

***Golf's Short
Game***
FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Michael Patrick Shiels
with Michael Kernicki**



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About the Authors

Michael Patrick Shiels: Michael Patrick Shiels displayed his woeful short game at courses around the world while maintaining his career as an international golf and travel writer. That is, until writing this book, during which his handicap improved five strokes.

Golf's Short Game For Dummies is his fifth book. The *Los Angeles Times* called his *Good Bounces & Bad Lies*, written with Emmy Award-winning golf announcer Ben Wright, "perhaps the best sports book ever," and a *Washington Times* review sardonically compared Shiels and Wright to Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Shiels' first book, a biography of famed Detroit radio host J.P. McCarthy, was a regional bestseller that received praise from Jack Nicklaus, Larry King, and Frank Sinatra, Jr. Shiels also penned *Works of Art: The Golf Course Designs of Arthur Hills*.

His travel articles have appeared in publications such as *Golf Magazine*, *Travel + Leisure Golf*, www.pgatour.com, *Sports Illustrated*, *Northwest World Traveler Magazine*, *Bermuda Royal Gazette*, and the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, and he's written scripts for The Golf Channel and ESPN. Shiels has traveled the world — from Thailand to the Middle East to his beloved ancestral Republic of Ireland in search of rich stories to tell. You can contact Michael at Mshiels@aol.com.

Michael Kernicki: A PGA member for over 25 years, Michael Kernicki has spent most of his career as a Head Golf Professional and General Manager at some of America's finest golf clubs. He was twice named Golf Professional of the Year by the Michigan PGA and has received other PGA awards. Kernicki has served as a member of the PGA of America National Board of Directors and on the Rules of Golf Committee, where he has administered the rules at 13 PGA Championships.

Noted for his knowledge of the golf swing, he has instructed at Teaching and Playing workshops around the country and has authored several articles about the golf swing and the short game.

Today Michael is the Head Golf Professional at one of the nation's most prominent country clubs, Indian Creek Country Club in Miami Beach, Florida. As a daily routine, Michael teaches the short game and the golf swing in the most simple and logical manner. His primary objective is for his students to enjoy the game while they improve and make golf a game for a lifetime.

Dedication

Michael Patrick Shiels: To my eight-year-old son Harrison Ambrose Shiels, a giant-hearted little boy who, at the age of two, aced his first-ever hole of mini-golf at Pirate Golf on International Drive in Orlando.

Michael Kernicki: To my father, Walter Kernicki, for the tools you provided for golf and life.

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Introduction

If we mention the term *professional golfer* to you, what image immediately comes to mind? Most likely you envision Tiger Woods taking a vicious swipe at the ball or Greg Norman bravely sweeping through the ball with his blonde locks flowing out from under his hat. You probably think of strong Tour players hitting big, booming drives that soar through the sky like guided missiles.

But even professional, tournament golf has an old and trusty adage: “You drive for show, but you putt for dough.” Often you hear a player who wins a tournament say, “I won because the putts just started falling for me this week.” No player ever won a tournament by hitting the ball the farthest from the tee. Players win tournaments at the opposite end of the hole — by hitting the ball close to the flagstick and making putts.

Take it from the pros: You can win more of your amateur tournaments and friendly matches by hitting the ball closer to the hole and giving yourself better chances to make putts. And you can improve your enjoyment of the game by improving your performance. An improved performance results in lower scores. And you can most immediately improve your performance and your scores by improving your short game.

Although most average players place a great deal of emphasis on how long a player can hit a golf ball, you use the driver from the tee only 14 times per round on a golf course. By contrast, you use your putter and short irons for as many as 50 percent of the total strokes. Players who strive to break 90 have a much better chance of realizing their goal if they come to the realization that they can save many, many more strokes by improving their short games instead of placing so much emphasis on the long ball. Chicks may dig the long ball, but as any dummy can tell . . .

The secret of golf satisfaction is in the short game.

About This Book

Every player likes to bang the ball with a driver, just like the kid at the carnival who tries to hit the bell with the sledgehammer. But standing at the driving range and belting pills gets you one thing — blisters.

