

Back to Basics

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I ALWAYS LIKED WATCHING THOSE punt, pass and kick competitions at halftime of the big game. But if you think about it, those three things aren't nearly as vital to playing football as driving, chipping and putting are to playing golf.

I admire John Daly's free-thinking approach to *playing* golf, but when you're on the range or a putting green, you should be practicing with a purpose. Honing the fundamentals of driving, chipping and putting won't come without some conscious effort.

Think of it as going back to the basics. The best players don't always hit perfect shots, but you'll rarely see these three parts of their game break down on a single hole. That's because they have mastered the fundamentals through quality practice. Here are some drills that will help make the game almost as easy as the pros make it look.

No



Set up with head behind

A bad setup leads to a bad backswing, which leads to trying to correct the problems on the downswing. At address, your lead shoulder should be higher than the other, your head behind the ball.

Yes



No



Yes



Rotate over stable legs

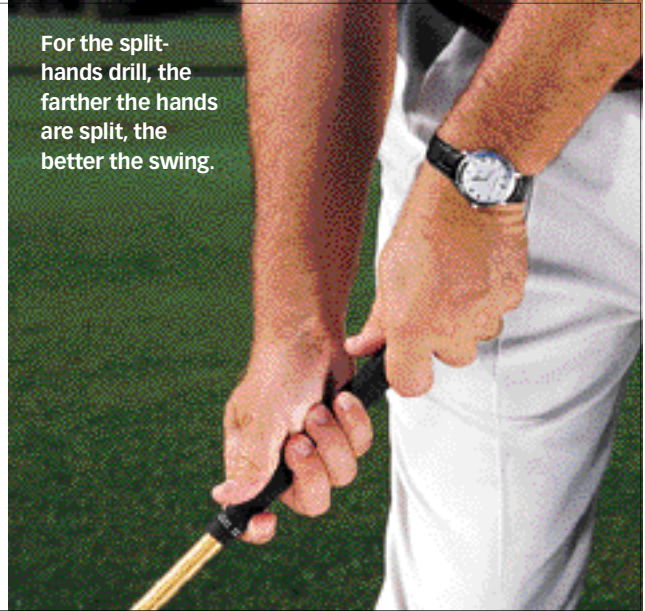
At least a 90-degree shoulder turn and 45-degree hip turn is crucial to solid drives. Your lead shoulder should rotate down and back behind the ball and your trailing hip away from it. The legs stay stable as you rotate. Don't let your arms get behind your body. Feel as if your body has remained behind the ball.

Smith's checklist/Driving

Getting off the tee and keeping the ball in play are the catalysts for your entire round. You may not always hit the fairway, but you need to avoid getting in positions where your next shot is a punch-out or penalty drop.

- Posture: Bend at the hips and feel athletic.
- Don't let your arms get behind your body.
- Make a good shoulder turn in the backswing while keeping the lower body stable.
- On the downswing, feel the trailing leg push off the ground as your body moves forward.
- Move your trailing shoulder down and through, finishing with it ahead of the tee position.

For the split-hands drill, the farther the hands are split, the better the swing.



Split-hands drill leads to powerful draws

Grip the driver so your hands are not touching (*above*). Then place the club on the ground directly in front of your trailing foot. From this position, swing from low to high, rotating your right forearm over your left. You can use a golf ball as reference, but you don't have to hit it. This drill helps you get the feeling for a good, powerful downswing and release. Most golfers (slicers) don't feel this.

