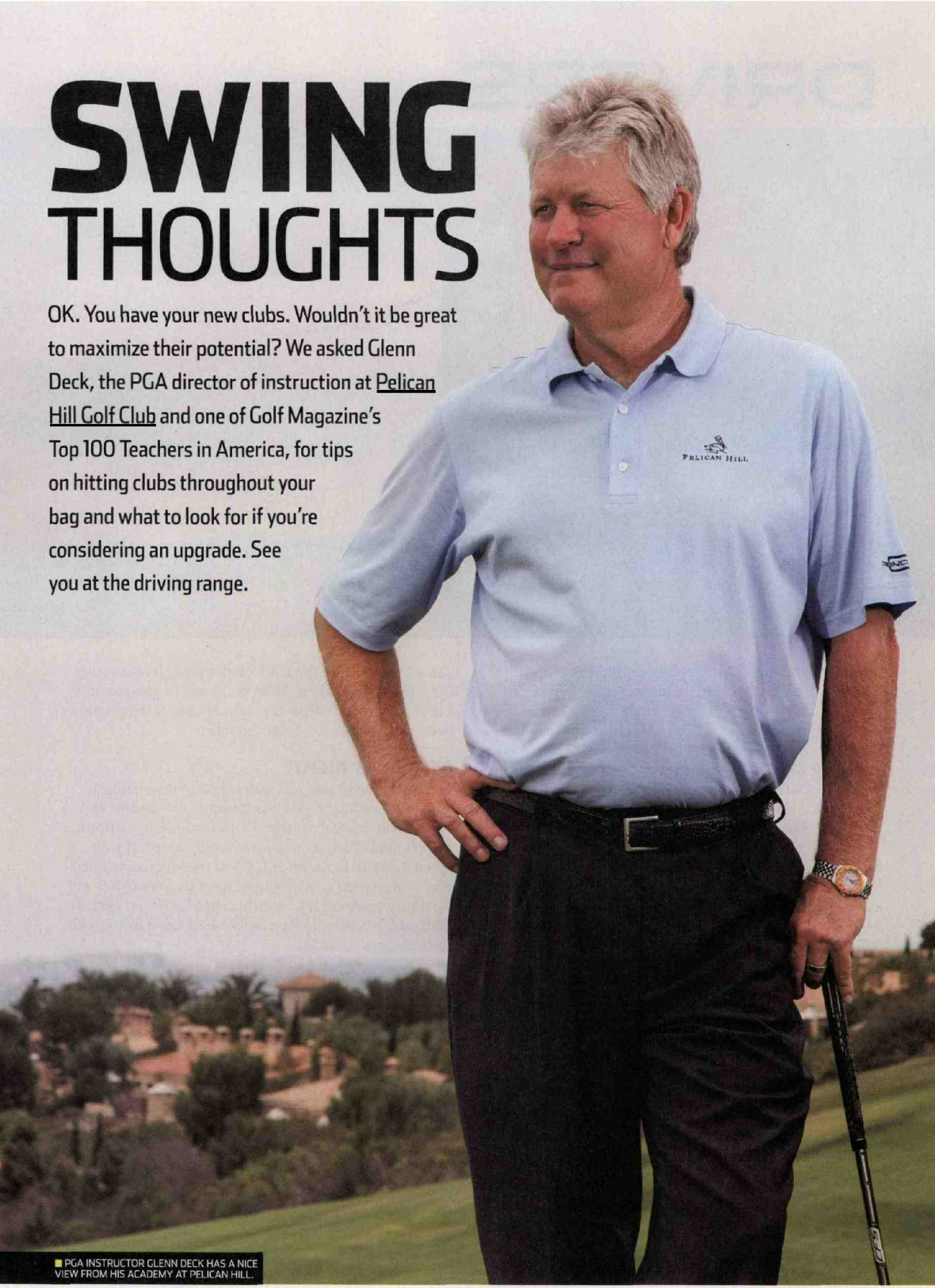
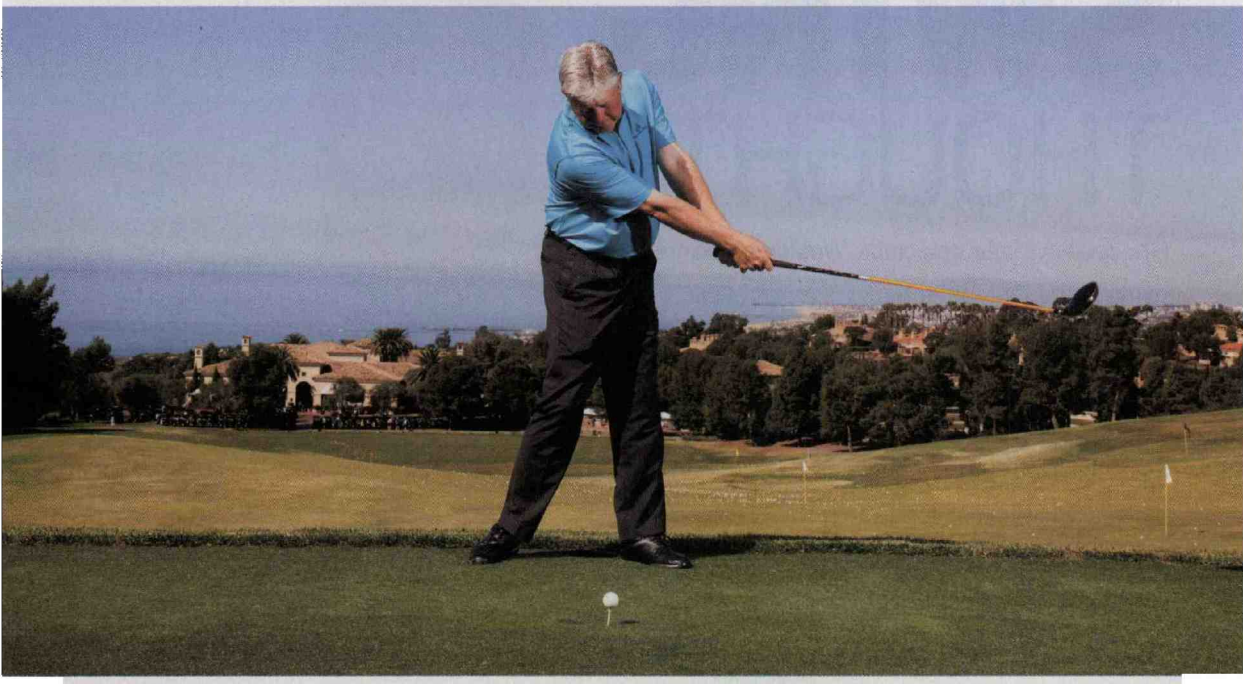
SWING THOUGHTS