Tiger Woods and John Daly may slug majestic, rising drives over 300 yards, but the average player has trouble equaling that kind of prowess. For most of us, the short game is the great equalizer. Something that we can do as well as the pros. For all their power, long hitting players like Woods wouldn't be as successful without equally impressive short-game skills — skills that average players can, indeed, acquire. You've likely heard Woods being tagged with the best-short-game-on-the-planet label, and if you've watched Daly, you've listened to announcers marvel at his touch around the greens. That part of their games you can emulate and even equal!

Convincing people to spend time at the practice green rather than the driving range is a tall order, but a spoonful of sugar can help the medicine go down, and we've written *Golf's Short Game For Dummies* to serve as an invigorating elixir for players seeking to improve their golf games.

Because many instructional books are as boring as the thought of practice itself, we wrote this book to entertain and excite you about developing and showing off your short game. Soon after you open the book and hit the practice facility, you can start winning bets and impressing your opponents.

This book details not only the specific types of shots and how to execute them but also relives stories of some of the greatest short game shots ever hit and shows you what you can learn from golf's biggest stars.

You find drills, tips, secrets, visualizations, and bits of advice that you can use immediately and that inspire you to go back to *Golf's Short Game For Dummies* time and time again for refreshers.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate through this book, we use the following conventions:

- ✔ We use *Italic* for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that we define in the text.
- ✔ We use **Boldfaced** text to indicate keywords in bulleted lists or the action part of numbered steps.
- ✔ We use Monofont for Web addresses.

What You're Not to Read

We dedicate most of *Golf's Short Game For Dummies* to improving your play by improving your short game. We put some of the other historical asides and stories in sidebars throughout the book. You don't have to read these asides to understand the text, but you certainly can: Reading them may inspire you or provide you with some vivid examples to help your visualization.

Foolish Assumptions

If you're reading this book, we assume you have more than a passing interest in golf and more than a little desire to refine your game and improve your scores. You probably have your own golf clubs and know the difference between a 9-iron and a 4-wood. You know what your favorite golf courses are and can recognize a tough hole or an easy green. You like to go out and play with some friends, and you want to get a competitive edge over them. You likely understand enough golf lingo to be able to handle any of the terms we use in this book.

If you're a true beginner, we can surely help you develop your short game. But you should also consider picking up *Golf For Dummies* (Wiley), written by Champions Tour player and CBS Television golf announcer Gary McCord. His text can familiarize you with the game and help if you're having trouble with golf shots outside of the short game.

How This Book Is Organized

We organize *Golf's Short Game For Dummies* so that you can look through the table of contents and immediately find the help or instruction you need to hit a specific type of shot. If you have trouble with bunker shots, you can flip directly to the bunker shot chapter and read all about the technique and execution needed to play effectively from the sand. We lay out the basic nuts and bolts for you in plain "golf speak" (admittedly, a variation of English!).

You can also delve into discussions on equipment, strategy, unconventional shots, drills, practice techniques, and philosophies about the short game by turning to other chapters of the book. We have chapters that tell you which golf stars to emulate and what golf courses are best to test your short game on! You can even read about how to stretch and limber up properly before any round of golf or practice session.

Part I: Walking the Short Game

Part I of *Golf's Short Game For Dummies* is all about reintroducing you to the short game. We show you that it doesn't have to be all that complicated. With some practice, you can begin knocking strokes off your score in no time by avoiding some common mistakes we all make. We also present a new way of thinking about the short game — broken down into two parts: fundamentals and preferences. We conclude Part I by dumping out that bag and taking a closer look at the golf clubs you use for short shots. The short game relies on fundamentals and preferences, and you have plenty of options in terms of clubs and equipment.

Part II: The Long and Short of It: Short Game Technique

In this part, we present the technique and execution of the fundamentals of approach shots via the short game: chipping, pitching, bunker shots, and putting. This part spells out the basics and gives you the fundamental techniques you need to improve your short game. The good news is an effective short game isn't as tough to achieve as you may think. This part shows you why.

