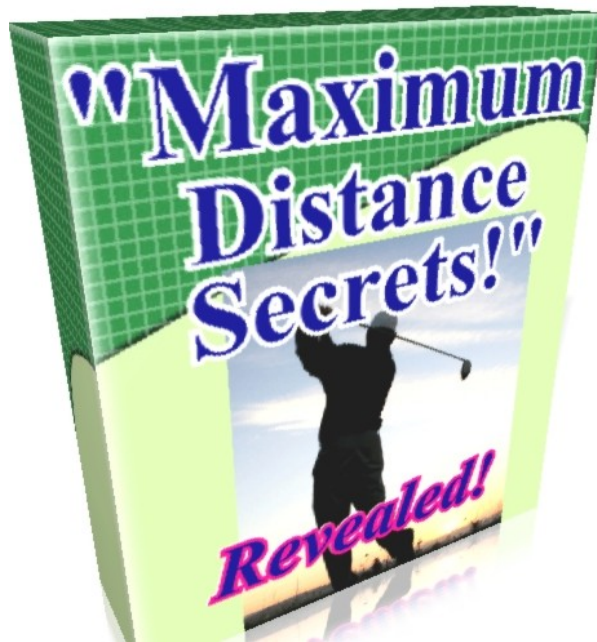


Strictly Off The Record

"3 Easy Problem Shot Killers"

Mini-Report



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I. Overcoming Problem Shots

A. Taming the Rough

Unless all your shots travel the perfect line and distance, eventually you'll find the rough. Unlike the mown grass of fairways and greens, rough can be long and shaggy, sometimes making it hard to find, let alone hit, your ball.

Because the ball can sink into long grass, you can't rely on a standard technique to get free. You must change your swing to tame the rough stuff.

Whenever you're in the rough, assess the lie carefully. Is the ball sitting high or has it dropped into the jungle? If it's up, you may be able to take a long iron or wood and swing normally.

But usually the ball is at least some of the way down, so your only play might be nothing more than taking a short iron and blasting into the fairway.

Your primary concern is to get out, even if you advance the ball only a few yards.

Select a club, set the clubface square, play the ball in the middle of

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your stance, and choke down on the grip. Hold the club above the grass until you swing; pushing it down may make the ball fall deeper.

Make a steep swing so the clubface encounters limited resistance from the grass. However, some grass will wrap around the club on the downswing, closing the face so the ball flies left; aim slightly right at address to compensate.

Swing hard, but don't bring your hands back higher than your shoulders; the shortened swing helps maintain balance.

Balls coming out of rough tend to be "hot." Grass getting between your club and the ball at impact decreases spin, so shots fly lower than normal and roll after landing — from wet rough the ball flies even hotter. Plan accordingly.

Should your ball find greenside rough, play the shot like an explosion from sand. Using a sand wedge, open your stance (aiming shoulders, hips, and feet left of your target), play the ball forward in your stance, and make a wide, U-shaped swing.

Hit behind the ball so it pops up and out; hitting too close launches a hot shot sure to fly the green.

B. Hitting From a Slope

Despite your best intentions, the ball won't always settle on level ground. Eventually you'll have to hit off a hilly lie — the ball above

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your feet, below your feet, on an upslope, or on a down slope.

Playing off a hill requires proper balance, club selection, and ball flight. Here's how to make the grade from any grade.

C. Uphill/Downhill Lies

To make a good swing and maintain your balance, set your hips and shoulders parallel to the slope. On an uphill lie that means moving your back foot (the right foot for a right-hander) slightly down the hill; on a downhill lie, reposition your forward (left) foot down the hill.

In both cases, take your stance so the ball is closer to the higher foot (left on an uphill lie, right on a downhill). Swing the club along the angle of the hill. The steeper the incline, the easier it is to lose balance, so make a shorter-than-normal swing.

Slope also influences the height and distance of shots, making club selection crucial. An uphill lie adds loft to the club so the ball flies higher and not as far; compensate by taking a club with less loft (for example, hit a 5- or 6-iron from your usual 7-iron distance).

Reverse the procedure from a downhill lie, where you need a more-lofted club. Finally, resist the temptation to help the ball into the air off a downhill lie; the club can do it.

D. Side Hill Lies

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A ball above or below your feet demands altering your posture, with the lie dictating how to stand. A ball above your feet is closer to your hands, forcing you to stand taller but also flattening your swing (the club moves more around the body); conversely, a ball below your feet is farther away, forcing you to bend more to reach it (and creating a more up and down swing).

The changes to your swing influence ball flight. The flatter swing produced when the ball is above your feet means the shot will curve right to left; allow for the draw by aiming to the right. The steeper swing caused by a ball below your feet creates a left-to-right pattern; aim left at address to handle that fade.