OK. You have your new clubs. Wouldn't it be great to maximize their potential? We asked Glenn Deck, the PGA director of instruction at Pelican Hill Golf Club and one of Golf Magazine's Top 100 Teachers in America, for tips on hitting clubs throughout your bag and what to look for if you're considering an upgrade. See you at the driving range.



PGA INSTRUCTOR GLENN DECK HAS A NICE VIEW FROM HIS ACADEMY AT PELICAN HILL.

PHOTOS BY JON ENCARNACION



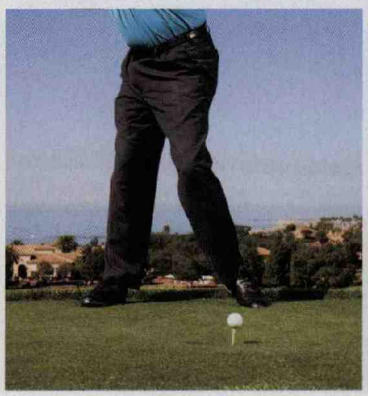
Start from the ground up in your transition and forward swing to build a powerful motion, and learn how the left ankle rolls or lifts in the backswing and is the first thing to set in your transition to the downswing. Once the left foot posts and your left knee braces, the hip should pivot to create extension. Last, check your ball position to ensure you're hitting it level or a few degrees up, which will aid your distance numbers. Just off the forward heel is ideal.