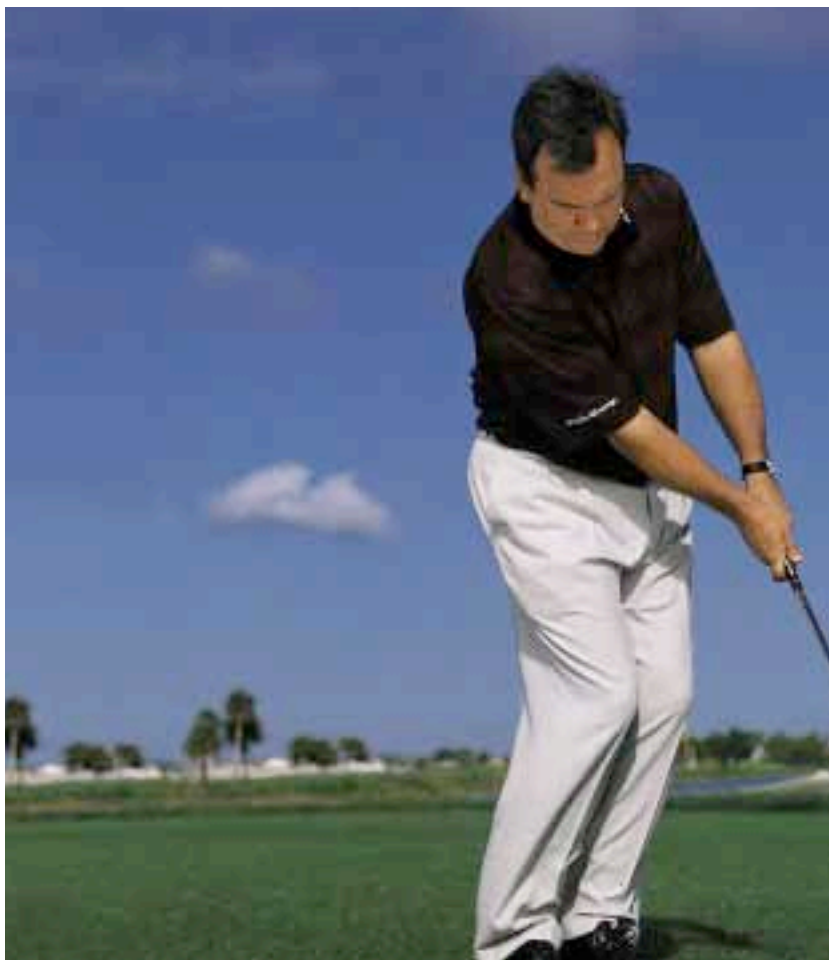




Smith's checklist/Chipping

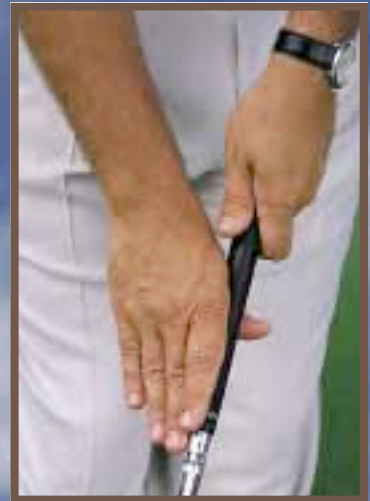
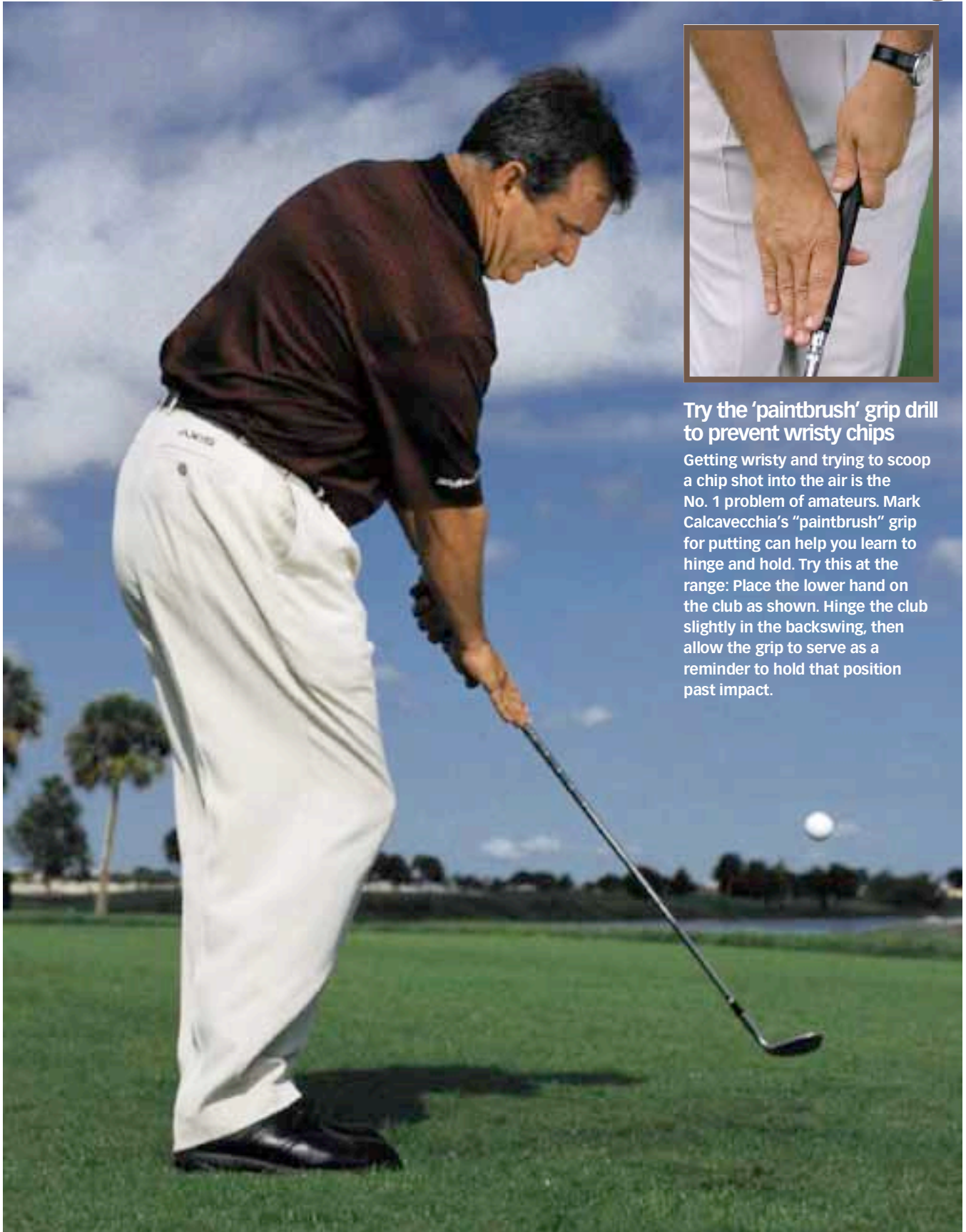
This is probably the least practiced of the fundamental strokes, yet chipping should be a top priority. Think of a chip as your first putt. Get it close enough to hole your next stroke.

