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"The Golf Expert"

Short Shots

Have you ever seen a poor golfer with a good short game? The answer is probably no. Have you ever seen a good golfer with a poor short game? The answer is again probably no. Peter explains this conundrum.



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Short Shots

I have written for many excellent magazines for over six years and now I am producing my own series of eBooks' and I admit I do spend a substantial amount of time on the headings.

As with all editorials, the headline is there to tempt the reader to explore the content and if the content is carefully written and thought out, perhaps the entire content will be read.

This article is focused on shots that are less than full shots. These shots are invariably called chip shots, chip and run shots, pitch shots, floating shots etc.

All shots that are less than full shots I simply call them short shots.

Nearly all short shots can be played with adjustments, NOT changes to your normal swing.

This should immediately make the short shots easier for you, as you can use your normal swing.

There are a few short shots that may require a departure from your normal swing but believe me they are few and far between.

Have you ever seen a good golfer with a poor shot game? The answer will probably be no.

Have you ever seen a poor golfer with a good short game? The answer again will probably be no.

The reason is that good golfers have good swings and they adapt their good swings to play good short shots whereas poor golfers have difficulty in adapting poor swings so their short shots are inevitably poor.

Tom Watson and Tiger Woods are great golfers with a great short game.

Picture 1: This picture shows my normal address position with a club with 56 degrees of loft. A shot with this club will travel less than one hundred yards.



Picture 2: This picture shows my normal address position with the same club to hit the ball approximately 25 yards.



The three key differences are: -

1. My right foot has moved closer to my left foot. This creates an illusion that the ball is now closer to the right heel but it is in fact in the same place as it was for the normal stance.
2. I have held the club slightly further down the shaft as shortening the club creates more control.
3. I have stood closer to the ball as this will change the line of the swing and allow the club head to go back and through slightly straighter.

The key move now is to take the club back as normal but less far so the club head is travelling slower at impact so the ball goes less far. If you understand that we are using our normal swing but controlling the length of the backswing to control the length of the shot then you will be able to play dozens of different shots with your normal swing.

This is how it works

The club in my hand has 56 degrees of loft and by taking the club head back up to 10 feet in 12" increments I can produce 10 different shots. I can then use clubs with loft angles of 52, 48, 44, 40, 36 and 32 degrees and by repeating the exercise I can produce a further 60 different shots. This makes a total of 70 different shots with the SAME SWING.

How many more different shots do you need?

NB. It is extremely important that your golf clubs have the correct loft with four degrees between clubs. Without the four-degree increments between clubs you will not achieve the desired results.

Have your clubs checked as soon as possible as not to long ago a pitching wedge would have 52 degrees of loft and it is now normal to have pitching wedge with 44 degrees of loft.

This is the same loft an eight iron used to have and is the reason why you have to have several 'gap' wedges to fill the artificial 'gap' created between a modern wedge with 44 degrees of loft and a sand wedge with 56 degrees of loft.

Have you noticed the difference in distance between your pitching wedge and sand wedge?

Now you know why. The numbers or names on clubs are not relevant as the golf ball only responds to the loft angle so have them checked.

Most of my pupils improve their short shots when they understand what the word pitch means. Any ball that goes in the air will pitch somewhere and either stop, run on, kick to the right or left or if the ball pitches in a tree it could go anywhere. It may be true that a tree has more air than branches but the ball always seems to hit a branch.

A ball hit with a driver or a lob wedge will pitch on the ground and react accordingly. By applying this fundamental to your short shots we can almost certainly improve them.

Good golfers read all shots before playing them.

This means they know where to pitch the ball and what they want it to do after contact with the ground.

