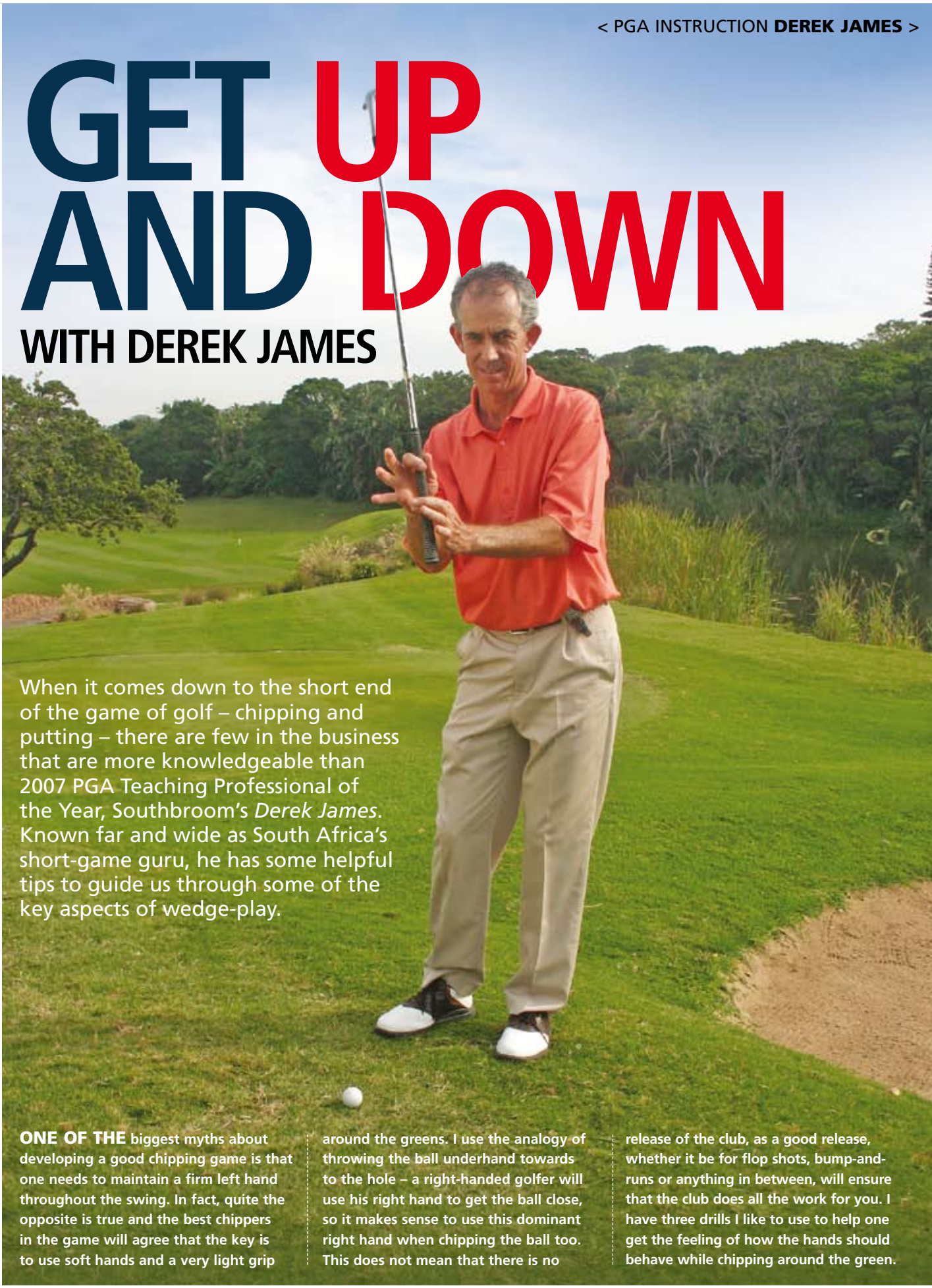


GET UP AND DOWN

WITH **DEREK JAMES**

A photograph of Derek James, a PGA instructor, standing on a golf course. He is wearing a bright orange polo shirt and light-colored trousers. He is holding a golf club and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a lush green golf course with trees and a clear sky.

