

Time to Master the Short Game

Many of my students contend that if they could only hit their driver, they would be a much better golfer. The reality is that they have a much better chance at lowering their scores by being more accurate and consistent with their shots inside 50 yards.

If you want to hit a driver, save that for the end of practice but spend at least 85% of your time working on your short game.

In fact, if you come closer to mastering just two techniques from 5 to 50 yards away from the green, I guarantee that you will shoot lower scores.

When it comes to the short game, there are three types of shots: low trajectory, medium trajectory, and high trajectory. The low trajectory shot is a chip shot and is the easiest, most high-success shot the game of golf offers. Mastering this shot will leave you thinking that you can hole out every time you find yourself just off the green. That type of mentality will leave you more taps in than ever before.

A medium trajectory shot is called the pitch shot and allows the sand or lob wedge's bounce to slide under the ball, producing a higher shot that lands close to your intended target and produces minimal rollout. While the chip shot has the highest success rate, the pitch shot is the one you'll use roughly 85% of the time, usually between 10 to 50 yards off the green.

The third shot is the high trajectory shot, commonly referred to as the lob, flop, or even sand shot. You'll need your highest lofted club to execute this shot but it is always the last option you'll want to turn to as it's the lowest percentage of the three shots when it comes to executing.

Chip Shot Checkpoints

Making a chip shot is the easiest shot because there's really not a lot happening with your body, including your hands. Think of a chip shot as a putt, simply using a lofted club. Keys to the chip starts with a narrow stance and positioning the ball closer to your trail foot than to your lead foot. Of course, the easiest way to hit a lower shot is to select a club with less loft, such as a 7, 8, or 9 iron. Hit this shot

by starting with leaning the handle just in front of your lead thigh with 70 to 75% of your weight on your lead foot. From there, make a short backswing with minimal wrist hinge and a follow through that finishes with the clubhead staying well below your hands. You'll want to raise the handle just slightly, lean the shaft towards the target, and, again, feel as if you have 70 to 75% of your weight on your front side.

Pro Tip: Squeeze your elbows tightly together throughout the entire swing. Practice by using a 7 iron through a sand wedge so that you can learn how the ball reacts with each club and which is most comfortable for your particular game. That way, when you find yourself just off the green you'll be able to trust your training, be more aggressive and feel confident about your ability to knock it close.

Pitch Shot Checkpoints

For medium trajectory shots we simply have to use our brain and go backwards from what we learned about the chip shot. That starts with grabbing a higher lofted club with some bounce built in, primarily a sand or lob wedge.

From there play the ball in the center or slightly towards your lead foot. Next, you will not lean the shaft towards the target and keep your weight very close to 50/50. While your backswing will be a bit lengthier than the chip shot, you'll want to incorporate more wrist hinge, trying to keep the handle of the club close to your body on both the backswing and the follow through.

Unlike the chip shot, where the club handle will reach the ball well before the clubhead, you'll want both to cross the "finish line" (where the ball is) at close to the same time. Hinging your wrist and using the club's natural bounce, you'll slide the club under the ball much easier. You'll want to make sure you turn your hips and shoulders while straightening both legs as much as possible in the follow through.

Pro Tip: The pitch works well from both the rough as well as from the fairway. You'll have to practice the length of the arc of your swing to manage your distance control.

It takes some work to get the courage up to execute the pitch shot during an actual round of golf, but trust your practice and you'll be hitting pitch shots and stopping the ball very close to the hole just like the pros.

