

Golf Digest



FAST FIXES FOR EVERY FAULT

- SHANK
- > FAT SLICE
- > PULL PUSH
- > TOP HOOK
- & MORE

RICKIE FOWLER
 > 'MY MOVE FOR POWER'

BARGAIN GOLF
 > WORLD'S BEST-EVER GUIDE: MYRTLE BEACH

FREE > PGA LESSON
 DETAILS INSIDE
 P. 151

+ OBSOLETE EQUIPMENT
 > WE TELL YOU WHAT TO TRASH

MAY/2010

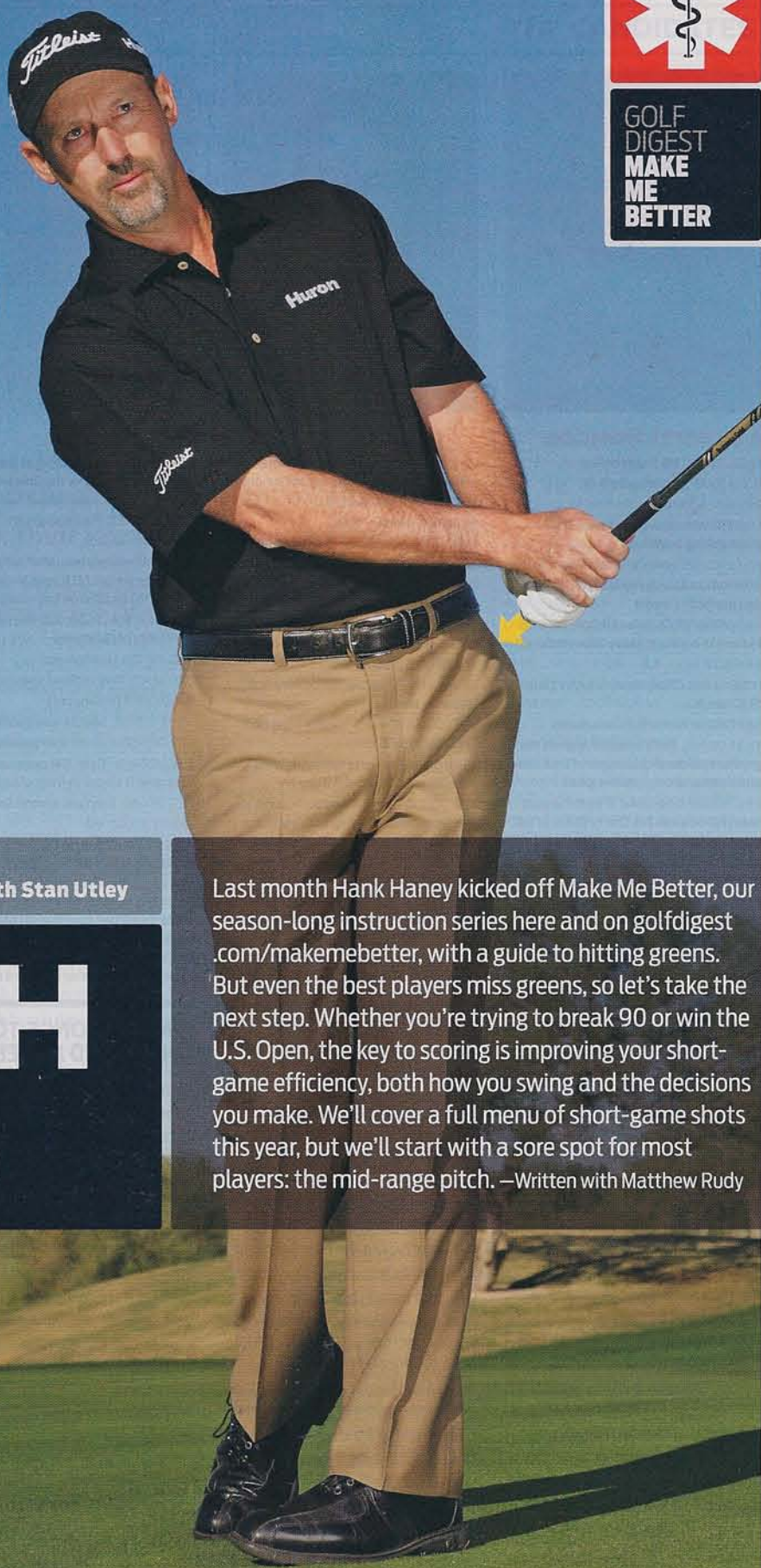
#BXBCCKX *****SCH 3-DIGIT 852
 #GLF9020048518/7# MRG
 MR. ROB MYERS
 COMMUNICATION LINKS DMAC # 8432
 8722 EAST VIA DE COMERCIO # 006
 SCOTTSDALE AZ 85258-3434 75N

