

How I Play the Chip Shot

Fine Pointers on One of the Master Strokes of Golf Explained by an Expert

By Alex Smith

THERE is no shot so valuable in golf as the chip shot to the pin, which has upset more golf matches than any other shot I can think of. Many pros would much prefer to play a chip to the cup than to negotiate a long putt. A chip can be regulated in such a manner that it is as certain as any putt of 20 feet.

The chip shot carries with it more back spin than the pitch, but the fact that it runs along the ground will make a golfer stop to think whether this is really true.

The art of playing the shot is easily learned if one will take a little time two or three days a week for practice and, once learn it, it will never be forgotten. I can't remember a single case where a chip shot was spoiled completely if the club was in the hands of an expert. The method of hitting the ball is such that always some sort of a shot develops and while the ball may not always be made to roll over and play dead when within a short distance from the hole some sort of a putt is left within reasonable distance.

In learning to play the chip shot it must be remembered that a little more force is needed than in the ordinary pitch; practice alone can enlighten a player on this point. The ball scurries across the green toward the cup and while apparently it has the intention of running on over the hole comes to a full stop when the spin imparted to the sphere begins to take effect.

There is no follow-through in this shot which is the only case where the club does not go on and complete the swing after the ball is hit. The chip shot might be described as a stab. The club stops short in the ground and the ball squeezed in between the club and the ground takes a sudden jump forward in the direction the player has aimed.

I play this shot with an ordinary mashie. Many others use a jigger or even a midiron. The jigger is a favorite club in playing this shot among many leading amateurs.

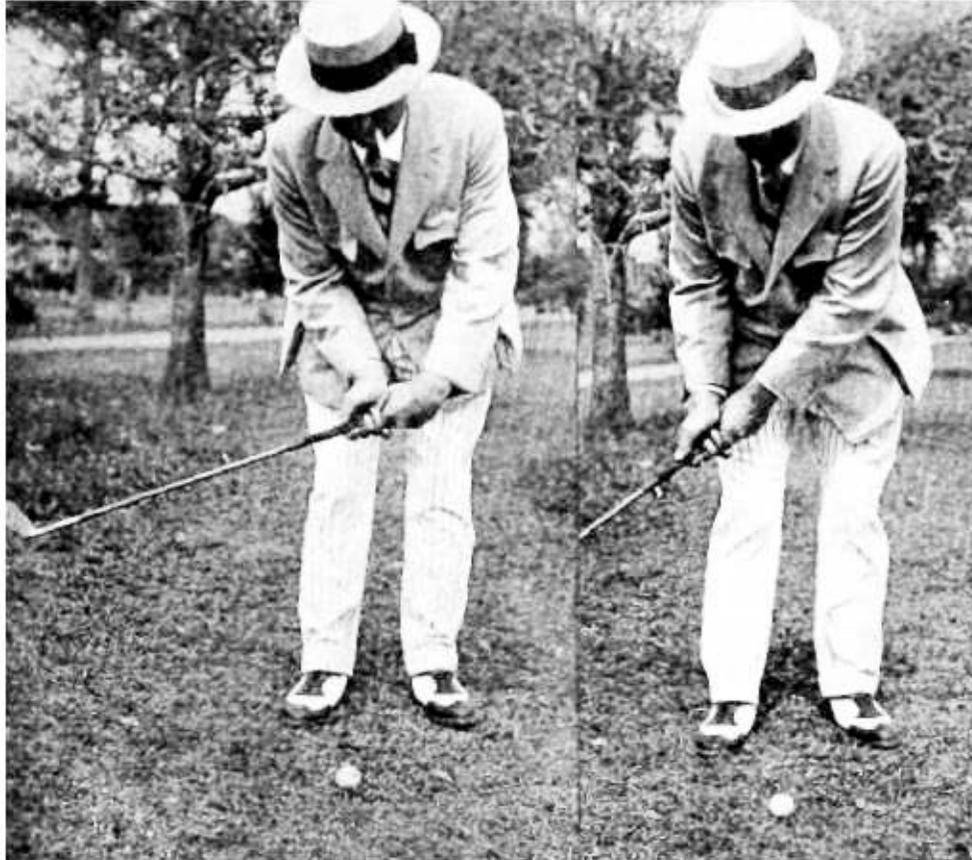
The distance at which the chip shot is most effective ranges from thirty to seventy-five feet. There are players who use a chip shot from eighty yards away, but I prefer the pitch from this distance.

The one thing to avoid in playing the chip is getting too much wrist into the stroke. This is a very common fault. In fact the average golfer seems to think that the stroke is made with the wrists almost exclusively.

But when this is done, direction is spoiled and the effort is too often a complete flub.

I always hold my right thumb straight

very carefully. Remember to keep your wrists firm and unbroken as the club head hits the ball.



Alex Smith demonstrating back stroke of the chip shot. Left, improper way, flexing wrists; right, wrists held firm without flexing. Too much wrist action is the leading fault with beginners

down the shaft. This steadies the club and prevents the wrists from breaking or overdoing their part of the work. Watch this



Another demonstration of too much wrist action, showing position of hands at the finish of the shot

When I began to teach golf to Jerry Travers, a great deal of my work consisted in putting Jerry right on this one shot. He proved a very apt pupil. In place of holding his thumb straight down the shaft, Travers decided that he could get better results by bending the top joint of his right thumb and holding only the tip against the shaft.

He used to practice this stroke for many hours a week until the time came when he could play it as well as any man I ever saw. It was largely through his effective use of this stroke that he won four amateur championships and one open title. When he was anywhere from thirty to seventy feet away from the green or the cup, he could count upon having a fairly short putt left. Very frequently Travers uses the jigger for this type of shot as well as for longer approaches.

I recall upon several occasions, when Travers won the Open Championship, that he was able to get his chip shot practically dead to the cup and thereby save a stroke.

It is very important in playing this stroke to keep your head still and to keep your body from swaying. The body isn't needed in the stroke as the distance is too short to require any power. Bring the club back at an even, steady sweep and not too far so that you may keep it under control. Never hurry this stroke. In coming through be sure to keep a firm grip with both wrists firm.

Many who play this shot well don't bring the club back any further than they would for a thirty foot putt. But there must be nothing flabby about the stroke. The ball barely leaves the ground, finishing with a run after the manner of a putt.

The mashie is never brought very far back in playing the shot, but to lay out a scale to follow would be difficult. A great deal would depend on the roll of the ground whether up hill or down and quite a lot on the wind. Only a lot of practice can determine this. For the ordinary mashie approach I bring the hands about waist high and finish the shot in the same way.

Accuracy is required in playing the mashie or the jigger as one is shooting straight for the hole and must gauge the proper distance as well as the direction. This comes only through careful and patient practice.