

80 YARDS TO GO

You're nearly there—Justin Morin can help you take it home. Writer PATRICK JONES takes a short lesson with the head pro from North Carolina's Birkdale Golf Club

GOLFERS ARE GENERALLY an intelligent bunch. The game requires intense head skills, such as prudent course management and club selection. That said, why is it that so many golfers just don't get it when it comes to knowing how to practice? The mantra "work on your short game" was around long before celebrity coaching gurus were earning millions to say it.

Yet when an opportunity arises to work on the game, golfers get to the range, pull out their bags and immediately regress to Cro Magnon clubbing tendencies.

"First thing, out comes the driver," says Justin Morin, head golf professional at Birkdale Golf Club in Huntersville, N.C. The Arnold Palmer-designed course is located 15 minutes north of Charlotte off Interstate 77.

"I can't estimate how many times I have walked up to a student for their first lesson and, after introducing myself, tell them I will be right back after getting some tokens (for range balls)," says Morin. "As soon as I turn my back, I hear them rip the head cover off their driver. They have just gotten out of their car. They have been sitting in an office for eight hours. They haven't warmed up a bit and all of a sudden they are taking swings at 100 miles per hour."

Instead, Morin strongly urges his students to work on the parts of their games that will provide the quickest results.

"More than half of your golf shots come from 80 yards and in," he says. "And if you include putts, you are looking at 75 percent of your game that comes from within that distance. Just think of all the strokes you could save (even if you did

drive into the trees) if you could chip out to wedge distance and get it up and in for your par. The bad drive did not even matter. It is absolutely critical to work on your short game."

Morin recommends that golfers put in 80 percent of their practice time working on their game from 80 yards and in, and just 20 percent focusing on their long game. He called that the "ideal breakdown" in maximizing available practice time and to see scoring improvements.

"If you want to get better, you must work on your wedge shots and chipping and putting. If you have an hour to practice, spend 45 minutes on the short game and the last 15 minutes working on getting the ball in play. Imagine if you took out all of your three-putts, or even cut them in half, and if you could take out all of the times when you didn't get it up and down when you just missed the green. You can easily see six, eight, 10 shots shaved off your game if you get it up and down even half the time or more."

Even in the face of overwhelming evidence, few golfers will likely change their go-for-it practices. But for those who are willing to put down the driver and work on getting real results, Morin offers the following tips for short-game skills:

"They've been in an office for eight hours, and suddenly they're taking 100mph swings"

FULL AND PARTIAL LOB WEDGE

Place the ball slightly back of the middle of your stance when hitting wedges. Distribute your weight evenly on both feet. Leaning back causes you to hit the ball thin. Too much weight forward causes a fat shot. Grip and posture are the same as on other shots.

“One of the biggest keys is to make sure that you maintain your shoulder rotation,” says Morin. “The common mistake when hitting short shots is just to swing with your arms. Make a nice full turn with your arms remaining in front of your chest.” Morin says his normal 80 yard shot with a wedge requires a shortened 9 o’clock to 3 o’clock swing. Work on the range to get a feel for where your arms need to stop on both the backswing and the follow-through to determine average distances.

“Just take a club you are comfortable with and get a feel for dialing it up and down.” Avoid taking full swings and decelerating the club to adjust to different distances. As erroneous: taking abbreviated back swings and suddenly firing through the ball.

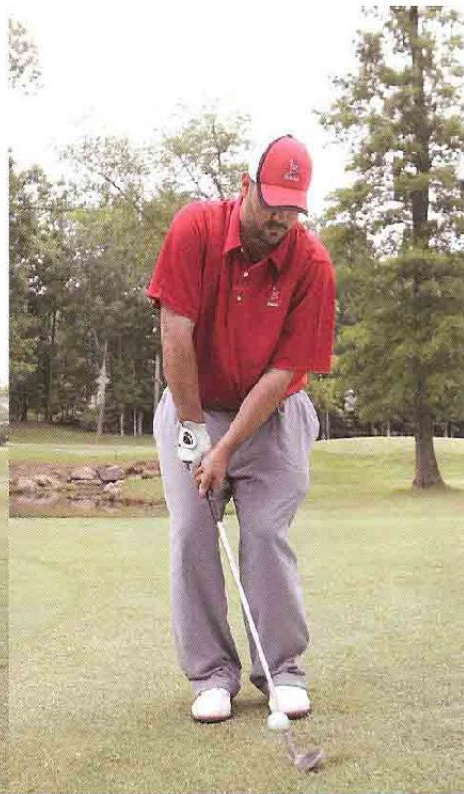
“You should have the same rhythm on every shot,” says Morin. “If you don’t have enough club, or have too much, go back and get another one. Be able to visualize the clock in your head and know how much of a swing is required as you move in. You will have confidence and be good to go.”

