

CHIP like a pro

Most amateurs tend to hit their chipshots fat, thin or even duff them completely. The good news is that, in most cases, this is due to basic, fixable faults, says PGA pro *Greg McDonald*.



THE FIRST ACCIDENT occurs at the take-away. In most cases, the club is taken back by the right hand, often at too steep an angle. The player is then committed to a steep angle of attack with little margin for error. One of two errors occurs at this point: either you hit the ball fat or, realising you are likely to hit it fat, you flip your right hand at the ball, resulting in a thinned (teethed) shot.



THE SECOND MOST common error is to stop your left hand from swinging through the ball. What this does is spur your right hand into action, once again teething the ball and sending your playing partners scurrying for cover.

Rectifying these faults is not difficult, and with some practise you can learn to master your chipping game:



1 MOVE YOUR HANDS down the club slightly (known as choking down) by about one-and-a-half inches. This allows you to make a slightly bigger swing, maintaining more control over the club. Hold the club more tightly with the top three fingers of your left hand, allowing the left hand to become the 'engine' of the shot.



3 NOW PULL THE HEEL of the club back into the ball, leading with the left shoulder. Make sure your left side leads past the ball and that your right hand is only there to guide the club. Hit the ball first, and then the ground, resisting the impulse to try to get the ball into the air. Golf is a game of opposites, where you hit down to get the ball up. Follow through low, trying not to 'scoop' the ball.

2 KEEPING YOUR WEIGHT on your left side, open your stance slightly and rotate your hands in the backswing. In other words, open the club so the toe is pointing towards the sky. At the same time, make sure you keep the club as low to the ground as possible, so don't just pick it up with your hands, keep it shallow. This is easily achieved if you allow your chest and shoulders to turn to a certain extent, instead of allowing your hands to do all the work.

Looking at the followthrough, there are two ways to complete your swing:



1

AS YOU WOULD in a normal full shot, allow the club to rotate back through the ball, so the toe of the club points towards the sky when the swing is finished. The ball will come out at a normal trajectory, land on the green and release slightly.



2

THE OTHER OPTION is to keep the club open though impact – in other words there is no release through the ball, similar to a bunker shot. As the open clubface will point right of the target, you need to swing across your body, slightly to the left, in order to compensate for this discrepancy. At the end of the swing, the back of your left hand should end up pointing towards the sky. The result is a higher shot, with a softer landing and less run.

A few more thoughts

PLACING THE BALL further forward in your stance will help you hit it higher while further back will encourage more run. You need to play around with the pressure of your grip, finding the strength that is most comfortable for you, always remembering to control the club with your left hand. With soft hands you can absorb a lot of energy in your hands, resulting in a shot that comes out softly and stops dead, while a tighter grip is more suited to the bump and run shot. The length of the backswing is important too – if it's too long you open yourself up to decelerate, while if it's too short your right hand goes crazy.

It is important that, while sticking to the fundamentals mentioned above, each golfer should play around with various shots in order to become confident in what they are

aiming to achieve. While the flopshot may look impressive, it is often the shot that gets down as soon as possible and runs like a putt that wins bets. Don't confine yourself to one club, but use the club that is most suited to the shot you are trying to hit. It is a good idea to practise the chipshot with the left hand only, as this teaches you to avoid flipping the clubhead at the ball. Mostly though, use your imagination and have fun!



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