

MATT WALLACE SHORT GAME MASTERCLASS

A winner on the PGA Tour in 2023, Matt Wallace has a four-step plan to transform your short game...

IMAGES GETTY

↳ I'd say that 99 percent of golfers are guilty of making the game too difficult. I used to be one of them. I would try to change this or that because that's what Tiger does or this coach recommends. I was always tinkering with something, looking for that extra one percent.

To some extent, that remains the case even now, but the difference is, I go about it in a completely different way. The best thing I ever did was stripping everything back and focusing on a few key fundamentals. It wasn't easy, but all the work I've done with Matt Belsham on my short game has been key to improving my ball striking and consistency.

Over the next five pages, I'll share some of the lessons I've learned, as well as my favourite drills and routines. Not only are they easy to repeat and execute, they'll also help you to get up and down more often.

TG COACH



MATT WALLACE
A star of the PGA Tour and DP World Tour, Matt currently has 11 pro wins to his name



↳ The 60-yard pitch shot is probably the one shot I see people consistently mess up the most, even us pros. The natural reaction is to dial back the power or to hang back and 'help' the ball into the air. These two moves trigger the right side of the body to drop lower than the left, which then shifts the low point of the swing behind the ball and causes fats and thins.

To avoid a scooping action, you need to commit more and create clubhead speed. Focus on keeping the weight on your left side (70/30) so that the left shoulder stays over the left foot. This will automatically move the low point of the downswing slightly ahead of the ball so you get that 'ball first, then turf' contact which produces better strikes.

PITCH PERFECT

How to master one of the hardest shots in golf



! GRIP LIGHT, STAY LOOSE

Keep the grip pressure light. If you start creating tension in the arms, you'll lose feel and your swing will become clunky.

Become a master pitcher

I practise hitting a lot of feel shots with my right heel up at address. It's made a big difference to my strike because it forces me to stay on the left side and rotate around the body, releasing the hands towards the target. Another good tip is to draw a line on the ground where the ball is and use it as a reference point to see where your divot is. If it's behind the line, you'll know your swing is bottoming out too early.



SWING FROM THE STERNUM

Groove your process and make a star turn

For short finesse shots, you really need to limit the number of moving parts. You need to think less wrists, more rotation – with your chest and core driving the action, not the arms and hands. Again, it all comes back to consistency. It's the reason I always keep my feet closer together, with the ball position in the centre and my weight on my left side throughout the shot. Some people alternate and hit chips off their back foot, but if you keep it in the same place all the time, you will hit the same shot with the same flight over and over again. That is key to building consistency.

When to change for the better

When chipping out of the rough, you do need to allow for the ball coming out a lot higher. Using a lower lofted club, like a 7-iron, might work off the fringe but it has the potential to get snagged up in the grass. The smart play is to use a higher-lofted club, like a 54° wedge, so you can be a bit more aggressive and generate enough clubhead speed to cut through the grass.



TRY THE TOWEL DRILL
A good tip is to hit shots with a towel tucked under the armpits. This will stop the arms working independently and encourage the upper body to rotate and initiate the sequence. The arms will naturally follow and come along for the ride.

RAISE THE HEEL

This simple method saved my short game



One of the difficulties of playing golf abroad or on links courses especially is trying to hit a bump and run off a tight lie. I used to fat a lot of shots until I started standing a touch closer to the ball and practised chipping with the toe down and the heel off the ground. What I quickly realised is that it's almost impossible to fat a chip shot using this method because it basically eliminates the bounce altogether. The set-up does feel a bit weird at first, but try to treat it like a putt, so the shaft sits more upright at address. This one move will bring less of the club into contact with the ground, which is key to clipping the ball off the turf cleanly.



Take the test

When I'm playing a practice round, I might hit 10 shots around the green and add up the distance to the hole. The challenge is to keep it under 60ft, which means you've got a buffer of 6ft for every shot. After a few goes, it will show you the benefit of reading chips like a putt.

PERFECT YOUR PRACTICE

Improve your confidence on the green with these three putting drills

1. DIAL IN YOUR STROKE

Drills are the best ways to practise pressure putting – and this one (see right) is a great starting point because it challenges you to hole out from inside 10ft, which is where you make your score on the course. Start by placing four balls around the hole and try to hole each putt from four feet. Keeping score, you then change the line of each putt and increase the length to 5ft, then 6ft, 7ft and 8ft. The goal is to hole 15 of the 20 putts, so if you miss five putts before the final set, that means you've got to hole four eight-footers or you'll need to start again. Sometimes it can take 10 minutes, other times it can take an hour!

2. TAKE ON THE 75FT TEST

This next drill is a favourite of my putting coach, Mike Kanski, because it tests your start line, distance control and green reading ability. To set it up, take four balls and position them around the hole at 5ft, 10ft, 15ft and 20ft. Once you've hit those four putts, find a new hole and repeat the process five times, keeping count of the distances of putts holed. In total, you'll hit 20 putts from a combined total of 250 feet. Par is 75ft and anything above that means you are gaining versus the tour average.

3. GET ON A ROLL

I'll let you in on a secret: I only try and hit putts over the first six inches. The start line is the most important thing when putting. If you can't start it online, your reads are going to be all over the place. Every day, I use the same training aid – a Visio Mi Putting Template – to provide instant feedback on the quality of my stroke and set-up (see below). I definitely recommend you use it.



! SHARPEN UP YOUR FOCUS

The most important thing is to go through your pre-shot routine on every single putt. There's no point cheating yourself and rushing it, otherwise you won't see the benefits on the course.

! DRILL DOWN ON YOUR MISTAKES

Make a note of your misses and try to see if there's an obvious pattern. These types of drills are brilliant for identifying if you've got any biases in your stroke.



GET YOUR STROKE TESTED

Last year I was losing too many strokes on the green, so I spent a lot of time testing at Formby Hall. That was the best thing I could have done. Based on the results and my comfort level, I ended up switching from a prayer grip to a more conventional style with one trigger finger. I had a lot of success with a TwoThumb Classic Putter Grip, which is great if you get a bit flicky with your stroke. I'm now using a TwoThumb Snug Tour 27, which has given me a bit more feel back with my putting. My hands are a lot softer and closer together now. That small tweak helped me win for the first time on the PGA Tour in 2023.

Join the gated community

1. Set your face to the short grey line and follow the long black line with your stroke. This mat is set on the smallest arc (12°) to fit my stroke pattern, but it goes up in three-degree increments and the maximum is 24.
2. I use four tees to hold the mat down, then I create a gate to putt through. There are three different holes each side so you can increase or decrease the width depending on your standard.