Part III: Short Game Strategies

Part III reveals the strategies behind the fundamentals of chipping, pitching, bunker play, and putting and also gives you fixes if your game has gone astray. What should you be thinking when faced with a certain shot? Can you use a more effective variation of the shot? How can you putt more efficiently and take your green game to the next level? Should you hit the ball high or keep it low? What can choking down on a golf club do for you? How can you shape the shot and affect its outcome? What are some unconventional short-game shots you may encounter or unconventional techniques you may want to work into your repertoire? We have the answers. Also, you can meet the infamous flop shot and receive a host of tips and tricks for getting your mind right and your head in the game.

Part IV: Short Cuts to the Short Game

We're all about practice. But we're all about practicing with a purpose and making sure that practice stays fun. In this part, we help

you warm up with proven pre-round and practice routines to get you prepared for the short game ahead. We provide a bunch of games you can play to keep things interesting while you practice and a number of practice implements and aids that you can use without spending a fortune on various gadgets and expensive equipment. We also help you transform time on the couch and time spent watching the game in person into productive practice time by outlining what you can learn from the stars.

Part V: The Part of Tens

Part V is a fun Dummies tradition — the Part of Tens. Here we outline 10 simple secrets for short game success, cover 10 things you can do off the golf course to improve your short game, relive 10 of the greatest short shots ever, and present 10 great short game golf courses.

Icons Used in This Book

The icons we use in this book are carefully placed little graphics to help you identify specific, important information in the text. You can flip through the book and read only the passages with icons to get a bare-bones cache of valuable short-game information. You find the following icons throughout the book:



The Tip icon signifies a passage that whispers sage advice into your ear. The info makes you smile, because a light bulb goes off in your head that inspires you and gives you immediate comfort. Try the tips for quick improvement and a crafty edge on the process.



The Remember icon signifies some simple advice that you can hang onto — like a life ring when you fall overboard into a turbulent sea. See it, read it, remember it, do it. You'll like the result!



The Hazard icon signifies the possible side effects of a technique or a possible downside or complication. It indicates a passage that deserves attention because of the risk involved in the shot — a risk that you should understand, heed, and factor into your decision-making.



The Technical Stuff icon signifies a passage that goes beyond the surface in an attempt to explain the physics of why a certain shot works. If you're not into angles, degrees of loft, and the mechanics of the clubhead making contact with the ball in the short game, you can give the Technical Stuff the short shrift.

Where to Go from Here

Golf's Short Game For Dummies isn't a book that you need to read "A to Zed." You can start anywhere you want and go directly to the information you find valuable or compelling. You can get yourself out onto the golf course and into the action by reading the techniques and trying them out. Go ahead and climb right into the saddle if you want. We advise practicing the techniques first, of course, before you challenge the club champion.

If you want, you can read the entire book for an overview of our full short-game philosophy and outlook on technique. All the shots — chips, pitches, bunker plays, and putts — are related to each other through motor skills and the fundamental of acceleration at contact.

Where to go from here? Anywhere you want!

Part I

Walking the Short Game

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

Drop that driver! Come over from the dark side and experience the force of the short game. You'll be wielding your pitching wedge like a light sabre after you realize the importance of the short game and start improving yours. Part I gives you an overview of the short game universe and gets you geared up to practice and play.

Chapter 1

Sharpening Your Approach

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Defining the short game through statistics
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Golf is a journey with no final destination — a series of trips up and down hills — but if you play long enough, you'll come to enjoy the ride. You discover nuances of the game as you go along, and sometimes you learn important lessons the hard way.

Players who seek improvement — and who tire of seeing three-digit numbers on their scorecards at the end of a round — often just want to have some consistency in their game. Who can blame them? What's worse than swinging a golf club and wondering where the ball will go or even worrying about making contact? Nothing we know of. Well, maybe swinging with these thoughts while wearing a Jesper Parnevik outfit.