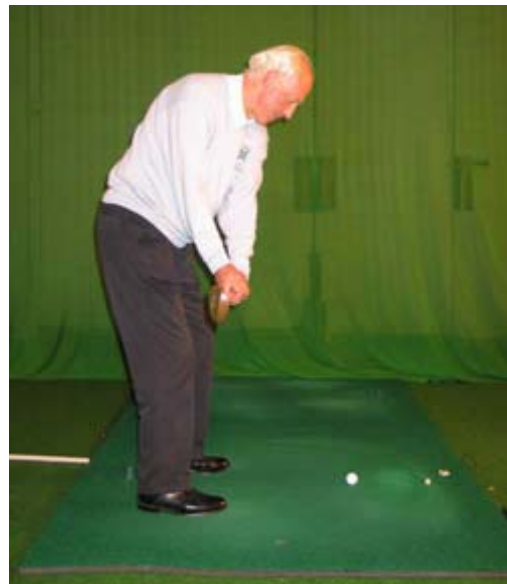
For example to play a straight forward shot of 50 yards with the pin in the middle of the green they will play a shot with a club with a loft of approximately 52 degrees swing half way back with their normal swing and the ball will go up in air land and stop fairly quickly.

To play a shot from 25 yards with the pin at the back of the green they will use a club with a loft of approximately 40 degrees take the club back less far so the ball pitches maybe 10-15 yards and runs the rest of the way.

There are dozens of shots you can play with different length backswings using different clubs with the SAME SWING.

One of the most important parts of any ones swing is the first movement back. The first movement back is even more important for the short shots and I will explain why.

Picture 3: This picture shows my normal first movement back with the shaft parallel to the ground and the target line. From here I would continue to the top of the backswing to hit a full shot and be in a good hitting position. I could also stop in this position and hit an excellent short shot.



Picture 4: This picture shows a poor first move with the shaft pointing to the left of the target line. It would be possible to correct this poor first move in the rest of the backswing for a full and still be in a good hitting position.



However, and this the crucial thing to remember, this is the end of the backswing for the short shot and unless you are a golfing genius it will not be possible to move the club back down to the ball correctly.

The ball may well go where the shaft is pointing i.e. to the left or in a desperate attempt to rescue the shot the ball could go anywhere.

A long term pupil of mine, a former Mid-Amateur Champion with a handicap of plus two had a similar problem recently as he moved his hands out a little too soon and then corrected this perfectly for the long shots.

However, he was slightly pulling his shots from 30 yards as he had no time to correct the faulty first move. The solution was to turn immediately so the club was moved back on line and the shots were then straight.

Turning immediately applies to ALL shots as Tiger Woods explained in the 2008 October edition of Golf World. "So many times I see my amateur partners butcher a simple pitch shot because of poor technique, anxiety or both."

The biggest reason for their failures that the upper body stops moving through impact causing a slight mis-hit at best, at worst, they lay the sod over it or blade it. One of the keys to consistently good pitching is keeping your chest turning towards the target on the through swing.

Your arms and shoulders follow you chest, not vice versa. Look at it this way: if your chest moves away from the ball your shoulders and arms also move. “Therefore, if your chest moves back towards the target, your shoulders and arms will follow.” That positive momentum, not the hands and arms moving by themselves is what propels the ball. Try to ‘hit with your chest’ on pitch shots.

I promise you’ll make better contact with the ball and hit it closer to the hole.” In all shots the chest moves the arms and the arms move the club.

Picture 5: This picture shows another faulty first move and with no time to correct the shaft angle the shot is doomed to failure, with the ball going straight to the right the likely outcome, or again a desperate attempt to rescue the shot with the hands and the ball could go anywhere and usually does.



A few ways not to play the short shots are.

Playing the ball back in the stance, as all this will do is reducing the loft angle.

Using just hands and arms will produce a very poor movement as your arms are attached to your shoulders and they need to move together.

Having a pendulum action will not produce good results, as the forward movement is normally three times longer than the backward movement.

Attempting to get under the ball to lift the ball is always disastrous as the loft on the club is there to move the ball upwards whilst you move the club forwards.

Hitting the ball down to make it go up is in the same category as the last observation.

A shot over a bank or a sand bunker to a hard green with a following wind is an almost impossible shot so accept that it is impossible and play accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Good swings produce good shots with all clubs and over all distances.

In your mind a short shot is just that – a short shot.

It is not a different shot.

A good technique is crucial. As a fellow coach once said: “Anyone who thinks psychology is more important than a good technique ought to see a Psychiatrist.”

I wish I had said that - it is so true.

Remember the club and ball are static, so you are in complete control.

Best Wishes and Keep Golfing