

GolfDigest



BREAKING

100/90/80

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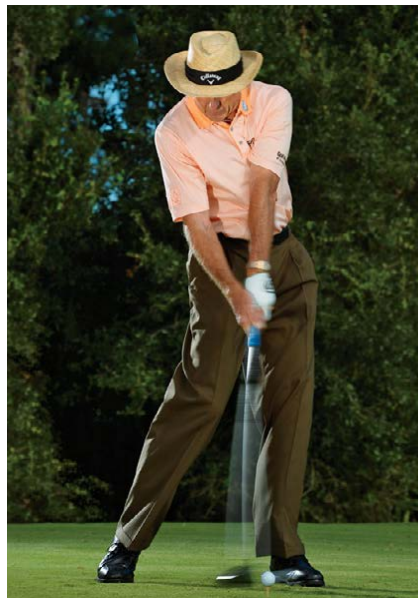
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Play Your Best | by Butch Harmon

Rule No. 1 in the Sand

Get it right,
and you'll
hit perfect
bunker shots

Everybody says amateurs can't get out of greenside bunkers because they're crushed by fear. Well, that's part of it, but the bigger thing is, they set up in a way that makes it almost impossible to hit a good shot. They get bad results, so the fear develops, but the root cause is a poor setup.

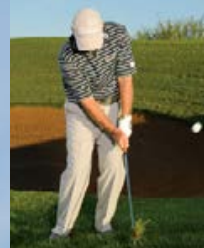
A lot of golfers treat bunker shots like pitch or chip shots. They set up with the ball in the middle of the stance and push their hands ahead so the shaft is leaning toward the target. That's fine if you want to hit the ball first, but in a greenside bunker you want to hit the *sand* first. With the ball middle, you catch it clean and skull it, or you try to shift back during the swing to get the club in the sand behind

the ball. That's hard to do. If you go back too far, you hit it on the upswing—another way to skull it.

To set up properly, play the ball forward—opposite your front instep (*below, left*). Also, open the clubface before you take your grip. That will expose the bounce feature on the bottom of your sand wedge, which helps the club slide through the sand. With the ball forward, you can make your normal swing and enter the sand two to three inches behind it, the clubhead passing your hands through impact (*below, right*). That will happen naturally if you set up correctly, which is the best thing you can do to help your bunker game.

Butch Harmon is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

BUTCH'S BASICS



▶ If your ball is in thick greenside rough, that's when you want to play the ball middle and lean the shaft forward. You're setting up a downward strike so the club's leading edge digs under the ball. Notice above, the clubhead is not passing my hands. It's more of a digging action, not the splashing or skimming action you want from bunkers.

PLAY IT UP

With the ball forward, you can swing into the sand behind it.

SLIDE UNDER

Let the clubhead pass your hands for a skimming action in the sand.



FOOTJOY: SHIRT, \$72; PANTS, \$86; SHOES, \$190 • TITLEIST: HAT, \$27; GLOVE, \$21 • HOUSE OF FLEMING: BELT • ROLEX: WATCH



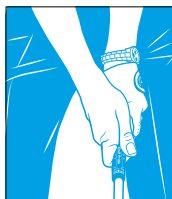
Finish Strong

Swing it like The Big Easy

After all these years, Ernie Els still swings the club like he's out for a Sunday stroll. There's real power and effort behind his tee shots, but you'd never know that if you judged his swing only by its tempo. On the flip side, many amateurs take a wild hack at the ball, like it just insulted a family member. If you want a smooth-looking swing like The Big Easy's, follow these steps to better tempo.

David Leadbetter is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

1. SQUEEZE, THEN RELAX



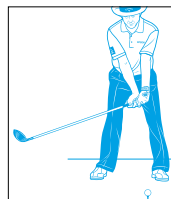
► Tension breeds poor tempo. It starts with a tight grip. To feel how lightly you should hold the club, squeeze the handle as hard as you can, then relax. Sense the lightness, especially in your forearms.