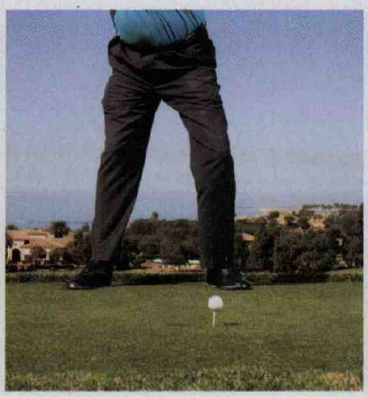
HITTING IT OFF

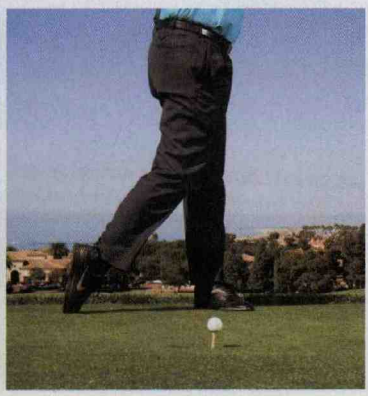
Get in your setup position but start your backswing from an extended position in front of the ball to create the feel for what you're trying to achieve. The upper body will naturally lead the backswing from here and give you a better feel for the left foot and lower body to start the downswing and produce the correct sequence and extension in your follow-through. Simply swing smoothly back and through to a balanced finish.

GETTING IT RIGHT

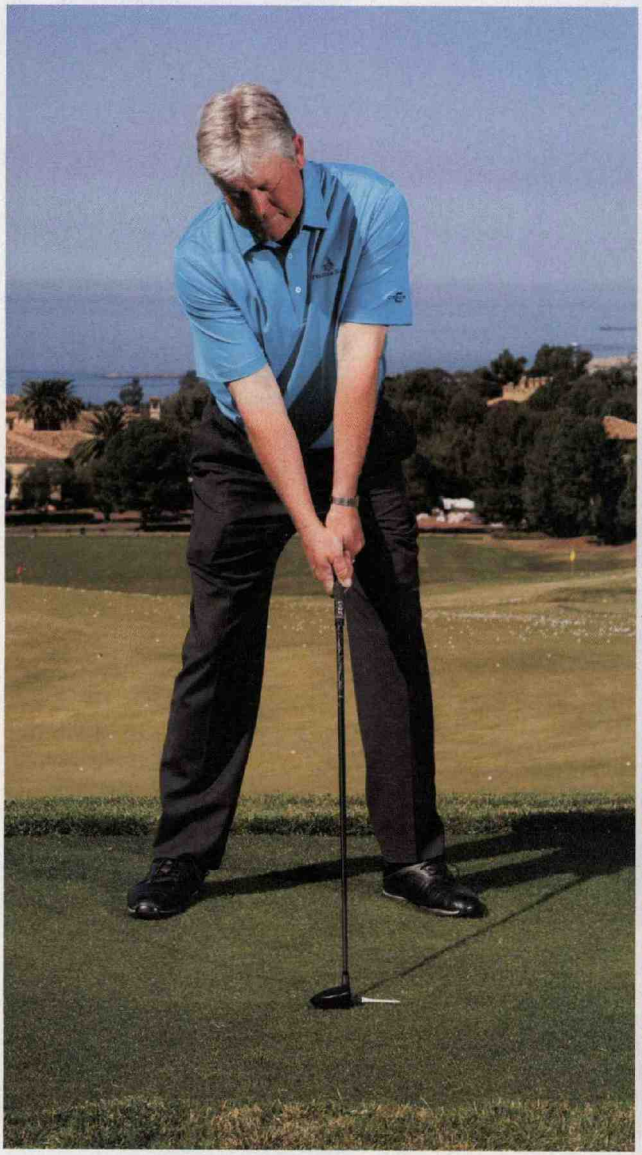
The correct shaft flex, loft and weight of your driver is critical. Too stiff and you lose distance; too flexible and you lose directional control. To maximize driver distance, the loft angle should match your swing speed. If your speed tops 100 mph, go with 9.5 to 10.5 degrees of loft; if your swing speed is 80-85 mph, 12-13 degrees of loft will maximize distance; if your swing speed is slower than 80 mph, which is normal for most women, use a driver with 13-15 degrees of loft. SG

