

SPECIAL REPORT

“Chipping is a Crucial Third Down Play”

By Bobby Lopez, PGA Pro at the Richmond



Yes I'm a football fan. I can't help it. Even though I must say I'm disgusted with the salary caps, free agency, the all around musical chairs played in trades.

First my apologies to anyone who is NOT a football fan. In football you're allowed four opportunities to gain 10 yards. Once reaching that ten yard threshold you are then permitted to keep possession of the ball and attempt to gain another 10 yards until one reaches the end zone or goal.

First Down - Applying football to golf...your tee shot is the first down play. If you're second and twenty all day you're not going to win many football games. That's why it's important to get properly fitted for a driver at Golf Galaxy. You need to find a way to control your tee shots and get them on the fairway with the best angle to approach the green. With a tee shot right down the middle I would consider the next play a second and 5. A tee shot in the woods would be second and twenty.

Second Down - Your iron approach to the green is important but second down won't kill you if it's not the best play in your game. It doesn't matter if you miss a six foot putt for birdie or get it up and down from a bunker it's still a par...which in my book is a first down!

Third Down - Your chip shot is a third down play that you MUST convert on in order to score. You need to convert on third down to win football games and it's the same in golf. Even the best golfers on tour only hit about 60% of their greens in regulation, so touring pros are getting it up and down, (*scoring a par from off the green*) more than you might think. Chip a ball in the hole off the green and I consider that a **TOUCHDOWN!** You were heading for bogey and made a birdie!

I like to classify a third down play in yardage.

For instance...if you're right on the front edge of the green with a straight uphill chip with plenty of green to roll the ball so you can use a low lofted club, (a 5, 6 or 7 iron) I would consider "*third down and three.*" You should convert most of the time from third and two or three.

The lower the loft you can use the better your chances for success. Arnold Palmer once said, "my worst chip is as good as my best chip." Does that mean chip with your putter...no! Of course unless the conditions apply then go for it.

I would consider a third and twenty when you're ball is behind a bunker forcing you to elevate the golf ball and stop it on a dime! Not much chance of converting for a first down here. Learn to play conservative in these situations and not take a big number when you try to get cute. Better to clear the bunker even if you leave yourself a long putt back then to dump it or "*chile dip*" it and leave yourself a fourth and twenty.

I like to see most average golfers practice more on the third in 5 or less or shots where there is plenty of roll on the green. First they have a far higher opportunity of converting the lower lofted shots to first downs or a par and the lower lofted shots usually happen more often on the course.

To be successful on third and short plays you need to dominate three different facets of chipping: The Stroke, The Alignment and The Choice in Loft and Landing Area.

The Stroke - To get a feel for the stroke try taking your three wood and gripping it very low on the shaft and holding the butt of the golf club up against your front forearm. This position will NOT allow you to



flip your hands. Flipping is death to the chipping stroke. You need a pendulum motion with limited motion in the hands. Try to stroke like a pendulum.



(Flipping)

Alignment

I suggest using a hitting station to chip from. Use the diagram below to see the chipping station I use. I see very sloppy alignment when teaching chipping. It seems like golfers understand the importance of aligning a putt and neglect the importance when chipping. Make sure the leading edge of your golf club is pointed directly at your target, *(which may not be the hole if there is some break to consider)*. Many golfers leave the club face open. You'll find that if you do leave your club face



open you are probably doing the same on your full iron shots. You've become so use to the open club face look that it doesn't look open to you.

The Choice in Loft and Landing Area

You want to use the least amount of loft possible when chipping. Loft equals speed so if you want the ball to roll faster use less loft. The further you are away from your landing area to more loft you need to slow the ball down. Loft or arc will cause the ball to roll slower.

The only way to improve with your choice of loft and roll is to practice. Find a practice chipping green and work your way all around the green. Chip with a six iron from about three yards off the green. Hit the ball so it goes only to about a foot or so on the green and watch it roll. Then you can begin adjusting from there. From the same position try an eight iron and hit it with same amount of force to reach the same landing area. Observe carefully the roll of the ball and

you should find that it rolls less distance and slower than the six iron shot did.

You should find that you have to move back about three more yards from the landing area to get the ball to roll the exact same distance with an eight iron as a six iron did.

Make your adjustments accordingly and you'll begin to

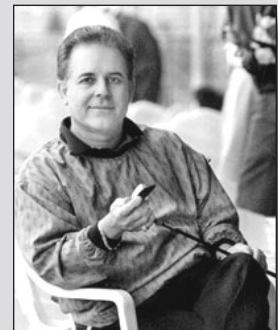
recognize the amount of roll and loft you need to accomplish any third down and short play. Don't get discouraged



when you miss a green in regulation, get excited about making a recovery. When you chip one up close to the hole on the golf course don't feel silly if you scream FIRST DOWN and wave you arms like a referee. I do!

Bobby Lopez is a PGA professional with 38 years of experience in the golf business.

- Host of the Bobby Lopez Golf Hour on ESPN Sports Radio
- Host of Blab TV Richmond television Show "Golf Your Way"
- Toured for the USO as a trick shot show in support of our troops overseas
- PGA professional of choice in local interviews with Big Al Coleman on 950 AM ESPN radio and with WRVA Jimmy Barrett
- Master of Ceremonies and Entertainment for General Richard Myers Chief of Staff Pentagon as well as annual USO event coupled with NFL Howie Long
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