2. REMEMBER TO BREATHE



► Quick test: Take a deep breath and hold it. Do you feel some of your muscles tightening? This is the opposite of your goal when you swing. Exhale to relax the muscles before starting the club back.

3. FEEL THE CLUB'S WEIGHT



► Instead of standing still, wagging the club by moving your wrists back and forth is a great ignition for your swing. But it also helps you feel the weight of the clubhead—important for a fluid motion.

4. DON'T SKIMP GOING BACK



► Complete the windup of your backswing to avoid the urge to swing down aggressively as a compensation. You don't want to ruin your rhythm and tempo. A full backswing leads to a smooth through-swing.

Play Your Best | by Tom Watson



From the Ground Up

An effective golf swing starts with your feet

Whenever I evaluate a golfer's ability, I first check for a proper grip and a balanced, athletic setup. Then I watch the footwork, which ultimately determines how efficiently the player creates clubhead speed.

Proper footwork is a necessity for consistency and power,

and there's a sequence you should strive for. Start with your center of gravity directly between the balls of your feet. Then as you take the club back, let your weight transfer slightly to the inside of your right foot and eventually toward the heel.

As you start the downswing, plant your left heel firmly to ini-

tiate the forward rotation of your hips. Replanting the left heel is an important lesson that my teacher, Stan Thirsk, taught me when I was growing up. It allows you to accelerate your swing and release the club powerfully through impact.

If your footwork is good, you'll be able to finish the swing in a posed position. Look for almost all of your weight on your front foot, with your back foot used only as a counterbalance.

Tom Watson is a Golf Digest Playing Editor.

ELEMENTARY WATSON

▶ If you want to hit it longer, copy the power moves in other sports. Whether it's hitting a baseball, playing a forehand in tennis, throwing a pass or even kicking a soccer ball, you shift and turn your lower body—feet in particular—toward the intended target. You plant the lead foot, turn the hips and then go with the upper body or leg. That's an athletic move. Golf is the same.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN CALDWELL • POLO GOLF: SHIRT, \$90; PANTS, \$198 • BELT, \$995 • G/FORE: GLOVE, \$35

Play Your Best | by Butch Harmon

Consistency Counts

Keep the ball in one place for every club

A lot of what determines whether you hit a good or bad shot happens at address. The simplest thing is ball position. If you get the ball in the right spot, good things tend to fall into place. Get it in the wrong spot, and things fall apart.

I like keeping the ball in the same position for all clubs on standard full shots. Start with the driver: Play it in line with your shirt logo, and drop your right foot away from the target in a wide stance (*below, left*). This sets up an upward strike.

For a middle iron, don't move your right foot out as wide and

keep the ball in the same place relative to your front foot. This narrower stance puts you more on top of the ball so you can hit down on it (*middle*).

When you get to the wedges, the stance is the narrowest and you even lean a bit toward the target at address (*right*). From there, you can really hit down and rip a divot after impact.

In short, it's about how wide the right foot goes. That sets the relationship of the body to the ball—but the ball doesn't move.

Butch Harmon is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

BUTCH'S BASICS

▶ People tend to get fixated on the ball and try to lift it at impact. That leads to thin contact and even topped shots. Here's a drill to get you hitting down and through the shot. On the range, tee up your iron shots like you do on a par 3. Then focus on knocking the tee out of the ground. You'll hit down more at impact and start really compressing the ball.



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN CALDWELL • FOOTJOY: SHIRT, \$72, PANTS, \$85, SHOES, \$180 • TITLEIST: HAT, \$27, GLOVE, \$24 • HOUSE OF FLEMING: BELT • ROLEX: WATCH

Play Your Best | by David Leadbetter



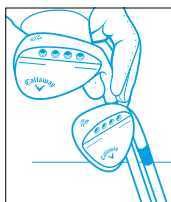
Get It There

Why you should swing easy with short irons

Generally speaking, avoid trying to hit your short irons hard. The more aggressively you swing, the more height you're likely to create with those lofted clubs, so the ball will tend to go a shorter distance. If you're lucky, you might get to the front of the green—that's why you see so many approach shots come up short of the flag. There's a much more effective and reliable way to hit your short irons. Start by following these simple steps.

