

MORE DISTANCE WITH LESS EFFORT? SURELY NOT!!!

I ask all of my new students what they hope to get out of having lessons and one of the most common answers is, "I would like to hit the ball more consistent and if I could get a little more distance that would be very nice too."

To achieve our maximum learning potential in golf it helps to have a little information on what we are required to do to make this difficult game work for us. So let's begin our lesson here.

Our Equipment has been designed to do a specific job and knowing what it is may help us understand what our aim is when hitting a golf ball.

Golf Ball Design

The golf ball has dimples to create drag when it is flying through the air. A golf ball needs to be doing two things to stay in the air; forwards velocity so the air hits the front of the ball and backspin to create lift.

To apply backspin to a golf ball we need a downward force on the back of the ball.

Golf Club Design

Each golf club in the bag is designed with a shaft that leans towards the target. That is if we place a particular club with the sole flat on the ground, the shaft will be angled forwards and this will be the true loft of the golf club. This will place the hands ahead of the clubhead. Our ball position is determined by how much each club's shaft leans forwards. The SW for instance should be played from the middle of the stance as it has a great deal of shaft lean forwards while the driver is played near the front foot as it has only very minimal shaft lean forwards.

So... our equipment is designed to help the ball stay in the air if we hit down on the ball.

The Golfers Swing

The golfer swings the club in a circle around his body on an incline. So where is the centre of the golfer's circle and where is the bottom of the golfer's circle?

The centre of the golfer's circle is the target side shoulder (for RH golfers this is the left shoulder). The bottom of any circle is due south of the centre of the circle which places the bottom of the swing or "low point" below the left shoulder. This will then mean the left arm and the golf club make up the radius of the golfer's circle.

When we put all this together...

- The golf ball needs backspin to create the lift it needs to stay in the air. To do this the golfer must hit down on the back of the ball.
- The club is designed with a forward leaning shaft so we impact the ball before the low point of the swing on the downward section of the arc.
- If we keep our target side arm straight the clubhead will continue on its natural swing arc trying to continue down to the low point of the swing which is why we should take divots. The ball will get in the way of the club's downward journey to the low point of the swing. The loft will launch the ball in the air and the downward blow will ensure the ball has backspin which will keep it in the air longer. More backspin should in most cases equal more distance. This is the reason golf professionals hit the ball a long way but also spin the ball on the green.

Chipping Lesson

To help you achieve a downward blow on the ball we can start to learn it easiest with a small stroke. Perfect the impact in a small stroke then progress into a bigger swing until you can achieve a full swing whilst maintaining a good impact.

Set Up for a chip...

- Grip the club in the life line of your top hand so the shaft of the club is in line with your forearm
- Feet are fairly close together with the front foot turned out about 45 degrees
- Ball positioned on the back foot
- Hang the target side arm straight down from shoulder and this is where you grip the club. This will mean the club is leaning well forwards.
- Move your head toward your front foot so your weight is about 75% forwards.

Your hands now being forwards of the ball should mean for a RH golfer the left wrist is flat and the right wrist is bent... this is reversed for a LF golfer.

The butt of the club will be pointing outside your target side shoulder... imagine a laser beam coming out of the butt of the club. This laser beam should not touch your body at any time in the chip.

The Chip itself...

Now that you have the correct set up there is no need to change any of your alignments.

- Keeping your head and body perfectly still and not changing the angle of your wrists draw the club back a foot or so. The wrists should stay firm and not bend, cock or roll. The hands and club form a "y" and you should endeavour to maintain this "y" throughout the whole swing.
- Then we gently accelerate the club to the low point of the swing (The low point of the swing is now well in front of the ball and outside the target line a little as we are swinging on an incline.)

Swinging through to the low point of the swing arc and allowing the ball to get in the way of the clubheads path will ensure there is no quitting or steering on the shot. It may help while learning this to place your back foot behind you and up on its toe to ensure you keep all your weight forward and your head still while chipping.

Pitching Lesson

Once you have learnt to solidly impact a chip shot you can now progress to a pitch shot.

Set up for a pitch...

- Grip the club in the fingers of your top hand so you can now cock and roll your wrists
- Ball position is in the middle of the stance with hands still forwards in front of your target side leg.
- Feet are still narrow but a touch wider than a chip shot to accommodate a slightly bigger swing.
- Move your head slightly toward your front foot so your weight is now 60% on your front foot

The Pitch itself...

Now you have the correct set up there is no need to move your head or body too much or risk destroying your impact.

- Keeping your head and body still draw the club back similar to a chip but now add a cock and turn of the hands. The hands will go the same distance back as a chip but the cock and turn of the hands will mean the clubhead travels further up the backswing arc.
- Then we uncock and roll our hands to the follow through position where both arms are straight. Make sure you maintain your "y" finish and don't accelerate the clubhead past your hands which will bend the left wrist. This is called flipping.

Swinging through to the low point of the swing arc and allowing the ball to get in the way of the clubhead's path will ensure there is no quitting or steering on the shot. It may help while learning this to place your back foot behind you and up on its toe to ensure you keep all your weight forward and your head still while pitching.

Below is a small video I did showing a chip shot and a pitch shot and helps explain the above set up and technique.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWytvPOlp_A

The pitch is a small version of the full swing... Learning how to impact the ball with a downward strike and compression will lead to more consistent ball strikes, a more stable ball flight through the air and if the ball is now spinning backwards more it will stay in the air longer.

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