feel is a solid 50-yard pitch swing. Hold your finish with your hands at waist height (any higher and you will have hit the shot too far) and check the tee. If it's pointing to the left side of your torso, **then you correctly kept your hands ahead of the club** and used your body to hit the shot. If the tee points at your stomach, then you flipped your hands or stopped turning. You won't even need to look at the tee—your poor technique will show up in your results. Repeat until you can point the tee at your left side every time. —*Top 100 Teacher Dr. Gary Wren*

HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT CHIP CLUB

We asked 27 golfers to play greenside chips with both lob wedge and sand wedge from (1) a clean lie to an easily accessible pin; (2) a clean lie with very little green between the fringe and the flagstick; (3) an uphill lie in the rough; and (4) a downhill lie in the rough over a bunker. Each shot was hit only once to simulate the pressure of having to hit a good shot on the first swing. What club did the better job? Here are the results:



SHOT TYPE	DISTANCE FROM PIN	SAND WEDGE	LOB WEDGE	RESULT
1. Chip from uphill rough	71 ft.	13' 9"	19' 4"	SW: 29% closer
2. Downhill over a bunker	84 ft.	32' 4"	24' 1"	LW: 29% closer
3. Chip from fairway	50 ft.	9' 1"	12' 9"	SW: 29% closer
4. Chip to a tight pin	38 ft.	4' 11"	8' 6"	SW: 42% closer



Allow your right leg to kink for better chip contact.

CONTROL DISTANCE AND ACCURACY ON EVERY CHIP

One of the most overlooked chipping fundamentals is leg action—most golfers assume that you need to keep your legs extra quiet when you chip. However, a little leg action goes a long way toward helping you produce the right kind of contact.

On your way back to the ball, allow your right leg to kink in—it should feel like your right knee is gently moving toward the target as you swing through impact. Notice in the photo above how this angles my lower right leg, and how this angle matches the lean of the shaft. This is what allows you to hit slightly down on the ball and catch the ball crisply. —*Top 100 Teacher John Elliott, Jr.*

THE SECRET TO TOUR-QUALITY CHIP SHOTS



Think of your chip swing as an elongated version of your putting stroke. Swing the club back using the triangle formed by your shoulders and arms. A bit of wrist hinge is okay to add some feel to the shot, but **as you strike the ball you want your left wrist to be as flat as possible**. Keep the triangle—and specifically, your left arm—moving all the way through the shot. Stopping your movement leads to deceleration and a poor result. If you copy the positions above, you'll get the majority of your chips into tap-in range and save par more often than not. —*Top 100 Teacher Kellie Stenzel*

GET YOUR PUTTERFACE AIMED CORRECTLY

When it comes to putting any type of green, the most important thing to get correct is the aim of your putterface. Getting this correct is mandatory because without it, everything else you do is relatively meaningless. And it's shocking how few players can actually aim correctly: **80 percent of amateur players can't aim their putter at the hole on a straight putt from six feet**, and 90 percent of amateurs can't get it right from ten feet.



Dial in the right aim by moving the ball back or forward in your stance.



Use a dowel to determine the quality of your aiming ability.

To nail this critical element every time I recommend using a wooden dowel to check your face alignment.

Here's my simple technique: Set up to a hole from about six feet as though you were about to make an important putt. Then remove the ball and place the face of your putter [photo, left]. If it aims too far to the right of the hole, adjust your ball position by moving it a bit forward in your stance. If you find you're aimed too far to the left, try moving the ball back a bit in your stance. Keep checking your aim until the dowel points directly at the hole. Once you get it right, practice that position until you can nail your line every time. —*Eric Johnson*

BY THE NUMBERS

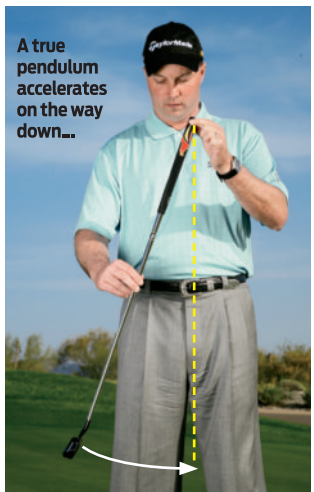
Distance control is the bane of the amateur putting game, which is why pace problems like the one Eric Johnson discusses in the dollar-bill tip at right can't be ignored. The PGA Tour's Shotlink system keeps track of how far Tour players and amateurs leave their first putt from the hole. On average, amateurs face a 70 percent longer second putt than the professionals do.