RICKIE FOWLER
ROOKIE SENSATION



GOLF DIGEST
MAKE ME BETTER

FINISH A PITCH WITH THE GRIP ALMOST IN YOUR LEFT POCKET.



Make Me Better

with Stan Utley

PITCH shots

Last month Hank Haney kicked off Make Me Better, our season-long instruction series here and on golfdigest.com/makemebetter, with a guide to hitting greens. But even the best players miss greens, so let's take the next step. Whether you're trying to break 90 or win the U.S. Open, the key to scoring is improving your short-game efficiency, both how you swing and the decisions you make. We'll cover a full menu of short-game shots this year, but we'll start with a sore spot for most players: the mid-range pitch. —Written with Matthew Rudy

PITCHING

TODD YAWASKY

A 30- or 40-yard pitch shot occupies an awkward middle ground for a lot of players, literally and figuratively.

You have a variety of choices in terms of trajectory, and this can be confusing. You're hitting the ball in the air more than you would for a chip, but you don't use a full swing. That can produce mismatched swing mechanics.

Many players intuitively understand that they need less force than for a full swing, but they dial back the power the wrong way. They freeze the body and make too big an arm swing—mostly because they've focused on the flag as their target instead of where they want the ball to land. The brain subconsciously knows that flying the ball to the flag is too far, so it tells the body to hang back and slow down through impact. That's a recipe for poor distance control at best and bladed or fat shots at worst.

CORRECT

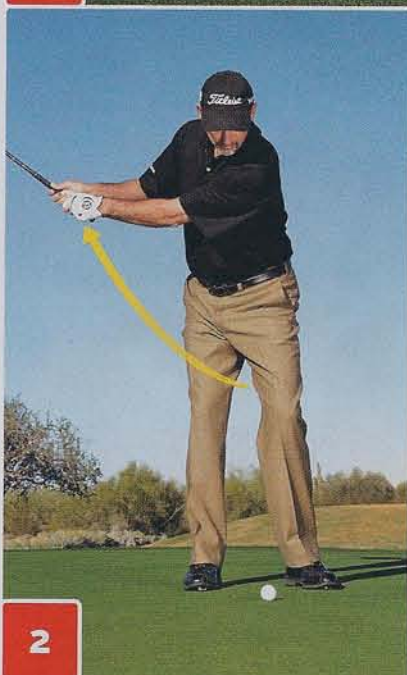
The goal on a pitch is to make consistent, predictable contact.

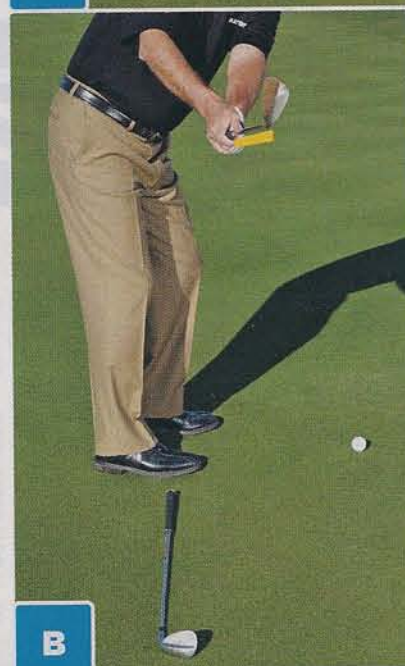
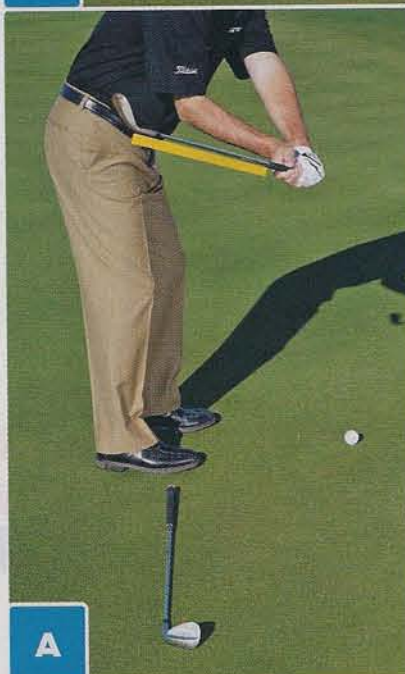
That's how you develop a feel for distance. It starts with a good setup. Take a slightly closed stance and square the face (1); this makes it easier to start on the correct path. If you swing the club on plane from there, you'll be lined up to make the ball go at your target.