When it comes down to the short end of the game of golf – chipping and putting – there are few in the business that are more knowledgeable than 2007 PGA Teaching Professional of the Year, Southbroom's *Derek James*. Known far and wide as South Africa's short-game guru, he has some helpful tips to guide us through some of the key aspects of wedge-play.

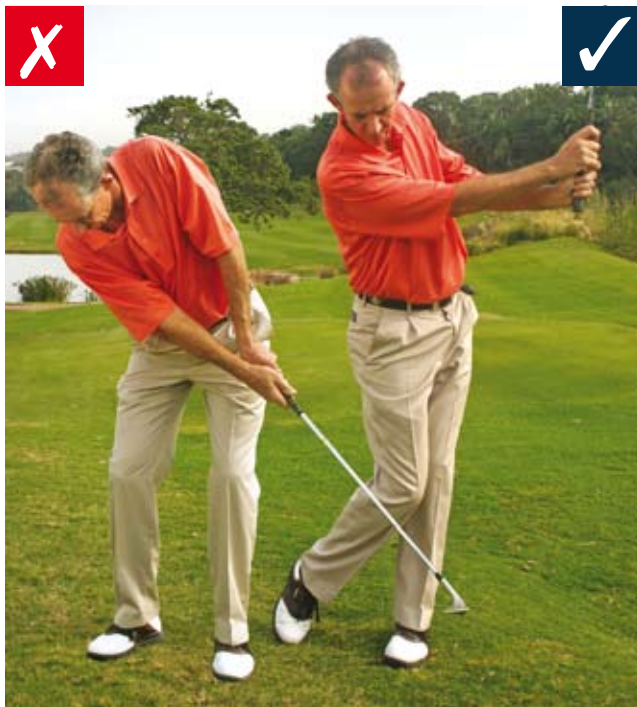
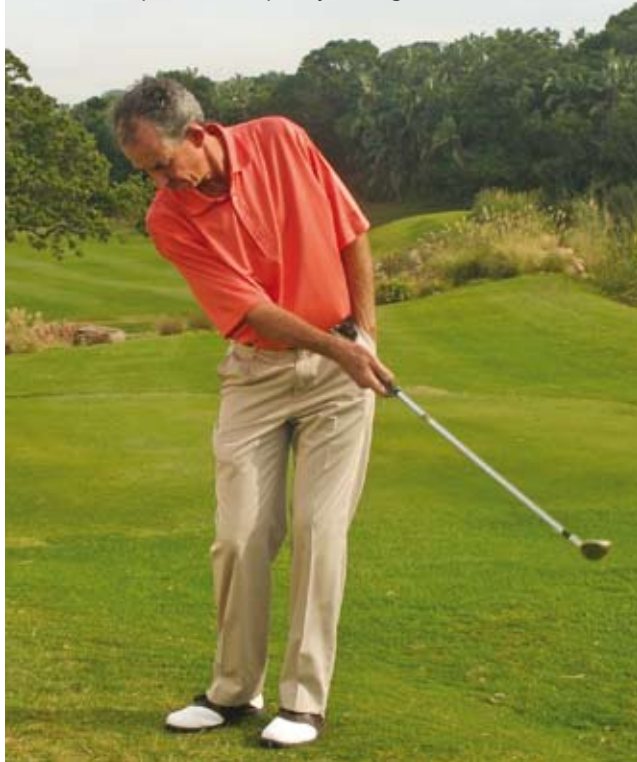
ONE OF THE biggest myths about developing a good chipping game is that one needs to maintain a firm left hand throughout the swing. In fact, quite the opposite is true and the best chippers in the game will agree that the key is to use soft hands and a very light grip

around the greens. I use the analogy of throwing the ball underhand towards to the hole – a right-handed golfer will use his right hand to get the ball close, so it makes sense to use this dominant right hand when chipping the ball too. This does not mean that there is no

release of the club, as a good release, whether it be for flop shots, bump-and-runs or anything in between, will ensure that the club does all the work for you. I have three drills I like to use to help one get the feeling of how the hands should behave while chipping around the green.