David Leadbetter operates 25 golf academies worldwide.

1. MAKE THE SMART CHOICE



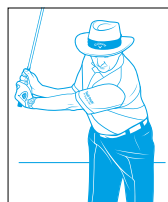
► Club selection is Step One to controlling distance. Let's say you're 90 yards out, and you know that's the maximum you can hit your sand wedge. Instead of pulling that club, take a longer one, like your gap or pitching wedge, to hit the shot.

2. GRIP DOWN, STAND NARROW



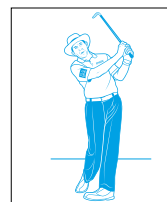
► To limit how far the ball flies with the longer club, grip down an inch and stand with your feet closer together than normal. These two adjustments will help you gear down, which should prevent you from hitting the less-lofted club over the green.

3. SHORTEN YOUR SWING



► There's no need to make a big turn off the ball or finish with the club wrapped around your body. Instead, shorten the swing. Feel as if you're making a backswing half as long as standard, and finish with the club still in front of your body.

4. DON'T TRY TO FORCE IT



► Resist the urge to swing hard. There should be no appreciable effort to get the ball to the hole. Just make a smooth and rhythmic motion. The ball will come off the club lower and more accurately, so your next shot will be a makable putt.

Play Your Best | by David Leadbetter



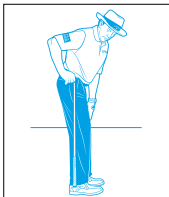
Power Shift

Training your lower body to hit it flush

Many golfers get happy feet when they try to take a healthy cut at the ball. They look as if they're spinning out of control, like a car on an icy road. A lack of stability in the lower body puts them in a weak position coming into impact. To consistently make better contact and finish your swing in a comfortable pose, follow these four steps for improved lower-body action.

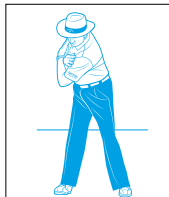
David Leadbetter is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

1. GET YOUR LEGS ALIGNED



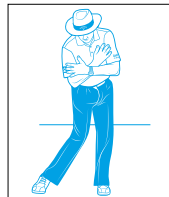
► A balanced setup promotes good use of the lower body. Bend from your hip joints a little so they're stacked over the backs of your knees, down through your ankles. Check this with a club-shaft (*above*).

2. PERFECT YOUR PIVOT



► As you go back, sense your weight being increasingly supported by your right heel. To get a feel for this movement, cross your arms and practice your backswing pivot without a club, like I'm doing here.

3. SHIFT, AND THEN ROTATE



► Initiate the downswing with a shift of the lower body toward the target. You'll feel it initially in the forward half of your left foot. Make this shift before you rotate your upper body around that leg.

4. MOVE TO THE LEFT HEEL



► Finally, settle into your left heel and use your left leg as a post to swing around. Feel as if that leg is screwed into the ground, letting you brace for the strike and complete your swing in balance.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TODD DETWILER • JOS A. BANK: SHIRT, \$115 • HOUSE OF FLEMING: BELT

Play Your Best | by Hank Haney

Sharpen Your Aim

Learn this simple routine the pros use

Golf is hard. Don't make it any harder by turning good swings into bad results because you're not aiming properly.

Looking back at the great players, you see lots of different swings. But virtually all of these players aimed the same way, starting behind the ball and picturing where and how they wanted it to fly.

Many amateurs get in their stance first, then look up, see

some trouble and move their feet around to try to aim away from it. Or they take one look at the target, then focus all their attention down at the ball.

Try this instead. Stand behind the ball, facing the target, and see the line you want to start your shot on. Pick an intermediate target a few feet in front of your ball, and picture a line from your ball to that target. Then walk in and set your body lines—feet, hips

and shoulders—parallel to that line. Over the ball, look from the intermediate target to your real target as you “see” in your mind the shot you want to hit.

