

“Short Game 101”

By: Brian Flugstad

People often ask me, “What is the best tip you ever received?” They are usually surprised to hear that it didn’t come from my days of playing professionally or from some top rated instructor. In fact it came while I was playing my collegiate golf at Washington State University. We were at a short game practice session at the old course in Pullman. While the driving range wasn’t much, they had a great putting and chipping green. One of my teammates was hitting all sorts of different shots. He wasn’t using the typical clubs one would expect. He was hitting shots with 5 irons, 3 woods, etc. Our coach walked up to him and politely asked him what he was doing. His response is where the tip came in. He said, “Coach, I am learning what my clubs can do”.

Since so much of the short game is imagination, this is what makes his response so brilliant. He was learning how to hit a variety of different shots and expanding his options. We have all heard the saying, “Never hit a shot during a round that you haven’t practiced”. My former teammate wanted to make sure that if he found himself in a spot that required creativity, he knew what each club could do. Still to this day I think he had one of the best short games I have ever seen.

Next time you head out to the practice tee take note of how many people are standing there hitting full shot after full shot, all the while never spending more than a couple of minutes on around the green. I fully understand the satisfaction of striking the ball perfectly and having it come to rest next to the pin. You will often hear your playing partners say, “Nice Shot” and after your round that is all everyone is talking about. This truly plays to our ego. But what great players find even more rewarding is the final number at the bottom of a scorecard.

There are a couple of statistics that tour players pay close attention to and both are linked together. The first one is *greens in regulation*. The top 125 players on the PGA Tour are all around 65% or better. That means on average they are missing 6 greens per round. How are they able to keep their rounds sub-par? This is where the second statistic comes in to play, *scrambling* or as most people like to call it “up-and down”. The top 125 players on the PGA Tour were all above 50%. So if you combine the two stats, you should start to see the importance of the short game. Even the best players in the world have better ball striking days than others, but what separates them from the average player is the ability to recover and not compound their mistakes.

Now that you have seen the numbers, let’s dive right into how you can improve your short game. It is my belief that most over looked factor in pitching and chipping is contact. Just as in a full shot, solid contact will produce the outcome you are looking for. If you hit it heavy, or behind the ball, the shot comes up short. If you hit it thin, the shot goes long. So how do we strike the ball solidly? The answer is quite simple. Hit down on the ball!

Here a few tips to help ensure solid contact:

1. Get your weight forward (on your front foot)
2. Hands ahead of the ball at Address
3. Be aggressive! (keep the club head moving)

One of the biggest mistakes I see mid to high handicappers make is they try to help the ball into the air. You have to remember, that in golf, we hit down on the ball to make it go up. The loft of the club will take care of trajectory.

Once you have worked on these mechanics, then it's time to go and experiment. Learn what your clubs can do! Make sure that next time you go out to practice that you dedicate 50% of your time to working on your short game. By doing so, you will start to leave less shots on the course and begin to see your scoring improve.

To learn more on how to improve your short game and stop throwing away shots around the green please contact me to set up a lesson and together we can lower your scores.

Brian Flugstad

"Learn from Experience"