On the backswing, let your right wrist hinge a little so the handle stays fairly close to you (2). Make sure you turn your body—proven here by the creases in my pants at the top of my right leg. On the downswing, turn toward the target, with your hips level at the finish (3). Your hands and grip should finish close to your belt, the butt of the club almost in your left pocket. You'll create clubhead speed by turning your body and releasing your hands, not by tugging the handle.

INCORRECT

To try to get more loft, many players set up with an open stance and an open clubface (1). This often causes them to lift their hands up and away from the body in the backswing. Taking the club back like this, with a faulty body turn, often leads to a move off the ball and onto the right side (2). From there, players usually hang back and pivot off their back foot, and then have to compensate by scooping at the ball through impact (3).





TAKEAWAY DRILL

Swinging the club on a good plane is as important on a pitch as it is on a tee shot. Place a club on the ground parallel to your target line and in line with the balls of your feet. At waist high going back, your club and the one on the ground should be parallel (1). To hit a shot lower or higher, I don't change my swing. I adjust the face. Here, the face is slightly closed—or pointed down—to hit a low shot. For a high shot, the toe would be straight up.

The most common takeaway mistake is getting the right elbow stuck in front of the body. From there, the player either whips the clubhead back to the inside (A) or keeps the arms and the clubhead too far out in front (B). When the clubhead gets inside, the face opens too much and you have to turn your upper body hard to compensate. When the club stays in front, you have to hold the face open and push the ball on target.

PIVOT DRILL

We've talked about controlling the downswing with your body pivot, but what does that feel like?

Set up in your normal stance, but stand the club up with your left hand for balance (1). On a pitch, you always want to have a little lower body motion going away (2) because it kick-starts the turn on the downswing. Start through by straightening your left knee while turning your right knee toward the target (3). If you're getting to your left side properly, your right heel should begin to release off the ground. Keep your hips level and finish tall.

PICK A BETTER TARGET →

Choosing your target isn't as simple as just aiming at the flag. Walk onto the green and gather some information. Where are the humps and breaks? Is the flag on a tier? Once you do that, decide on a trajectory and a spot where you want the ball to land. On a pitch to a flat target, I might fly the ball halfway, so I'll dial in 15 yards of carry. But I don't have a formula. Picking the landing spot is always a guess, but the more your contact improves, the better your guesses. In fact, it's better to guess wrong and hit the shot with conviction than to swing with no specific shot in mind. ♣


Stan Utley, who ranks sixth on Golf Digest's list of the 50 Greatest Teachers in America, is based at Grayhawk Golf Club in Scottsdale.



**GOLF
DIGEST
MAKE
ME
BETTER**

CREATE YOUR PLAN

The first step to a better golf game is knowing where you need help. The next is getting the help you need. With our game-analysis partner, shotbyshot.com, we'll help you compile your stats and figure out your strengths and weaknesses. We'll generate long-game and short-game handicaps for you, and assess your game after every round. Charts and tracking tools will bring it all into focus. Then we'll help you navigate the best tips from the Golf Digest archives. You can also send in a video of your swing for a lesson. And new this year is a special driving-analysis tool. Find it all at golfdigest.com/makemebetter.



**FOCUS ON YOUR
LANDING SPOT,
NOT ON
THE FLAG.**