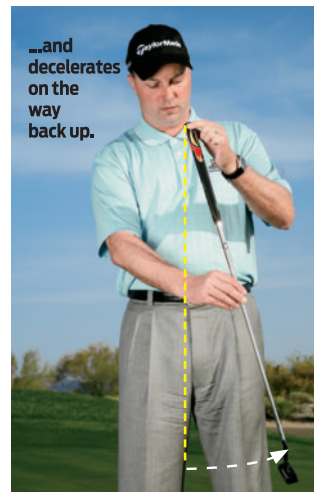
MAKE THE HOLE AS BIG AS POSSIBLE

On fast greens like the ones we have at Oakmont C.C., hitting the ball hard enough to send it a few feet past the cup is a mistake—if you don't make the putt, you're effectively making the cup smaller for your second putt. Think of it this way: a dollar bill is six inches long—about one revolution of a ball—and for every dollar bill you hit past the hole you effectively shrink the hole by about 10 percent. In other words, the farther you are from the hole, the smaller it looks. If you hit it five dollars past the hole you reduce the size by about 50 percent, which makes the cup look like a thimble. It doesn't take much to send a ball five dollars past the hole, so I suggest you **approach putts with the idea that you want the ball to just trickle over the edge**. You'll make more one-putts this way, and your two-putts will be a lot less stressful.

PUTT LIKE A PENDULUM



A true pendulum accelerates on the way down...



...and decelerates on the way back up.

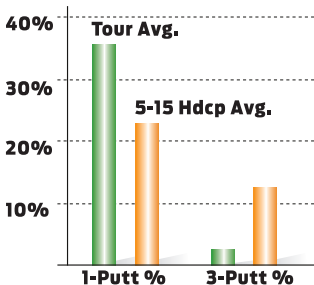
We've all heard that you need to accelerate the putter through impact if you want to put a tight roll on the ball and get it to the hole. In reality, speeding up the putterhead too much through the ball is one of the biggest mistakes I see from recreational players. They put too much energy into the forward-stroke and lose their sense of touch and speed control. This isn't the type of stroke that you make when you want to feed the ball over the edge of the hole.

Instead, I want you to imagine your stroke as a true pendulum that swings back freely and then slightly decelerates as it moves past the bottom of the arc [photos above]. If you play the ball a bit forward in your stance, which is a must if you want to hit up on it slightly, the putterhead is actually slowing down at contact because it's located ahead of the bottom of the swing arc (provided you don't put too much muscle power behind it). The words I like to think

of are "coasting," "gliding," and "smooth." This is the proper mind-set for putting on faster greens and one you need to adopt if you want to get your speed correct.

BY THE NUMBERS

As you can guess, Tour players make a higher percentage of one-putts than recreational players, but the gap isn't as large as you might think. You'll find a bigger discrepancy in the frequency of three-putts.

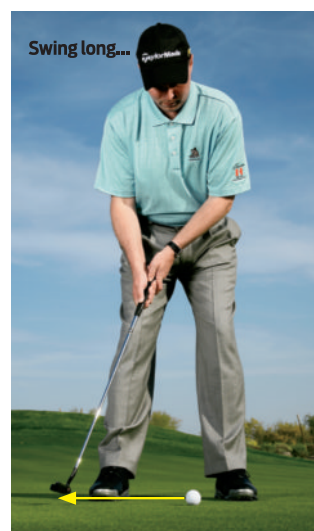


GO LONG TO SHORT FOR SUCCESS

Traditional instruction typically advises that you either make a short backstroke and a long, accelerating forward-stroke, or that you match the length of your stroke on both sides of the ball. My advice is that you do neither, particularly on fast greens. Here's why: if you take a short backstroke you'll over-accelerate the putterhead through impact, leading to too much speed on the putt and very little touch. If you match the length of your strokes you'll do the same thing, just to a slightly lesser extent.

What I want you to do is to get used to making a normal-

length backstroke (or even a longer-than-normal backstroke) and then a significantly shorter forward-stroke. If you think "long to short" you'll be on the right track. Although this type of stroke is considered wrong by many putting gurus, **I've found that it actually encourages my students to putt with more feel and to worry less about mechanics**. The key is to focus on gliding the putterhead through impact and letting it stop on its own. If you just think about distance control and forget about accelerating the putterhead, you'll get it right in no time.



Swing long...



...to short.

golf.com/instruction

Catch Eric Johnson's video lessons on putting speed and distance control to dominate any green you play.

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