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**Six Keys To Pitching From The Fairway**

**By Jack Moorehouse**

Accurate pitching reduces your golf handicap. Turning three strokes into two by pitching close to the pin cuts strokes from your scores. Cut enough strokes and you'll lower your handicap significantly. Learning to pitch accurately from the fairway is crucial to improving your game.

Pitching accurately from the fairway, as I mention in my golf lessons, requires good distance control. That's not easy to achieve. The tendency is for your swing to be either too long, in which case the clubhead decelerates through impact, or too short, in which case the clubhead is jerked through impact. Either way costs you strokes, inflating your golf scores and your golf handicap.

Learning to pitch accurately from the fairway is a two-stage process. One stage involves building better technique. You can work on technique in golf lessons and on the practice range whenever you go. The second stage involves learning how to judge distances. While you can't learn to judge distances simply from taking golf lessons or reading golf tips, they can facilitate the learning process.

Here are 6 keys to building better technique:

1. Make changes at address
2. Open the stance
3. Aim clubface at target
4. Make a shorter backswing
5. Clear the left side
6. Release the clubhead

Two subtle changes at address help with technique. Since you need to strike the ball with a crisp, descending blow, (1) position the ball at your stance's midpoint and (2) make sure that the club's shaft and your left arm (for right-handers) are in a straight line, ensuring ball-then-turf contact.

Also, open your stance a little at address. It enables you to clear the left side through impact. While it seems like a minor thing, it has an impact, just like the two changes discussed above. Despite the open stance, aim the clubface directly at the target, just as if your feet were parallel.

Opening your stance shortens your backswing, since it curbs movement of the lower body. Gripping down on the club also shortens your backswing, while providing increased club control. The closer your hands are to the ball, the better control you have. Nevertheless, you still need to transfer your weight

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correctly, despite the shorter swing,

With the open stance and the left side clear, your hands have room to strike the ball squarely. Release the clubhead freely through impact and then move smoothly into your follow-through. Use these suggestions to help build better technique.

In addition to working on your technique, you need to improve distance control. Unfortunately, the only way to do that is by practicing. The more you practice, the better you'll get. Below are two other suggestions to remember the next time you're practicing your pitching:

Practice the Body-controlled Method One approach to help with distance is the body-controlled method. It's an approach I've talked about in my golf tips. Assume your normal pitching address position, but place a towel across your chest and under your armpits. Choke down on the grip for added control and make short compact swings, keeping the towel under your armpits as you swing.

At the same time, vary the speed of your body turn. If you have a 20-yard shot, think in terms of turning your body 20 miles per hour. If you have a 30-yard shot, think in terms of turning your body 30 miles per hour. The longer the shot, the faster you turn your body. Try this method to help improve your distance control. Also, vary the length of your shots so you will get practice at different lengths.

Establish a "Pitching Zone" Work on establishing a pitching zone—a safe area where you're not only comfortable and confident pitching from. Once you've developed the zone, try playing to it the next time you golf. The goal is to land your shots in the zone when approaching the green, so you'll have an easier shot.

Jose Maria Olazabal used this approach during a tournament. Having driven into trouble off the tee, he asked his caddie: "What club will give me 92 yards to the flag for my next shot." Thinking one step ahead, Olazabal was aiming for a spot on the fairway where he was confident he could get up and down from to save par. That was strength for him. Establishing a "pitching zone" gives you a strength to play to, just like Olazabal.

Use these six keys to help with pitching from the fairway next time and you'll be sure to start dropping shots fast.

Jack Moorehouse is the author of the best-selling book "How To Break 80 And Shoot Like The Pros

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." He is NOT a golf pro, rather a working man that has helped thousands of golfers from all seven continents lower their handicap immediately.

**How To Cut Five Strokes From Your Game By The Weekend**

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If you're serious about lowering your golf handicap and doing so quickly, master the three scoring clubs—the driver, the wedge, and the putter. These clubs have the greatest impact on your golf game and provide the greatest opportunity for cutting strokes from your scores. Mastering these clubs will improve your game as much as 5 strokes per round.

Specifically though, let's focus on the wedges. Knowing which wedge to hit in different situations is really the best way to drop shots because if you have the right club selected, it makes it so much easier to pull the intended shot off. While learning to hit a wedge is not difficult, hitting one with confidence comes in handy, especially 40 yards or so from the green. Golfers face this situation two or three times a round, maybe more. Hitting a good shot from 40 yards out often leaves you with just a short putt, as I emphasize in my golf lessons, so you want to hit the shot well.

The most critical decision with the 40-yard pitch shot is which wedge to use—the pitching, the sand, or the lob. These clubs are easy to hit to the green, but landing on the green is one thing and getting the ball to do what you want after it lands is another. Let's look at three typical 40-yard situations and the type of wedge shots each requires.

**Lob Wedge** In first situation the pin's up front and there's little green to work with. Here, you need a high-flying shot with little run—a shot you can easily learn to hit with a some practice. The lob wedge is the club of choice for getting the ball in the air, so it's recommended in this situation. (If you're on the fairway with a tight lie, however, you might want to try one of the other wedges.) The lob wedge has from 58 to 60 degrees of loft, so there's no need to open the clubface. Just square the face to the target and swing. Since the ball will fly high and come to rest softly, you need to be careful about where you land the ball.

**Sand Wedge** In the second situation the hole is in the middle of the green, so you have some green to work with. The sand wedge is the club of choice in this situation whether you're on the fairway or in the rough. The sand wedge enables you to customize your shot more easily than either the lob or the pitching wedges. You can learn to alter the roll and the trajectory with very little golf instruction. I personally like the sand wedge as my "go-to" club.

If you want a shot with less carry and more roll, square the clubface to the target. If you want a shot with slightly more roll than loft, then close the clubface slightly. If you want to hit the ball higher, just open the clubface more, in which case the shot will resemble a shot from a lob or a pitching wedge. Also, keep in mind that with an open clubface, the shot tends to go right.

**Pitching Wedge** In the third situation the pin is back and there's plenty of room for the ball to roll. The pitching wedge is the club of choice if you're on the fairway or in some light rough. (If you're in heavy rough, try one of the other wedges.) Keep in mind that the ball will run lower and hotter, even if you open the clubface a little, so don't swing as hard as you might with another iron. It's a mistake I see a lot of when giving golf lessons. The ball is also going to roll more than with the other wedges, so get a good reading on the green, just as if you were going to putt the ball. More often than not you will get closer to the pin with this type of shot than a high-lofted shot.

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The mechanics of a wedge shot are easy to learn. The key is choosing the right club at the right time, and making slight adjustments in your shot. That's something that only experience can teach. At the same time it's important to practice these three shots as much as you can, so you can master the technique of each shot, develop control of it, and build self-confidence in your ability to execute them. That, in turn, will make shots easier to make.

The wedge is as important the driver or the putter when it comes to minimizing scores. Wedge shots from 40-yards out may not have the drama of sinking a 30-foot birdie putt or powering a 300-yard drive down the middle of the fairway, but over the course of a round, they'll save you as many as five strokes or more from your scores. And that result is bound to lower your golf handicap.

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