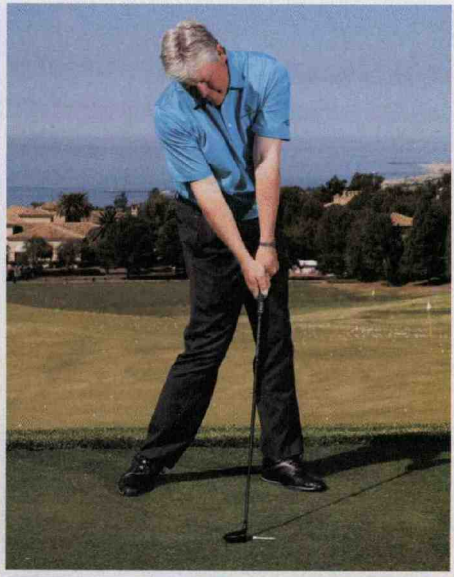


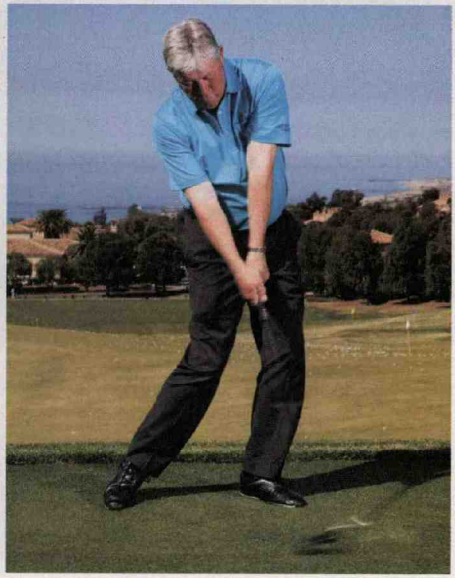




FAIRWAY WOODS







Most golfers play the ball too forward in their stance, like with a driver, and try to help it in the air. Topped or thin shots are often the result. Swinging too hard is also a common flaw, so having a swing tempo similar to with your 9-iron should be the goal. Position the ball a few inches inside your front heel and don't be afraid to hit down on it. Ben Hogan used to make a mark in the turf with every fairway wood he hit, which enabled the loft of the face to do its job.