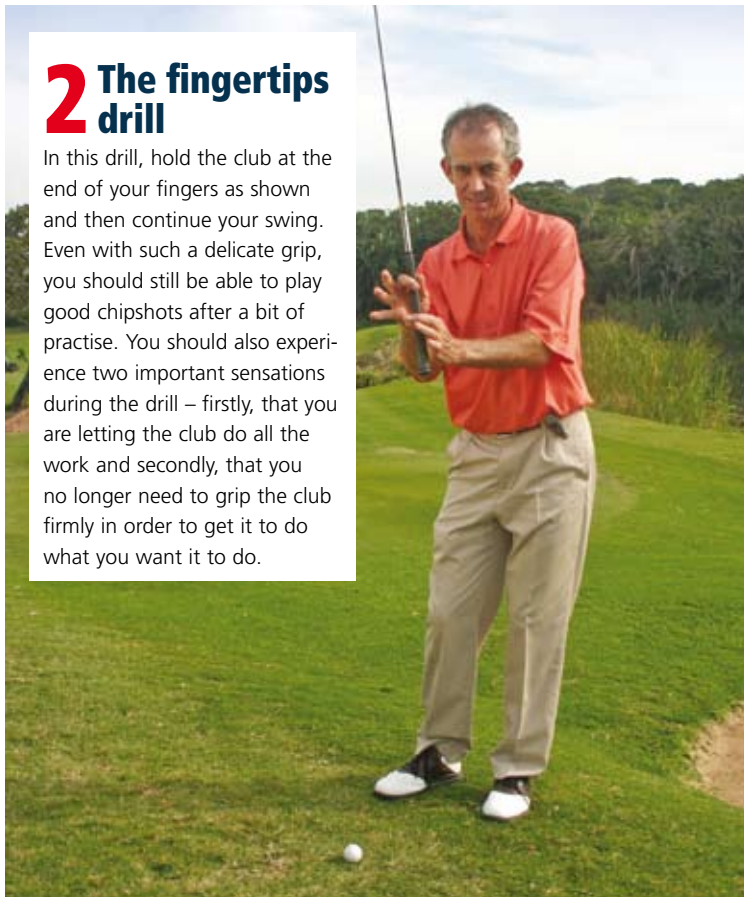
1 The one-armed swing

This drill is simple enough – you grip the club as you would ordinarily and then remove the left hand. In fact, take it out of play completely by putting it in your left pocket. Continue to swing normally with the right hand only, whether for a flop shot or a bump-and-run to get a feel of how the right hand should act during the chipshot. You should be following much the same action as throwing the ball at the hole and, as this swing forces you into a good release of the club, it shouldn't take long before you get a feeling of getting the ball up in the air quickly through cleaner contact.



2 The fingertips drill

In this drill, hold the club at the end of your fingers as shown and then continue your swing. Even with such a delicate grip, you should still be able to play good chipshots after a bit of practise. You should also experience two important sensations during the drill – firstly, that you are letting the club do all the work and secondly, that you no longer need to grip the club firmly in order to get it to do what you want it to do.



3 The weight-transfer drill

Another common myth is that players should stay dead still over their chips, but as with any other shot, weight transfer is still hugely important. This drill simply involves practising chipshots with exaggerated legwork in order to help you learn to transfer your weight from your right leg to the left leg correctly (as shown by my bent right leg), clearing the hips so that you can swing through the ball. A bad weight transfer, where the weight stays on the right side, cramps up the swing, restricts the arms and forces one to swing at the ball with the wrists. It can produce just about any result, but hitting it in the teeth is most common.

BECOMING A GOOD chipper requires one to be proficient in a variety of chipshots at different times. Many of these shots are dictated by the position of the ball; for example, when there is very little green to work with, you will need to play more of a flop shot, but wherever possible I highly recommend the more

easily controlled bump-and-run shot. Of course, when it comes to chipping, a number of variables influence how a ball will react on the putting surface. The condition of the green is important, as is the hardness of the golf ball – the harder either of the two are, the trickier it will be to get the ball to spin and stop. The

lie of the ball is another consideration, as many times we are faced with tricky or bad lies – either down in the grass or on an up-slope or down-slope. The following tips should help you to exercise a better recovery shot and the key to all of these scenarios is your set-up – paying attention to the position of the ball in your stance.



1 Ball sitting down: ball back

The most common bad lie is when your ball is nestling down just below the surface of the grass making it difficult to get the club under the ball. The No 1 rule here is to make sure the ball is back in your stance. The reason for this is that you need to generate a steeper angle of attack so that you hit the ball before you hit the ground – a shallow swing is likely to result in a teetted shot. Remember that the ball will probably come out lower from this type of bad lie and generally with less spin, so play the shot to the safer part of the green. You might even think about using a rescue club if there is no hazard between the ball and the green as this club is unlikely to dig into the turf.



