

Short cuts to lower scores

...and they only take a few hours of practice for consistent results

It's great to see Phil Mickelson back on tour this week.

With all he and his family have been through after wife Amy was diagnosed with breast cancer, you've got to be happy for the guy.

One thing's for sure: When Mickelson shows up for a tournament, you're guaranteed to see some wild green-side shots.

The guy has better hands than Houdini when it comes to hitting high-risk, flashy shots around the green.

Unfortunately, way too many average players are intrigued by those shots and try to hit them themselves.

That's a problem for two reasons: If you had hands as good as Mickelson's, you'd probably already be shooting in the 70s, and average golfers rarely practise their short game. So the odds of pulling off a Mickelson-type lob shot are less than one in 20.

A better short game is, however, your easiest and best way to shoot lower scores.

In just 24 hours, I guarantee you can cut 5-10 strokes off your game. You'll have to spread those 24 hours over a few weeks, but lower scores are that easy if you just spend some time around the green.

Here's your 24-hour plan:

There are four basic short game shots — the chip, the bump and run, the pitch and the lob (a watered-down version of Mickelson's super flop).

If you take a one-hour les-



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son on each of the shots, then practise each for an hour five times, you've got a 24-hour commitment and guaranteed lower scores. Sounds pretty simple because it is, but many players are looking for the answer in the wrong place.

Average players are obsessed and distracted with hitting the ball better. Sure, it's important to develop a consistent swing, but full shots are less than half the game.

While 60% of shots are taken with less than a full swing, few golfers even spend a third of their practice time on their short game. On any given day at my golf centre, I see a 30:1 ratio of long game practice to short game practice — that's 30 people hitting balls to only person on our short game complex.

Learn how to hit four basic short game shots and practise each shot until you're consistent and happy with the results. If you learn how to hit the basic shots and keep your shots as low risk as possible, the game gets a lot easier.



FILE PHOTO

Phil Mickelson, pictured chipping during the Barclays in August 2008, has returned to the PGA Tour after caring for his wife Amy, who is battling breast cancer. Also back in the public view is Mickelson's spectacular short game, which takes practice to perfect. For consistent results, keep your short game simple.

Here's a quick look at the four staples of the short game:

1. The Chip

This is the simplest short game shot used within five yards of the green. It's basically a putting-type shot with a lofted iron. Make sure the ball is placed back in your stance and keep your hands and weight forward throughout the stroke. Always land the ball on the green and let it

roll out to the hole. Different lofted irons will lead to different flight-to-roll ratios.

2. The Bump and Run

This shot is similar to the chip, but requires a little more swing and body rotation. Because you are farther from the green, you'll need to widen your stance and turn your chest back and through as you swing. However, just like a chip shot, your hands and weight need to stay for-

ward to bump the ball and to let it run on the green. Keep your finish low to keep your ball flight low.

3. The Pitch

It's golf most basic shot and the foundation, or blueprint, for your swing. If you can master basic pitch motion, a consistent swing won't be far behind. Better players most often use their 56- and 60-degree lofted wedges to pitch the ball around the green.

4. The Lob

You'll need a lesson for every short game shot, but this is the trickiest. The idea is to cut your club under the ball. The shot requires more motion, wrist hinge and precision. But with a little practice, you can use it when necessary.

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Harrington takes three-shot lead, but watch out for Tiger

At Akron, Ohio, Padraig Harrington kept pouring in birdies as he tried to separate himself from the pack at the Bridgestone Invitational. He arrived at the 18th green with a three-shot lead, happy with his day's work.

Then he glanced at the leaderboard for the first time yesterday.

Suddenly, that lead felt a little smaller.

His closest challenger was Tiger Woods.

"I was surprised, yeah. I didn't know he was up there,"

GOLF Roundup

Tournament notes

said Harrington, who made four birdies on the back nine for a 3-under 67 and a total of 10-under 210. "OK, he's in second place. There he is, 7-under par. There you go, three-shot lead. Is that enough? Probably not."

Woods made a charge of his own about an hour earlier, running off four birdies over the last six holes, for a 65.

He has never finished worse than fifth on this track, while winning six times in 10 appearances, three times when trailing.

Woods was happy to just have a chance this time after missing a short par putt on the eighth hole and falling six shots behind.

"I figured if I could put half

a dent in that, I'd be all right," Woods said. "At least I'm there with a shot at it."

While Harrington conceded that Woods chasing him changes the dynamics, the Irishman usually is up to the task.

"I realize I'm going to have a difficult (final) day, that's for sure," said Harrington. "This golf course has obviously been very good for Tiger ... so I don't think anything is going to be easy. Probably at best, it's going to be a long, hard day and a battle. That's what

I'm going to prepare myself for."

Harrington won both the British Open and PGA Championship last summer, but has struggled with his swing this year. Woods, meanwhile, is looking for his fourth win of the season.

It could be a two-man show, and quite an opening act for the PGA Championship next week at Hazeltine.

Jerry Kelly (69) was alone in third, five shots back of Harrington. Another shot back were 10 players, including

Mike Weir of Bright's Grove. Weir also carded a 69.

Just keeps on Roll-ins

At Reno, Nev., John Rollins opened a four-shot in the Legends Reno-Tahoe Open with a 5-under 67. Rollins, who tied the course record with a 62 Friday, had three birdies and three bogeys on the front nine yesterday, then rolled in a 30-foot eagle on 11 and added two birdies to finish at 17-under 199. — Sun wires

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HARRINGTON
Eyes on Woods