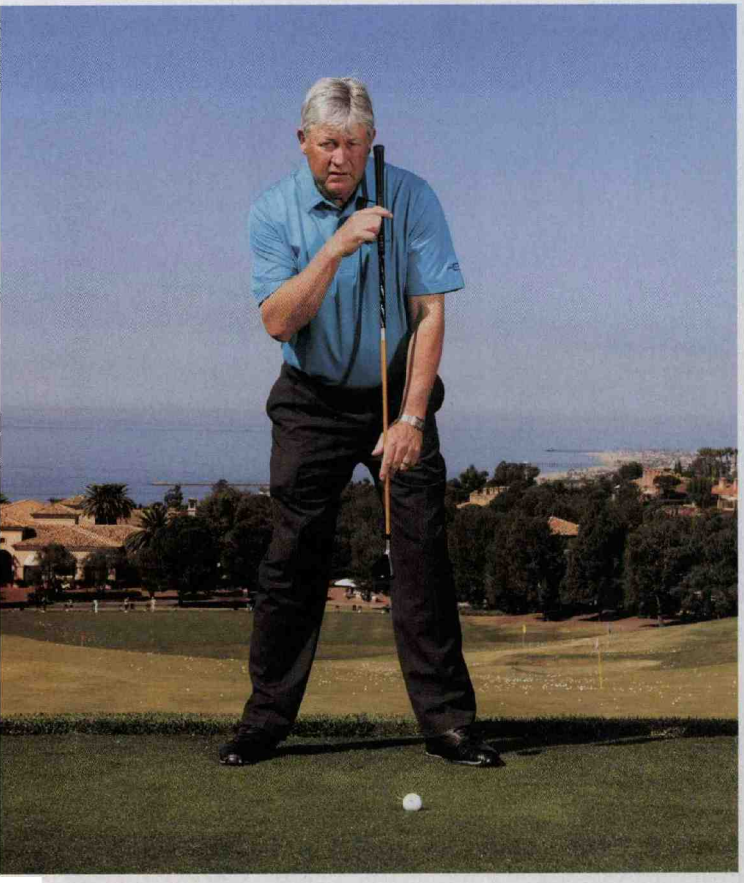
HITTING IT OFF

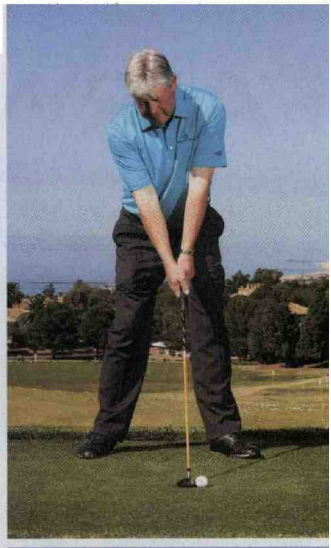
Place a tee on the ground with the tip pointing at your target. Swing and hit the tee with a sweep of the grass or slightly downward angle. The tee will shoot forward if you don't swing too hard or try to help it up. Now take that same swing and feeling to the course to produce a loftier and more powerful shot from the turf.

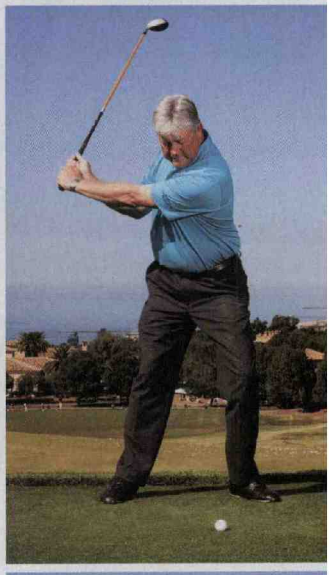
GETTING IT RIGHT

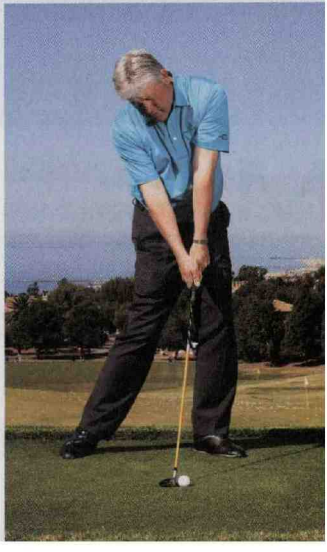
Make sure your 3-wood has 15, 16 or 17 degrees of loft. If you have a 13-degree model, consider lofting up. If your handicap is 18 or higher and you prefer hitting a 5-wood, that's OK because you'll have room in your bag for an extra wedge. The main benefit with fairway woods occurs when you learn to hit down on the ball to get adequate height and carry distance. **SG**

HYBRIDS









Hybrids need to be hit with a descending strike, much like a 6-iron swing. Taking a small divot or leaving a mark in the fairway after impact is good because that shows you're hitting down on the ball to get it airborne. Play the ball just inside your left ear and take advantage of the club's wide sole and low center of gravity to elevate the ball. Hybrids can also be used for chipping around the green as well as from tight lies that require a bump-and-run shot.