Precision is never more important than when you get the ball close to the green or the hole, and as we convey in this opening chapter, the short game is the most complex and varied aspect of the game of golf. But lucky for you, the short game is also the area in which you can make the most immediate and significant improvement.

In this chapter, we take a look at the importance of the short game, the best way to approach it, and how to prepare yourself to hit the shots that can improve your scores. Improved scores give you a greater sense of enjoyment — and who could ask for more?

Approaching the Short Game Statistically

According to the National Golf Foundation, a fine group of folks who make it their business to study the business side of golf, as many as 36.7 million people play golf in the United States. (Of those 36 million golfers, about 45 percent are between the ages of 18 and 39, and 22 percent of all golfers are female.) In a year's time, these golfers spend about \$25 billion on golf equipment and fees. That's *billion*, with a *B*.

But like the old saying goes, money can't buy you love. And it can't buy you a 72 either. Even with all the cash players currently spend, average scores have changed very little over the years. Only 22 percent of all golfers regularly score better than 90 for 18 holes. For females, who shoot an average score of 114, the number is just 7 percent; for males, who manage to shoot an average score of 97, 25 percent break 90. The overall average is an even 100.

But par, on almost all golf courses, is 72.

When asked what they want to shoot, most golfers say they'd be satisfied shooting 85.

Although critics and the media place a great deal of emphasis on how long a player can hit a golf ball, you use driver from the tee only 14 times on a golf course. By contrast, you use the putter and short irons for as many as 50 percent of the total strokes.



The secret of golf satisfaction is in the short game. No matter what your score is, half your strokes come from the short game. Statistics prove that 50 percent of your score comes from shots within 75 yards of the green — whether you shoot 120 or you shoot 67. The percentage includes your putts, your chips, your pitches, and your bunker shots.

For instance, say you go out and shoot that 67. You hit all 18 greens in regulation. You make five birdies with five one-putts to shoot 5-under. That means you hit 31 putts out of 67 shots. And to sink some of those one-putts, you had to hit the ball close to the hole. You probably had a wedge or some type of short iron in your hand to do that. You didn't miss any greens, because you used your short game to get into position. Adding six more strokes to the putts, you have half your strokes accounted for.

If you shoot 110, you surely didn't hit all the greens in regulation, because if you did, you would have used 70 putts (or four putts per

hole) to shoot that 110 — a dismal result for even the worst of putters. More likely you missed some greens and needed to hit some short-game shots — all the more reason to improve your short game.

Approaching the Short Game Athletically

The short game, by definition, covers short shots. You hit short-game shots from 75 yards and in — which is also known as the *scoring distance*. The short game requires a shorter swing. A 100-yard shot, by contrast, is a full-swing shot.



The short game is all about scoring and precision — not distance and strength. You want to get the ball onto the green with a single approach shot and into the hole with two strokes. (See Chapter 2 to help set your goals and expectations for the short game.)

The short game is the great equalizer. Unlike in many other sports, and even in other aspects of golf, scoring doesn't rely on power. In golf, you need to hit the ball straight and with the proper distance. Success means making good decisions and doing your homework.

With this in mind, you can see why golfers use the term *approach shots* — and not *bang it over the hole* shots. Think of an aircraft on approach to its final destination. To hit the runway and land safely, the plane has to travel at the right speed and at the proper angle of descent. It can't be short, and it can't be long. It has to, through a carefully made plan and proper execution, glide perfectly onto the runway and roll to a stop.

Your short-game swing options typically include a

- ✓ **Chip shot:** A low running shot, measured in feet, that flies only a small percentage of its life before landing on the green or in front of the green and rolling toward the hole (see Chapter 4).
- ✓ **Pitch shot:** A shot that remains the air for about 70 percent of its life before hitting the green and rolling to the hole. You often use a pitch shot when you have an obstacle to fly over, such as a bunker, creek, or hill (see Chapter 5).
- ✓ **Bunker shot:** A shot needed to extract a ball from a bunker. You normally hit bunker shots with a sand wedge, which splashes through the bunker and sends the ball floating out on a pillow of sand. Bunker shots fly high and land softly near the hole (see Chapter 6).