



SHORT-GAME STRATEGIES
**BEFORE YOU
PLAY THAT
SHOT AROUND
THE GREEN**

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BEN HOGAN was famously quoted as saying that “golf is not a game of good shots. It’s a game of bad shots.” In other words, you’re not going to hit it great all the time, and it’s what you do when you get into trouble that will define your round. No matter your ability, the fastest way to improve is by saving strokes when you don’t hit a green in regulation. You want to turn 6s into 5s and 5s into 4s. The good news is, you don’t have to spend hours and hours practicing to do that. Instead, if you’re short on time, focus on course management. Here, I’m going to give you three things to remember that will help you save shots simply by raising your golf course IQ around the greens.

1. YOU SHOULDN’T BE HERE

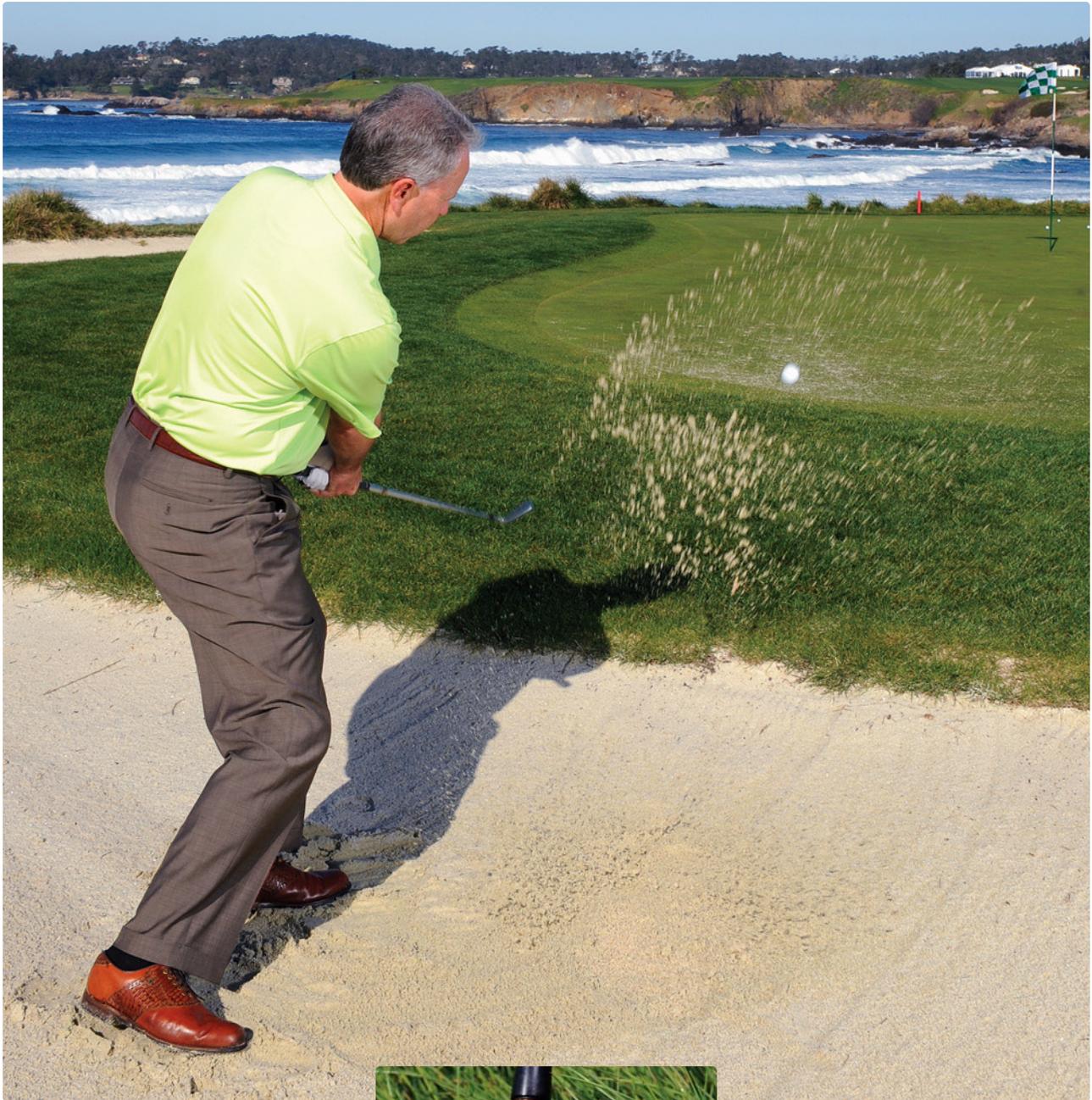
Here I got into trouble on Pebble Beach’s 10th hole and had to play a tough lob shot to try to save par. I was lucky my ball didn’t roll into the hazard and cost me a penalty stroke. Regardless, you don’t want to be here. Before you hit your approach into this or any other green, ask yourself, *Based on my typical ball flight, where’s the best spot for my ball should I miss my target?* For me, because I hit it fairly straight, that spot should’ve been short or left of the green. But if you’re a slicer, you should aim even farther left and allow the ball to bleed into the target area. Always err on the side without a hazard or out-of-bounds.

HOW TO PITCH FROM DEEP ROUGH. First, find a similar spot to rehearse this shot. Get a feel for how the club will react in deep grass. Then, at address, open the clubface slightly. Make a longer, fluid swing. Keep the club moving but don’t overaccelerate.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY / J.D. CUBAN

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'USE A 9-IRON FOR A LONG BUNKER SHOT SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO SWING HARDER.'



2. KNOW YOUR BEST BUNKER OPTION

Here I missed the green and now have a long bunker shot. Many amateurs would grab their sand or lob wedge, but the loft on those clubs forces you make a bigger swing than normal and hit too close to the ball to get it to the hole. A much better play would be to take a 9-iron or even an 8-iron and make a smooth bunker swing. The lower-lofted club still has enough bounce to explode the ball out, but it will allow the ball to travel farther with less effort. You won't have to take a big hack.



3. HOVER YOUR CLUB IN HIGH GRASS

Even if you miss the green in a good place, like I did here, you'll probably have to chip or pitch from the rough. In tall grass, don't ground the club at address. Not only can pushing the grass down cause the ball to move, as it might not have settled, but it also positions the club to dig under the ball and miss it completely. Instead, hover your wedge so its sole is the same height as the bottom of the ball. As you swing, maintain your posture. The club will find the ball's bottom, and it will come out great. ♣