- Use the fingers in your trailing hand to hinge the wrists slightly.
- Keep your weight on your lead side. Play the ball back.
- Don't take the club back inside. Take it straight back on the target line.
- Hold your wrists in a firm position until post-impact.
- Chip with an 8-iron until you master the bump-and-run. Then learn to use a wedge.



Improve your chipping with the two h's—hinge and hold

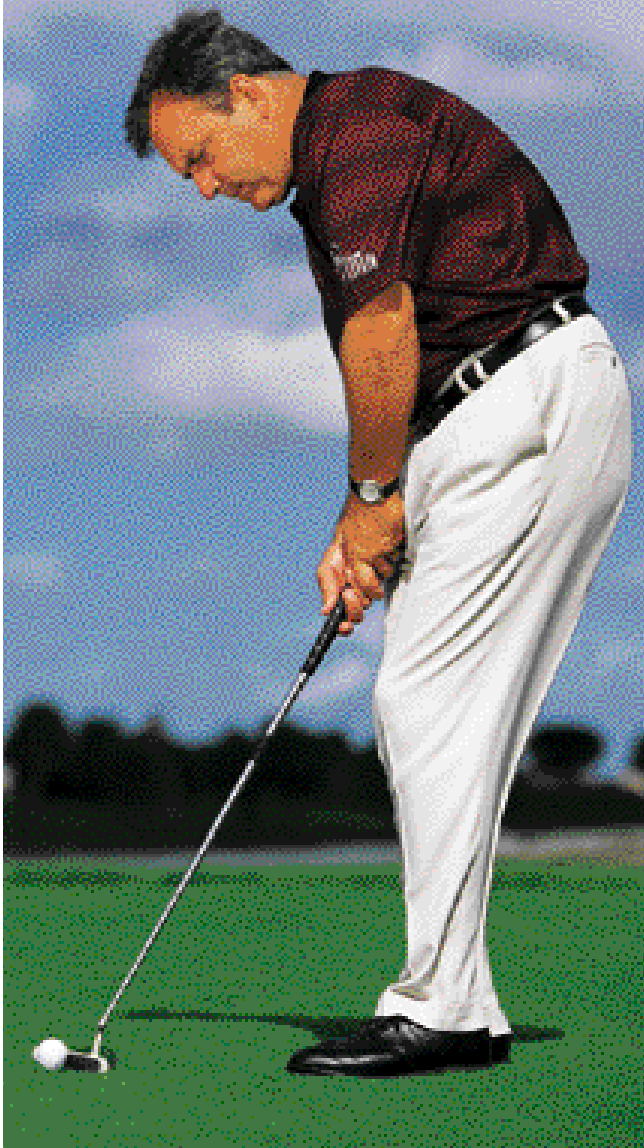
First, learn the proper chipping setup: weight on the lead side, ball slightly back of center in your stance, eyes and hands closer to the target than the ball is at address. Second, learn the two h's: hinge and hold. During the backswing, use your dominant hand (right for right-handed players) and hinge the club slightly. Then, in the follow-through, hold this position post-impact. That is, don't let the clubhead pass under your lead hand before impact. The back of that hand should be closer to the target than the ball is at impact. After impact, you can release the club a bit. Don't tense up.