To pinpoint the proper impact point on wedge shots for his students, and to avoid thinned and fat shots, Morin draws a dot on the back side of a golf ball then rotates it down. “Hit down on the golf ball with a descending blow at that exact point and you’ll hit it crisply every time,” he says.



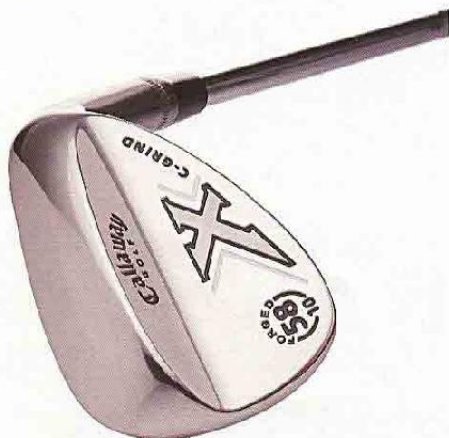
CHIPPING FROM JUST OFF THE GREEN

When the ball is just off the green, Morin suggests selecting a wedge, placing your weight slightly forward and your hands slightly forward. "Hit it with a descending blow and let the loft of the wedge get the ball airborne," he says. "Visualize a spot on the green where you want to land it, not where you want it to end up, and aim for that spot." Morin sometimes has his students visualize a shoebox on the green and then has them attempt to land the ball perfectly in that shoebox. "Hit your spot and let the contours of the green be your friend to bring the ball toward the hole," he says. Phil Mickelson has popularized the flop shot, but Morin calls that choice "always the worst case scenario and the very last resort." He recommends that higher handicappers not even attempt the flop shot even if it means chipping away from the hole and leaving a longer putt.



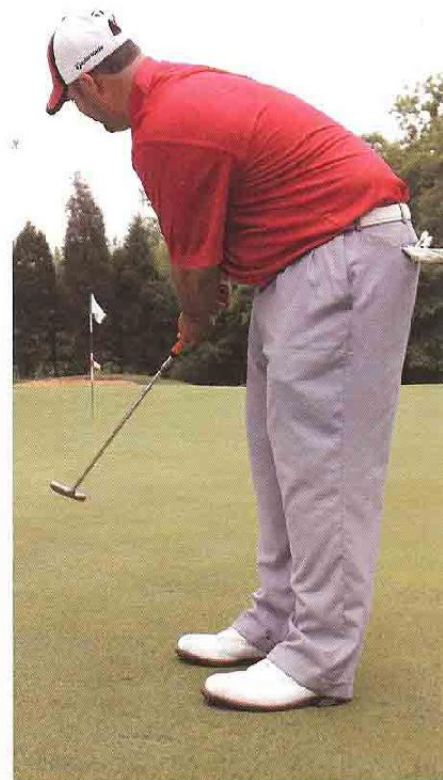
CALLAWAY WEDGE

Available in two finishes, New White Chrome and New Vintage, the X-Forged Wedges were designed with input from Tour Professionals and come in 12 different loft offerings ranging from 48 to 64 degrees (the 64° being a Mickelson favorite). They are made from soft 1020 carbon steel for exceptional touch and feel around the greens. A tighter toe to heel radius provides increased versatility from any lie you might encounter around the green. Select 56-through 64-degree models of the X-Forged Wedges feature the aggressively-sized Mack Daddy Grooves, which are designed at the maximum depth and width for tour-level spin, trajectory and distance control.