HITTING IT OFF

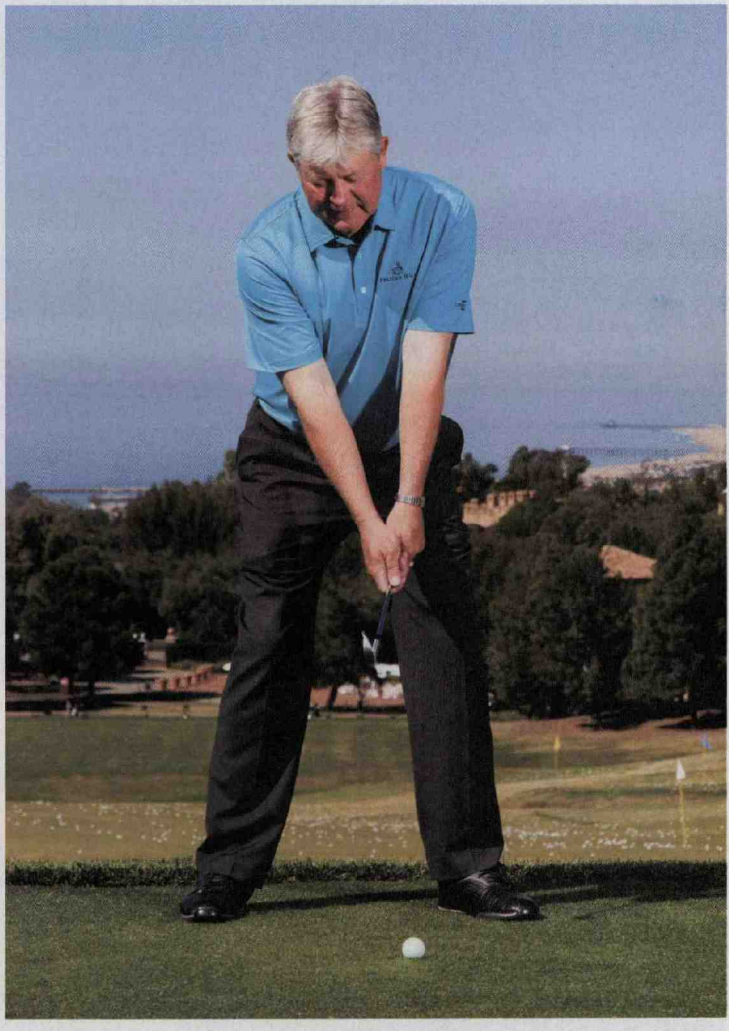
Take the club back slow and smooth and, in the downswing, feel the left shoulder turning back into the target before working up into its starting position. Delaying the opening of the left shoulder allows the club to swing down for maximum benefit. This move also works great in the rough; just move the ball back about an inch to create a steeper angle of attack.

GETTING IT RIGHT

Hybrids combine the best features of woods and irons, so learning to hit them is beneficial. The hollow metal head and shorter shaft length make them better than long irons for control and distance, so, if you struggle with long irons, put some hybrids in your bag. Here's an iron to hybrid replacement guide: 3-iron: hybrid of 19-21 degrees; 4-iron: hybrid of 22-23 degrees; 5-iron: hybrid of 24-27 degrees; 6-iron: hybrid of 29-32 degrees. SG

IRONS

Many golfers collapse their arms and have their hands too close to their head in the backswing. That leads to hitting the ball on the upswing because you have to throw the club away from your body to start the downswing. Get depth in your backswing with a good shoulder turn and width between your arms and hands, which should be far enough from your body to allow you to find the slot in the downswing.