Try the 'paintbrush' grip drill to prevent wristy chips

Getting wristy and trying to scoop a chip shot into the air is the No. 1 problem of amateurs. Mark Calcavecchia's "paintbrush" grip for putting can help you learn to hinge and hold. Try this at the range: Place the lower hand on the club as shown. Hinge the club slightly in the backswing, then allow the grip to serve as a reminder to hold that position past impact.

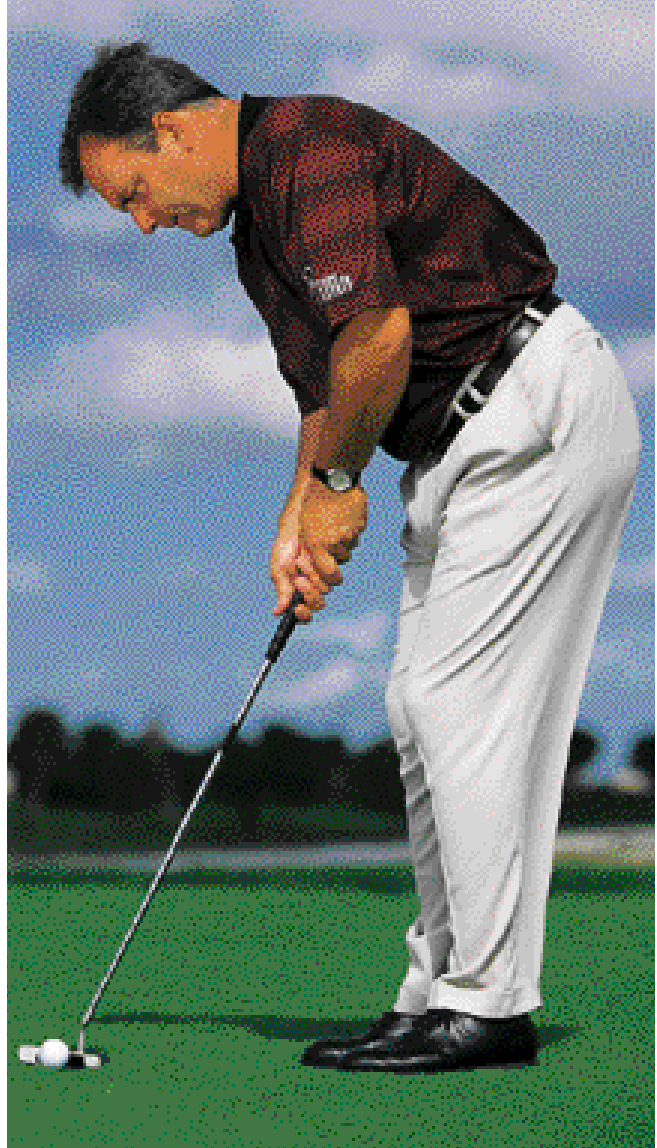
No



Poor posture leads to poor putts

Here my back is too rounded and my eyes are too far inside the ball. This stems from the common mistake of bending at the waist, not at the hips. With such poor posture, there is no room for the arms and shoulders to swing back and through freely and consistently. The result is a wristy stroke that can break down under pressure. Also, with this setup it is difficult to align your eyes along the target line.

Yes



Bend at the hips so arms can swing

Good posture is the key to good putting. Center your weight over the balls of your feet. Bend at the hips, not the waist or back—this will help prevent you from getting too round-shouldered. Your head should be directly over the ball or just slightly inside it, depending on the angle of your puttershaft. Grip the club securely, and let your arms hang freely, but that doesn't necessarily mean gripping all the way down the shaft.

DON'T BE A HUNCHBACK WHEN YOU PUTT.

GOOD POSTURE LEADS TO GOOD PUTTING.

Smith's checklist/Putting

Once you have good posture at address, the important thing to remember is to maintain it during the stroke. Your eyes can follow the ball to the hole, but your spine angle stays the same.

- Your arms should feel like they are hanging comfortably from the shoulders.
- Once you've selected a line, stay committed to it.
- Stroke straight-back to straight-through for short to medium putts.
- Make the stroke with the shoulders only, but never lose feeling in your hands.
- Practice long putts for rhythm, short putts for the line.

'I tried it.'

TREY ENTWISTLE
HANDICAP: 21
LAFAYETTE HILL, PA.