I'll bet you get better results without making a single change to your mechanics.

Hank Haney is based at the Hank Haney Golf Ranch, Lewisville, Texas. To get fixed in Golf Digest, send Hank your swing on Twitter: @HankHaney.

PGA Tour player Marc Leishman picks a target from behind the ball.

THE BALL GOES WHERE YOU LOOK

▶ One of the things they show you in driving school is that the car goes where you're looking. Stare at a tree, and you might smash into it. Same for golf. Obsess over that water hazard down the right side, and you're probably going in it, even if you try to hit an anti-right shot. Instead, stay focused on where you want to end up. Use your subconscious mind to your advantage.

ILLUSTRATION: AL MURPHY • CALLAWAY: HAT, \$28, GLOVE, \$25 • NEXBELT: BELT

Play Your Best | by Tom Watson



toward an imaginary ball. Then hold your driver across your shoulders and mimic the back-swing and through-swing. The club represents shoulder plane.

You want to make sure that your shoulder plane stays the same throughout the motion. It should be perpendicular to your spine. Turn your shoulders this way when it comes time to actually hit shots, and you'll return the club consistently to the same impact position. Now *you've* got the secret.

Tom Watson is a Golf Digest Playing Editor.

ELEMENTARY WATSON

▶ Sam Snead said you don't make the same swing with every club because the amount of spine tilt (how much your upper body bends forward) changes based on the length of the club. Your spine angle will be tilted down more when swinging shorter clubs. That's why it's important to keep your shoulder plane perpendicular to that tilt instead of turning your shoulders at the same angle for every club.

My Secret to Better Golf

Maintain your shoulder tilt

If you're not happy with early returns this season, check your shoulder turn. That's what helped pull me out of a long period of indifferent golf. During one particular range session, I identified a flaw in my downswing: I was dipping my right shoulder coming into impact, which caused me to fall back with my upper body. I realized that when my shoulder plane stayed the same in relation to my spine as I swung back and through, everything else—arms, hands, clubhead—would fall into a foolproof groove. In short, I discovered my secret to better golf.

To feel this, copy what I'm doing here. Start at address with your upper body tilted



POLO GOLF: SHIRT, \$90, PANTS, \$198, BELT, \$980 • G/FORE: GLOVE, \$35



Hidden Key to Solid Strikes

The supporting elements can make all the difference

The movement of the knees, though seldom discussed, is vital to hitting good shots. The knees provide stability, back and through, and help ensure you hit the ball with the center of the clubface.

Let's start with the front knee. On the backswing, it should remain flexed and pointing at or behind the ball. This


allows you to make a good hip turn and complete the backswing by fully shifting to your right side. On the downswing, the front knee should rotate a little toward the target, but more important, it has to straighten to brace the body for the hit.

The back knee also should remain flexed as you go back. This prevents the body from

swaying away from the target and out of position for impact. The back knee should start in a kicked-in position, pointing at the ball, and pretty much stay that way until you swing down. That's when it moves toward the ball before ending up tucked behind the front knee.

A good drill to help train better knee action is one I saw LPGA great Mickey Wright demonstrate in this magazine many years ago. Put a golf ball under the outside of your back foot and make some practice swings. This helps give you a feel for how to prevent that backswing sway that ruins so many shots. Give it a try, and your impact will improve.

ELEMENTARY WATSON

 I really like the "kicked-in" position of the back knee when it comes to chipping. It helps you hit down on the ball. Start with that knee leaning toward the target, then lean it more as you swing down. You'll keep the swing's low point in front of the ball for crisp contact.

Tom Watson
is a Golf Digest
Playing Editor.

POLO GOLF: SHIRT, \$90; PANTS, \$108 • RALPH LAUREN: BELT, \$495

Play Your Best | by Chris Kirk

Cheat Sheet for the Sand

**The 3 keys
you really
have to know**

During the offseason, I play a lot with my amateur buddies in Atlanta. I have a big edge in the short game, and bunker play in particular. These tips are for them—they know who they are—and for you, too.