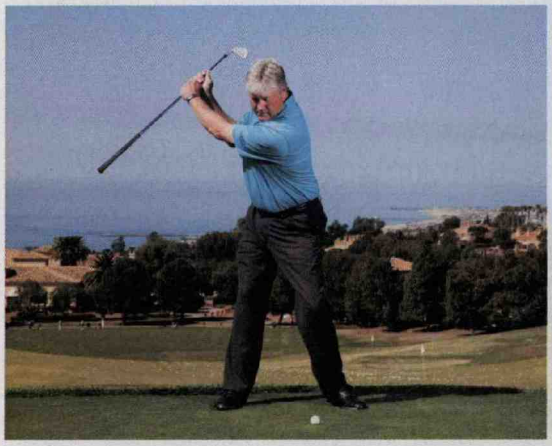


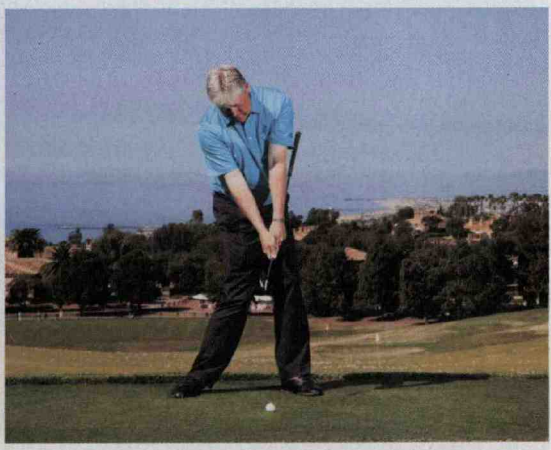
HITTING IT OFF

Get in your stance and grip the club just above the hosel. Turn your chest, shoulders and hands back together to create a nice turn in your upper body. After hinging the club, start the downswing from the ground up by shifting your weight left. This will drop your hands and arms into the slot and improve your downswing plane as the head works down while the hips are turning toward the target. You should end by having your left foot braced, hips opening and shaft under your left arm.

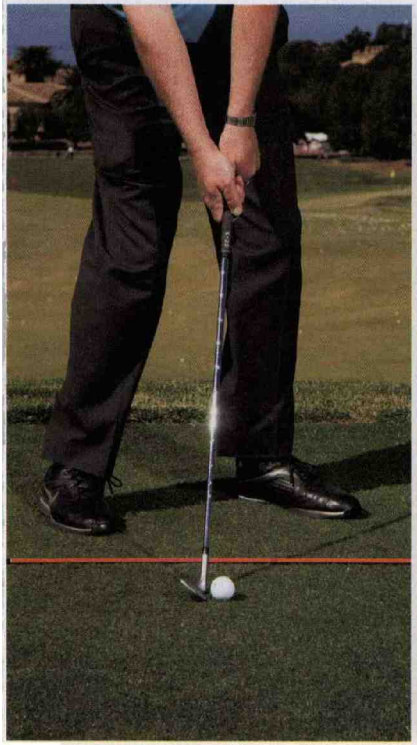
GETTING IT RIGHT

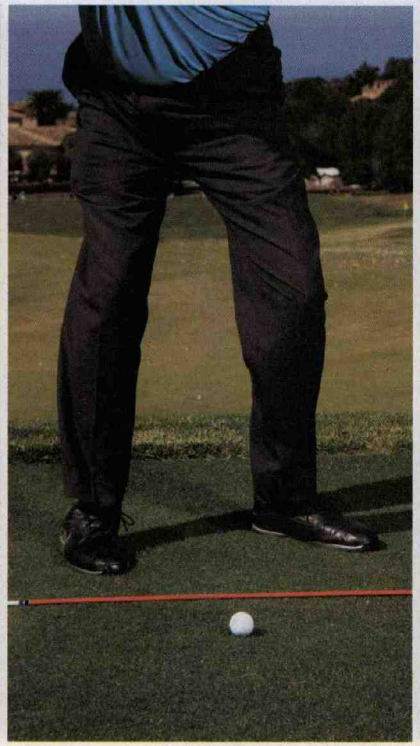
Look for irons that match your ball-striking skills. There's nothing wrong with playing a more forgiving iron that has a cavity back and more weight in certain areas to make your misses turn out better. When you select irons, look into clubhead design, shaft flex and the correct lie angle since you're going to be making thin divots with these clubs. SG