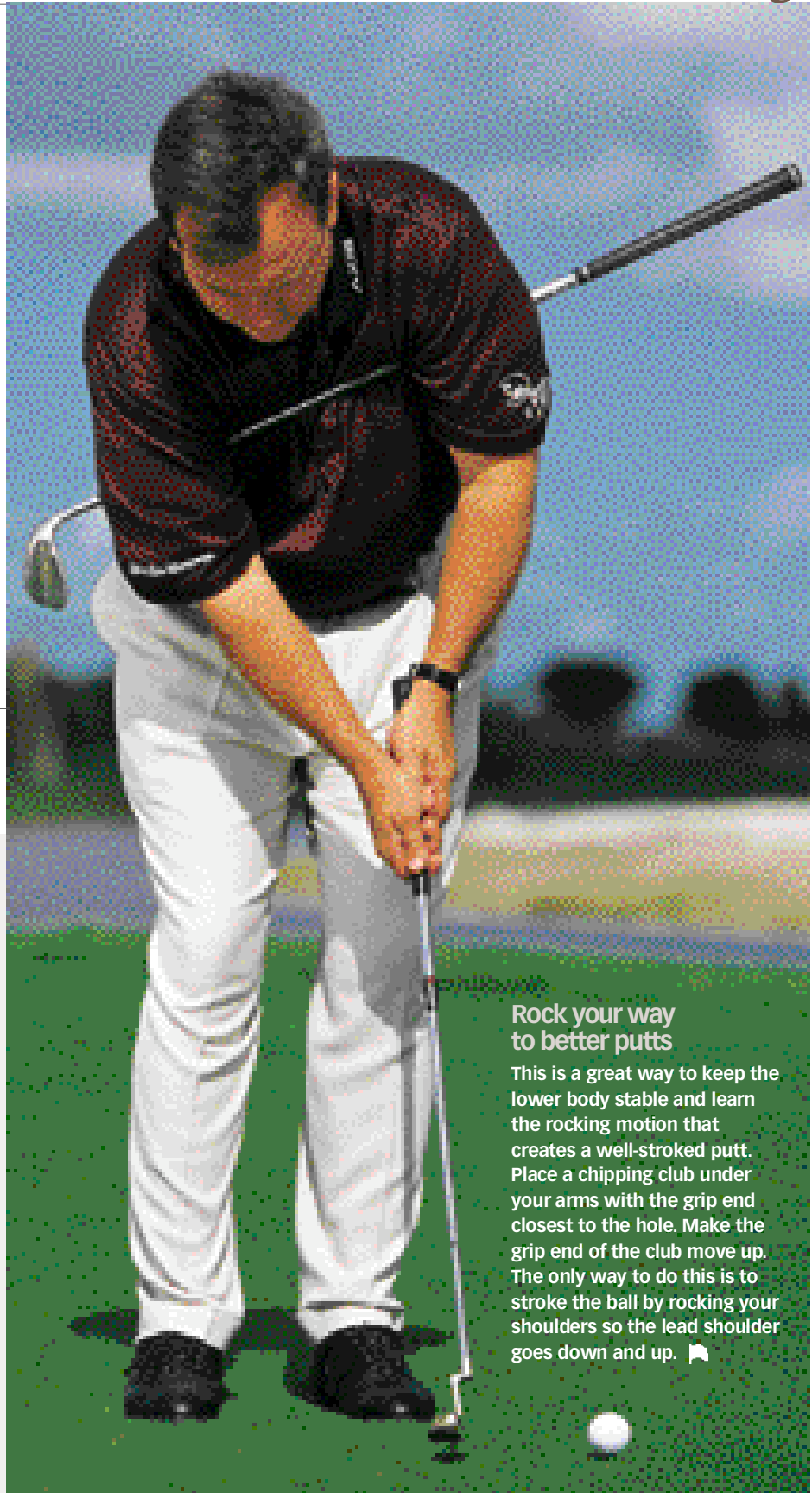
I felt very restricted with this drill.

It really forced me to putt with my entire upper body, almost a little like



I was pivoting from my waist. On a positive note, I learned some of the things I've been doing when I putt have been correct. I try not to over-use my wrists and hands, and you really can't do that with this drill.

Smith's comments: It should feel awkward at first, but after some repetitions, you will really reinforce the correct feeling of the arms and shoulders delivering the stroke. Maintain sensitivity in your hands.



Rock your way to better putts

This is a great way to keep the lower body stable and learn the rocking motion that creates a well-stroked putt. Place a chipping club under your arms with the grip end closest to the hole. Make the grip end of the club move up. The only way to do this is to stroke the ball by rocking your shoulders so the lead shoulder goes down and up. 🏌️