2 Tight pin: accelerate through impact

When there is not much green to work with between you and the pin, it makes sense that you need to get the ball up high and landing softly. A sandwedge or lob-wedge is the order of the day here but, more importantly, one needs to commit to the planned shot. With the ball forward in your stance and the clubface slightly open (to create more loft), you need to trust in the loft of your club and accelerate through the swing, releasing the clubhead at impact. A common mistake with these shots is for golfers to decelerate on their downswing, causing either a mishit, double-hit or chunky shot. Take a shorter backswing in order to limit the chance of this fatal error.



3 The up-slope: ball forward

The most important thing to remember when chipping from an up-slope is to have the ball positioned well forward in your stance, since the angle of the ground actually changes the point where your swing bottoms out. To demonstrate this, take a practice swing and see how the club actually makes contact with the ground further forward in your stance due to the up-slope. It's a good idea to use a less lofted club as the angle of the slope also creates more loft in the club and one should try to hit the ball a little harder to accommodate the higher trajectory that the up-slope creates and to generate more spin on the ball.



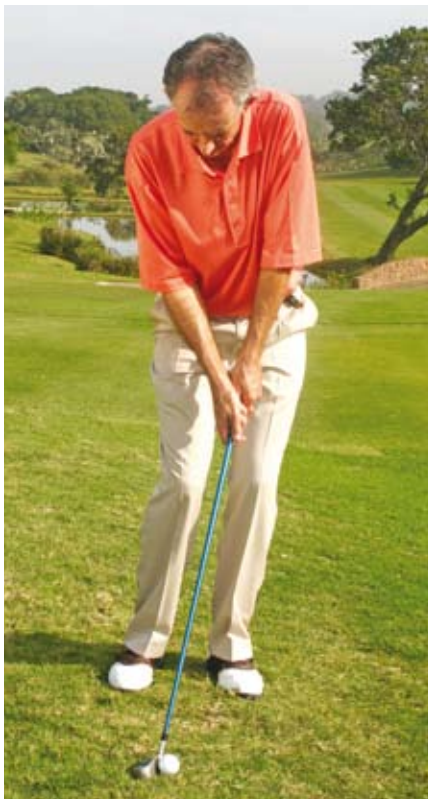
4 The downhill lie: ball back

For this tricky chipshot, you need to make sure the ball is well back in your stance, otherwise you run the risk of hitting the turf before the ball and catching it fat. On severe slopes you might even need to position the ball outside of your right foot. Since you are on a down-slope, expect to get less height from the shot, so it is best to turn to the loftier clubs like the sandwedge or the lob-wedge. Again, avoiding the dreaded deceleration is crucial to pulling off what is a difficult shot.



5 The bump-and-run

This shot is great for when you have a good lie and lots of green to work with. As I mentioned earlier, if you can play the bump-and-run shot, then I suggest you do so, as the sooner one gets the ball onto the green and rolling, the better. Use less loft by selecting a pitching-wedge or another short-iron and put the ball back in your stance, with your weight forward (onto your left side). Your stance should ensure that your hands are ahead of the ball and the swing should be controlled with the dominant right hand and arm. Importantly, you are not trying to 'flick through' at impact but focus on keeping the wrists relatively firm (as in a putting stroke) and making clean contact with the ball before the ground.



6 The hybrid chip

The hybrid is a handy club to have in the bag for small chips around the green as it makes use of a putting stroke – much like a fringe-chipper – rather than a chipping stroke. The extra weight and longer shaft length of a hybrid allow you to make a smooth, short stroke which tends to get the ball up quickly, to carry the rough, onto the green and rolling quickly. This 'chip-putt' should be powered mostly by your shoulders, with just a bit of wrist hinge and a touch of forward knee movement.



Why not book a short-game lesson with your local PGA pro? To find your nearest pro, turn to page 122 or visit www.compleatgolfer.co.za and follow the PGA link.

To book a lesson with Derek James call him on 039 316 6051.

NB: WHILE DEVELOPING a good short game is key to lowering your scores on the golf course, becoming adept at chipping requires a lot of practise. Since this is a 'feel' part of the game, it makes sense that one needs to put in the hours around the green, getting a sense of how each club and each different shot feels and reacts. ●