

IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR GAME

Cupped-wrist lob is key weapon in your arsenal

One of the shots the pros have that amateurs don't know about is the cupped-wrist lob or pitch, a technique used when you have to get close to the pin, but have very little green to work with. It's a soft lob shot that isn't hit very hard, but flies high.

This short but high flop shot breaks some of the rules, but lowers scores. Normally, when pitching the ball, the proper technique calls for a firm, slightly arched lead wrist that maintains its position all the way through the swing. But for this shot, the lead wrist is allowed to cup, increasing the loft.

Because the shot is so soft, there is no need to hit the ball hard to put

spin on it. Thus, this technique is almost completely free of the skulled and exploding shots that can result from the rough when you swing hard at the ball.

When you practice pitching, you need to alternate techniques — four or five pitches with a firm lead wrist, then two or three with the collapsed lead wrist. This extra work will pay big dividends, especially from Bermuda rough.

ABOUT THE WRITER



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As this professional practices the cupped-wrist lob, note that he follows the low hands, high clubhead rule of pitching. He takes a very short backswing that is under control while setting the wrists early so the loft of the clubface is unlocked.



Now comes the hard part: Through impact, he allows his lead wrist to cup, thereby increasing the loft of the shot while staying on the swing arc. This produces a very high, soft lob that clears the intervening rough, takes a couple of bounces and stops on its own accord.

TEERING OFF

Virtual rehearsals improve performance

Everyone can create images on their mental screen — it is a power as natural as breathing, but very few have control over this power. Only champions have it on call, waiting in the wings as the ultimate deciding factor in competition.

A remarkable example of employing the power of imagery comes from Charlie Wilson, one of the world's finest neurosurgeons. Dr. Wilson, who is retired now, was an expert in a very difficult procedure called transsphenoidal resection — the removal of a tumor from the pituitary gland. His secret of success? Wilson mentally rehearsed every step of a pending operation before setting foot into the operating room.

"It was a virtual rehearsal," Wilson says, "so when I was doing the operation, it was as if I was doing it for the second time."

One way to harness the power of imagery that has proven itself effective is the use of two mental transition periods — entering and coming out of sleep. During these periods, the brain is in a state in which brain waves signal a syn-

chronization of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. This state is most conducive to producing multi-sensorial images so powerful that they can dramatically improve performance.

Can you learn things in your sleep? Yes, says Dr. Noam Sobel of Israel's Weizmann Institute. Using a tone followed by an odor, Sobel conditioned sleeping subjects to connect the auditory with the olfactory event. The next morning, absent any conscious memory of the tone-and-odor experience, the subjects were exposed to the tone and began sniffing the air in expectation of the odor, proving they had learned while they slept.

I suggest to my students that they use their imaging skills to improve their golf swing by imaging the swing they learned in their lesson that day during the pre- and post-sleep periods of their sleep that night. You're learning something during these periods, and it might as well be something really important, like your golf swing.

GOLF BY THE NUMBERS

Best game starts with the right drive

If you watched the battle between Jordan Spieth and Jason Day during the last round of the PGA Championship earlier this month, one aspect stood out: Day outdrove Spieth by a lot, sometimes as much as 60 yards.

Spieth averages about 292 yards, which ranks him outside the top 50 in distance, and although it is difficult to knock his game, one area that seems to be lacking is that he is of medium length off the tee. But consider this: Dustin Johnson is the longest hitter on tour, but Spieth wins the most money, with the lowest scoring average.

This is a prime example of a concept called "minimum required distance off the tee": Given a player's other capabilities, such as iron play, chipping, pitching and putting, adequate driving distance must be interpreted not simply as a single number, but within the context of the player's overall game.

So when you're evaluating your own strength and weakness profile, make

sure that you don't overemphasize the individual numbers for each category (accuracy, length, trajectory, etc.), because it is the total body of work (score) that counts. Ian Baker Finch did exactly that after winning the British Open in 1991 when he focused on one number — how far he drove the ball — and then decided to make changes in his overall game in order to get a few more yards off the tee. It was a move that proved to be a big mistake.

What you are looking for is not how far you drive the ball, but how well your drives set up the rest of the round. It's like watching an expert pool player control the cue ball — the shots he makes on the object ball are not spectacular, but the control of the cue ball is.

To prove this to yourself, play nine holes hitting your tee shot as usual, then pick up that ball and drop another at the 150-yard marker. Chances are you'll have one of your best scores ever.