



Improving your Bunker Skills

with P.G.A Master Professional Tony Bennett

The first thing to understand is how the club reacts with the sand when you make contact with it. Sand is extremely efficient at absorbing energy and as such when an object, in this case the club head, enters the sand a proportion of the energy is absorbed and the object slows down. As long as you are prepared for this then playing from sand is quite simple. When playing from the sand it is advisable to attempt to strike the sand a couple of centimetres behind the ball, as the club enters the sand it causes a mini explosion and it is this that cushions the contact with the ball allowing it to pop out of the bunker softly. When practicing you may draw a line in the sand a couple of centimetres behind the ball, but be careful as this is not permissible when playing the course. Rule 13-4 of golf states that a player must not touch the ground in a hazard with his hand or club. If you break this rule you will face a penalty.

Normally when using a wedge you would position the ball across from the middle of your feet, but when playing from sand, position at the point which you are trying to strike the sand across from the middle of your stance. Keep a little more weight, perhaps 60% on the lead foot. You will notice that my feet and shoulders aim a little to the left of the target and the face of the club is aiming at the target. Make a committed swing ensuring that you keep the club moving through the contact area. The length of the backswing and throughswing should be more or less the same.

The technique used to play this type of shot is almost the same as when playing a normal shot with the exception of anchoring your feet into the sand and holding a little lower on the club. The length of the shot can be controlled in several ways but the easiest way is by changing the loft of the club or by changing the speed of the swing. Every club has loft, that is an angle between the sole and face of the club, clearly a club with more loft should travel higher and shorter than one with less loft. The speed of the swing also has an effect, if less energy enters the sand then the ball will travel less distance and conversely with more energy entering the sand then the ball will travel further. I must stress that the whole swing speed must be changed and not just the forwardswing.

For most shots from sand that are close to the green, the sand iron or lob wedge are the most suitable. Some clubs have the number of degrees printed on them, so for example any club that has 50° or more is quite easy to use. The sole of these lofted wedges are specially designed to allow them to be used from a variety of different areas around the green. For long shots from bunkers positioned near the fairway you can use almost any club as long as the club has enough loft to make the ball fly over the lip of the bunker.



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