LAG PUTTING

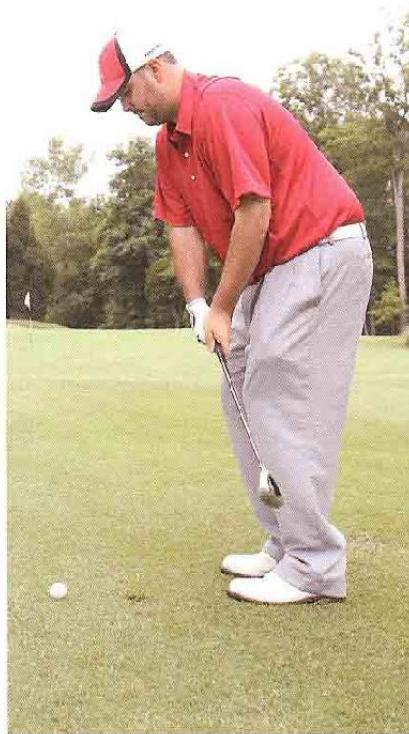
Morin does a little trash talking when discussing improvement of lag putting skills. He says he literally visualizes a large trash can sitting over the top of the hole and then tries to roll the ball to it on long putts. "All you want to do is try to hit the trash can," he says. "If you have a bigger target, it is a lot easier to hit." Morin actually puts a large metal trash can over the hole when working with his students. He recommends widening your stance just a bit more to have a sturdy base on lengthy putts. "One of the best lessons I ever received was to know which putts actually need to go in," adds Morin. "If you are 60 feet away and it goes in, it's a big bonus. Think rolling it to the trash can and you're going to be within 3 or 4 feet with a very makeable putt. Know which putts need to go in. If you have a 10-footer that is downhill with a big break, that's another time when you just want to make sure you get out of there with two putts. On the other side, a 20-footer straight up the hill is one you should be aggressive with and try to make."



BUMP AND RUN

Another alternative for finding the flagstick does not require lobbing the ball high in the air. Instead, Morin suggests considering the bump and run shot. "If you don't have anything in front of you and the green except green grass, pull out a 7-, 8- or 9-iron, use a regular putting stroke and get the ball rolling on the ground," he says. "The loft of the club will get the ball in the air. Let the club do the work. The higher the loft of the club, the softer the ball will land. The lower the loft, the more the ball will run out. Let the green and the flagstick placement dictate which club to use. You are always better off playing the ball as low as you can and letting it run to the hole."

Ball position should remain in the middle of the stance. A normal putting grip can be used if a golfer prefers. Morin suggests that golfers read the terrain like they would on a regular putt, including picking the high point, getting the ball to that point with the correct speed and letting it track to the hole. "Your goal with the bump and run is to get the ball on the green in one try," says Morin. "If you get it on the green and then two-putt, you have saved a shot."



Morin guarantees that his short-game advice will improve every golfer's game. Now if he—and teaching professionals everywhere—can just convince a few more golfers to leave the head cover on their driver just a little longer...

A GREAT DAY INDOORS

New technologies from AboutGolf take the virtual golf experience to a new level

AboutGolf, the company that for 20 years has lead the way with golf simulation software and technology, is once again setting the standard with its SimSurround Simulator and new 3Trak™ 3D launch engine technology.

"Virtually every level of the industry will benefit from this," says Bill Bales, AboutGolf CEO.

AboutGolf's simulators are already the best available; you may have seen one in a local equipment store or top club.

The SimSurround Simulator adds to the company's already great product by using three screens to create an almost 180-degree wrap-around image. This immerses the golfer in the virtual golf experience more than ever and really offers the feeling of "being there" on course.

Adding to the overall effectiveness of AboutGolf's simulators is the new 3Trak technology. 3Trak uses three ultra-powerful, very small "smart" cameras designed by AboutGolf to track both the ball and club during a swing. It's the first and only system to directly measure both ball spin and spin axis, making it the most advanced and accurate system for measuring ball and club data. Data like this helps top manufacturers improve the products we all use—but it also can help average players get the right equipment and the right instruction to improve their scores.

AboutGolf's software is second to none, and the company's new technologies make

the simulators the most technically proficient virtual golf experience available. But the overall effectiveness of AboutGolf's simulators is due to an added bonus: The simulators are fun.

Not just for club fittings or corporate afternoons, AboutGolf's simulators are available for the home as well, meaning your game room could get a whole new level of intensity. Due to the company's huge emphasis on research and design, nothing comes close to AboutGolf's excellent 3D experience. As important, no other system offers the incredibly detailed selection of courses. Gathering its own course data and using a top team of incredible programmers and developers, AboutGolf offers virtual replications of most of the top courses in the

world. Recently, St. Andrew's was added to the list. The legendary Old Course, plus the New and Jubilee courses, were all painstakingly recreated using the most detailed information AboutGolf could gather. It's a standard the company brings to every aspect of its business, including customizing systems for any home at an incredibly reasonable price.

As Bales says: "Our system doesn't impose any limitations as far as design. With 3Trak we can create a simulator in a smaller space than you can swing a club or as large as you want to make it... From an architectural standpoint it's a designer's dream."

Find out more about AboutGolf and its excellent systems at www.aboutgolf.com or by calling (419) 482-9096.