(1) At address, lean to your front side. Push 80 percent of your weight to your forward leg, enough that you feel pressure

in the thigh. That sets up a descending blow. A lot of golfers hang on the back foot, sensing they need to help the ball up. But you've got to hit down.

(2) With the clubface slightly open, take the club back to the outside. Then swing down on an out-to-in path, but not too steep. You don't want to dig. You're looking for a sliding action. Let the bounce, the

heavy sole of your sand wedge, control the depth.

(3) The final key is rhythm. Keep it slow and smooth. See my long follow-through? You can only do that with a nice, even tempo. Remember these three tips, and you'll be fine.

Chris Kirk, 30, has four PGA Tour victories and played on the U.S. team that won the 2015 Presidents Cup.



TRAVIS MATHEW: SHIRT, \$85, PANTS, \$115 • CALLAWAY: SHOES, \$130, HAT, \$28, GLOVE, \$25

Play Your Best | by Tom Watson

Don't Skip the Hips

Turn them back for more power

The movement of the hips is important for generating clubhead speed at impact. But most golf instruction focuses on how the hips unwind as the club swings into the ball. Not to be ignored is how they should rotate on the backswing.

The hands, arms and shoulders start the swing, which in turn gets the hips to rotate. Notice I said "rotate." You don't

want the hips to slide. Brace on the inside of your right foot, and turn your right butt cheek behind you. Remember these keys: The right hip turns back, and the left knee moves toward the ball (*below*). That combination lets you fully wind the upper body, storing power that you'll use to fire the club through impact.

Hip rotation in the second half of the swing happens in a flash. As you shift your weight

forward by pressing down with the left heel, your hips will slide slightly, no more than a few inches toward the target. That slide happens as the hips start to undo their backswing turn.

Your end goal in the downswing is to transfer your weight to your left heel while rotating your hips until your bellybutton faces the target. Let your hips lead the way, and you'll max out your speed at impact.



ELEMENTARY WATSON

▶ The hips take a beating over years of playing golf, which is why I had a hip replacement in 2008. Stretching and exercises that strengthen the muscles around the pelvis are important. If you must have surgery, don't think your best golf is behind you. I almost won the British Open at age 59, and I've been able to compete in the Masters every year since 1975, this one being my last.

Tom Watson
is a Golf Digest
Playing Editor.

POLO GOLF: SHIRT, \$90, PANTS, \$85 • RALPH LAUREN: BELT, \$995



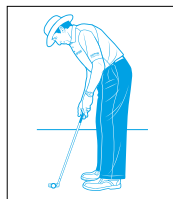
Gimme Range

How to roll your long putts stone dead

Being an effective long putter is about having good feel. The mistake many amateurs make is thinking they have to hit these putts harder. Any time you increase effort, you sacrifice feel, which is your ability to judge distance. What you want is a stroke that looks rhythmical and almost effortless. Follow these steps for better long putting.

David Leadbetter is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

1. GET TALLER AT ADDRESS



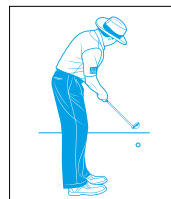
► Forget those old photographs of Nicklaus and Palmer hunched over the ball on the greens. To accommodate a longer putting stroke, it's easier if you stand taller with very little bend at the hips.

2. CHECK YOUR PRESSURE



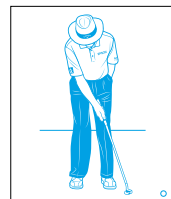
► Lighten your grip until you feel virtually no tension in your arms and shoulders. Your goal should be to make a smooth, free-flowing stroke back and through. And don't rush it.

3. LENGTHEN THE STROKE



► As I said, you shouldn't try to hit a long putt harder than a short one. Instead, simply lengthen the distance your putterhead moves both away from the ball and toward the target.

4. PRACTICE ONE-HANDED



► Improve feel by practicing with only your dominant hand. Notice your stroke gets longer and less jabby. You can do this before real putts, too. If you do, the next one should be a tap-in.