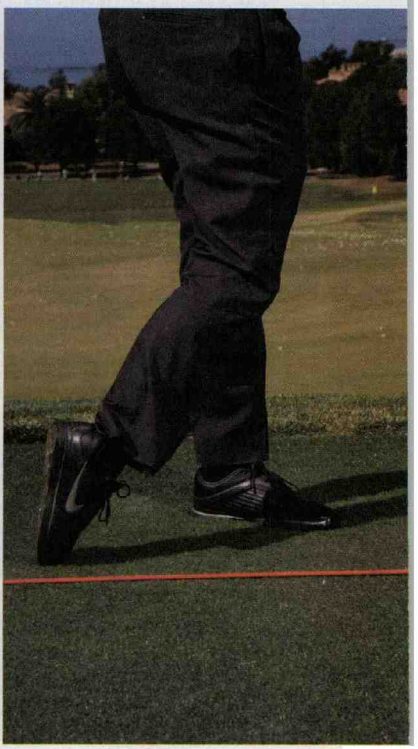




WEDGES







Take a look at your wedges to see if you have the correct loft gap between them. Knowing the distance you hit each wedge is critical. The number of wedges in your bag is a personal choice, but at least three is necessary and, if most of your shots are from 90 yards and in, four is a good number to have.

HITTING IT OFF

Shots from 50 yards and in require a modified setup to restrict your back swing and decrease your swing speed. Here's a good drill that also can be used on the course: Take your normal setup and either pull your front foot back 4 to 6 inches or turn both toes left with your hips matching the toe line. Both setups enable you to swing your front arm back to 8 or 9 o'clock before swinging down and out to the target without decelerating. A sand wedge or lob wedge are best for this move.

GETTING IT RIGHT

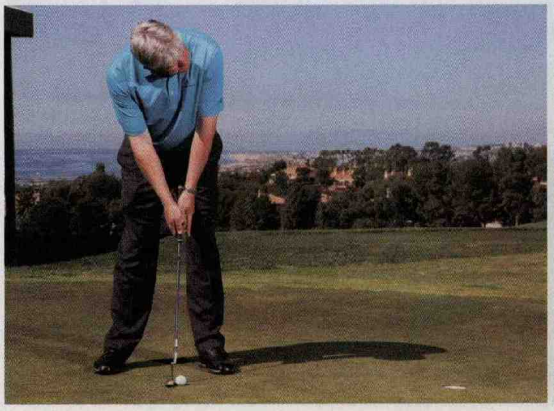
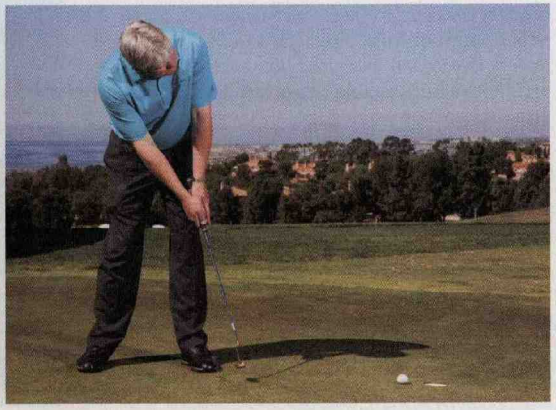
If you prefer to carry four wedges, go with a pitching wedge (45 degrees), gap wedge (50), sand wedge (55) and lob wedge (60). If you'd rather have three in your bag, try a pitching wedge (45), sand wedge (52) and lob wedge (59). Also, a higher bounce on your sand wedge and a lower bounce on your lob wedge will work best. **SG**

PUTTERS

There are many ways to putt, with personal feel the best way to go. The most important thing is speed, so having a putter that feels good in your hands and allows you to make the smoothest stroke possible is the one that should be in your bag.

HITTING IT OFF

Set up to the ball with the putter face aimed down your target line. Turn your head so your eyes are looking at the hole and make a stroke with your head still and eyes remaining on the target. (Jordan Spieth occasionally does this on short putts.) Because you're looking at the target you have a better perception of distance and will hopefully think less about mechanics. If not comfortable doing this on the course, stare at the target, return your eyes to the ball and stroke it while still in distance-control mode.

GETTING IT RIGHT

You want a putter that has the best length and lie angle for your stroke and has a head design that's easy to align with your target. Matching speed with the correct line will lower your scores and make the game more enjoyable. SG