II. You're in the Trees – Let's Get You Out

Golfers have a saying: "Trees are 90 percent air." That's true if you're trying to hit over or through them. But when your ball is under low-hanging branches, lying against roots, or situated so you can't make a normal swing, trees are 100 percent trouble.

From any lousy lie, you want to get the ball in the fairway with a chance of saving the hole. The following plays will help.

A. Under Low Branches

When limbs restrict your backswing, make several slow, smooth practice swings, bringing the club back until it just brushes the obstruction. When making the shot, stay slow and relaxed: Take the

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club as far back as you can, then swing with the arms and hands, keeping head and body still.

B. Root Work

A ball against roots may be better left un-played: There's no point breaking a club or your wrists. But sometimes you can safely get free. If the ball is just in front of a root, top it with your putter.

Choke down for control, swing easily, and hit the top of the ball. If the ball is behind a root, be careful. The shot might bounce back, and if it touches you, it's a two stroke penalty (to say nothing of potential injury). But if you have room, take a wedge and make an easy swing.

When a root is to the side of the ball away from you, stand a little further away, tighten your grip, and try making contact off the toe of the club. If the root is between you and the ball, use your putter, or else turn around and use an inverted wedge, as described below.

C. Up Against the Trunk

When you can't make a normal right-handed swing — thanks to roots or the trunk — turn yourself and your club around and play lefty. Reverse your grip so your left hand is below your right. Set up square, make a smooth swing with your arms and hands, and keep your body still.

Choose a club based on its features: The wedge has the largest head,

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whereas the flat backside of a long iron or putter provides the most roll.

D. Bad Lies

Even a good course can present you with bad lies, spots where the grass isn't perfect, or where there isn't grass at all. Here's how to handle three common situations.

E. In The Mud

The recovery from muck isn't difficult. Properly played, your biggest worry will be staying clean. If the ball sits on top of the mud, address it as you would a fairway bunker shot: Position it back in your stance about an inch, and stand taller than usual. Swing easy, especially if your footing is slippery.

Play a plugged lie in the mud as you would one in the sand. Use your pitching wedge or a short iron, but not the sand wedge (the big flange will stick, rather than get through, the muck). Close the club face a little, open your stance, take a firm grip, and hit down on the ball. The deeper it's buried, the shorter it will fly, so plan accordingly.

F. Divot Hole

Nothing is more frustrating than hitting a good drive only to find it in a divot hole in the fairway. Before planning the shot, calm down: Anger only produces tension. Take an iron (a wood probably will

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snag), and set up for a normal shot with these changes:

1. The face should be square to slightly closed, whereas your swing has to be steeper than usual.
2. Because the ball is below the level of the fairway, you have to go down after it. Make a slow backswing, get set at the top (resist the temptation to rush the downswing), and hit down hard. The ball will fly lower than usual, then roll after landing, so overall distance should be about normal for the club.

G. Perched Lie

When the ball sits up in a clump of long grass, be careful not to move it as you position the club head (that's a penalty). Then think about putting the club head on the ball rather than whiffing by passing under it. Stand taller than normal and, if necessary, choke down on the club.

For control, keep your backswing short, no more than halfway back. Make a shallow downswing, "sweeping" the ball of the grass rather than hitting down. Again, swing easy. Worry about making clean contact, not achieving great distance.

III. Playing the Wind

In United States, where most courses are inland, wind is only an occasional factor, and many players don't know how to manage it. Some simple strategies will help you battle the breezes.

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Shots will be affected by gusts over 10 miles per hour. Hitting into a headwind, your ball loses yardage. Into a tailwind, the ball flies farther, then runs after landing. Crosswinds can move the ball well off your intended line. So when it's gusty, plan your shots carefully.

Facing a headwind, take one extra club for every 10 mph of draft: If you usually hit a 7-iron 150 yards, you'll need a 4-iron when hitting into 30-mph gusts. Resist the impulse to swing harder; make a slow, three-quarter swing (your hands rising only to shoulder height).

Finally, a headwind exaggerates a shot's bend: If your normal shot flies left to right, a headwind will move it farther right, so aim more to the left.

Tailwinds straighten out curve balls, so don't aim so far away from the target. Take less club, because not only does a tailwind keep the shot in the air longer, it brings the ball down on a shallower angle so it rolls after landing.

Ride a crosswind. Into a left-to-right gust, start your shot well to the left and let the wind bring it back. Aim five yards off the target for every 10 mph of breeze.

In any kind of wind, try a low-flying "knockdown" shot when hitting from the fairway. Take a club or two more than the distance dictates, and set up open — your feet and body aimed slightly to the left. Play the ball back in your stance (almost in line with the right heel),

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with your hands angled forward.

Choke down on the club and keep a firm grip. Swing slowly to shoulder-height, then pull down and through with your left arm and hand. Restrict your follow-through so you finish with the club pointing at your target.....

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