

Your weekly
golf lesson
in the Sun



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TeeItUp

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Sand blast on course

Improving bunker play isn't that hard – and it will save you hundreds of shots

Ask any average high handicapper to name the scariest shot in golf and you'll get the same answer: Sand shots!

Actually, there are much scarier shots, but nothing freaks out a 90-plus shooter more than walking up to a green and seeing their ball in the sand.

Better players, on the other hand, hope their ball lands in a greenside bunker, rather than having to take their chances with a snarly lie in greenside rough.

PGA Tour pros, who deal with the toughest of conditions, get downright giddy when they see a clean lie in the sand.

Never mind just being happy to get the ball out of the sand, Luke Donald, who leads the PGA in sand saves, gets his ball up and in 67.82% of the time. Average players would be thrilled to get their ball out of the sand 67.82% of the time!

Imagine how many shots you'd save over a season if, every time you ended up in the bunker, you could just get your ball on the green and two-putt.

So, why the disparity between pros and average golfers?

There are three steps average Joes need to take to get a little confidence with sand shots and none of them have to do with the complexity of the shot.

1. The right equipment

A good carpenter might not blame his tools, but at least he has tools. Some golfers I work with don't have a sand wedge at all; others don't have the proper loft for the shot they're trying to hit; and way too many have lousy, no-name wedges. To have any chance in the sand, you'll need at least two different lofted wedges. You should invest in top-line wedges, which are better designed to slide through the sand and they'll put more spin on the ball. Finding the right wedges for your swing shape can be a little tricky, so you might want to consult a PGA pro.

2. Take a lesson

Honestly, I can help any



FILE PHOTO

Mike Weir, hitting out of a bunker during the Masters in April, is one of the best when it comes to sand play. He consistently ranks in the top 20 on the PGA Tour in both sand save percentage and scrambling.

golfer get out of the sand in just 15 minutes. Sand shots don't require a massive amount of skill, but they do require a particular technique. Most players are scared in the sand because they have no idea what they're doing, not because the shot is that difficult. If you learn how to set up in the sand and you can make your club hit the sand where you want, you'll get your ball on the green every time. Learn how to hit the shot just once and your fear will melt away.

3. Work at it

So, when was the last time you got a bucket of balls, walked into a bunker, dumped

them out and practised your sand shots? You don't need to spend hours in a bunker to get decent, but you do need to put in a little time. Think of it this way: If you practise just an hour at a time a few times in the next month, you'll hit better sand shots for the rest of your life. Now that's a pretty good deal.



All you have to do to save hundreds of shots over the next several years is buy a couple of good wedges, take a lesson or two and practise for a couple of hours this month. If you do, you'll also be happy to see your ball end up in the sand, instead of in long rough.

FIVE KEYS TO SUCCESS IN THE SAND

1. Watch your ball position

Always place the ball well forward in the sand. I move my ball position two inches forward from a normal pitch position in grass. So my ball is about three inches forward of the middle of my stance or opposite my left heel.

2. Change your focus

Look at and focus on a spot about two inches behind the ball where you want your wedge to impact the sand. You're not trying to hit the ball, so stop looking at it.

3. Open up

To encourage loft out of the sand, I align myself left of my target (open) and open

up my clubface a touch. Then I swing along my body line from out to in.

4. Watch your clubface

Keep your clubface open as you swing it up and as it enters the sand. The back edge of the club should spank the sand so the club can skim under the ball. Otherwise, the front edge of your club will dig in too much.

5. Keep it going

You need to maintain momentum as you swing through the sand to a finish. Don't be too aggressive. Bunker shots are best hit with longer, softer swings. Just make sure to keep things moving.

GOLF ROUNDUP

Non-Canadian Open wrapup

Shark soars at Senior Open

At Sunningdale, England, Greg Norman fired a 6-under 64 to grab the lead heading into the last round of the Senior British Open.

Norman was a stroke ahead of second-round leader Fred Funk (72) and Loren Roberts (67).

Tom Watson's hopes of improving on his runner-up spot in the British Open took a hit after a 70 that left him six shots behind.

Watson's putter remained cold, despite a grip change.

"I had five three-putts. I wasted a good ball-striking day," he said. "I hit it very well and made absolutely nothing on the greens, although I did make a 60-footer (on the 13th hole) and a 30-footer (on No. 5).

"Otherwise, I was missing everything. Everything was right, everything pushed. Maybe I ought to aim left. I don't have very good speed control on these greens."

Norman found the speed in a bogey-free round.

"I got on the tee and could see the shots I wanted to play and just went and played them," he said. "I really wasn't worried about anything else."

Funk dropped his first shot of the week at the tough second hole, then double-bogeyed the 12th and bogeyed 14.

"The good news is that I'm still there. I can still win it," Funk said. "The bad news is that I put everyone else in the tournament right back in it."

Graham Gunn of Orleans missed the cut, which was made yesterday after 18 players completed their lightning-delayed second rounds. Gunn shot 75-75.

Brewerton keeps pace

At Evian-Les-Bains, France, **Becky Brewerton** of Wales shot 3-under 69 to share the lead at the Evian Masters for the third consecutive round. Joining Brewerton were **Sophie Gustafson** of Sweden (67) and **In-Kyung Kim** of South Korea (68). — Sun wires

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