

Tiger Woods Teaches Golf

How I Play Golf: How to Escape from Sand



There are tough shots, and then there was the one I had on the 16th hole at Poipu Bay Resort in Hawaii during the 1997 Grand Slam of Golf. With three holes to play, I was trailing Ernie Els by three shots

and desperately needed a birdie to have even an outside chance of catching him. When I saw my approach to 16 drop into the right greenside bunker, I knew a birdie would be unlikely, but not impossible. But when I got close enough to

observe my lie, I saw a shot that was close to impossible. The ball had buried into the thick, wet sand. Worse, it was on a severe downslope.

To get the ball out of the bunker would be very difficult, and if I did there was no way it was going to hold the green. A thick clump of bushes beyond the green was beckoning to my ball. I was a dead man.

Or was I? A steep, grassy embankment was just beyond the bunker. If I could somehow make the ball fly directly into the embankment, the ball might release forward and get on the green. It was a 100-1 shot, but I had to try it.

I addressed the ball as though I were ready to chop wood. I didn't swing the club back so much as lift it straight in the air, then brought it down into the sand as though I were swinging an ax. I swung as hard as I could, closing my eyes, and hoped for the best.

When I found the courage to peek, I saw an amazing sight. The ball had shot straight forward and slammed into the embankment. It jumped into the air a good 3 feet and continued forward, stopping 2 feet from the hole. I knocked the putt in for one of the best pars of my life.

Ernie parred the hole and held on to win by three. But that sand shot, which ranks as one of the best I've ever played in my life, made my day and eased the pain of losing.

THE NO-FAIL SETUP

More than for any other shot in golf, the setup for the standard bunker shot deter-

mines the type of swing I make and the way the club behaves when it enters the sand. It's a four-part process.

- I Open My Stance: I align everything - my feet, hips and shoulders - to the left of the target. That preprograms an out-to-in swing, the clubhead cutting across the sand and the ball through impact.

- I Open the Clubface: I aim the clubface to the right of the target. That does two things. It increases the loft of the clubface so I can hit the ball high and soft, and it also increases the amount of "bounce" on the sole of the clubhead.

- I Weaken My Grip: The last thing I want on a sand shot is for the clubface to rotate to a closed position through impact. To discourage that, I weaken my left-hand grip at address, so the back of my left hand faces the target.

- I Position the Ball Forward: I like it just opposite my left heel. Playing the ball forward promotes a higher trajectory, and also encourages me to slide the clubhead easily through the sand.

EASY DOES IT

Remember one thing. The standard bunker shot is about technique, not strength. I don't apply any more effort than I would on a 40-yard shot from the fairway.

- I Downsize My Swing: I don't need a long swing with lots of body action, as there is no need for extra distance. I keep my grip pressure light, maintain an easy rhythm and

swing my hands back to about shoulder height.

- I Cock My Wrists Fully: The clubhead speed I generate comes mainly from my hands and arms. I break my wrists early on the backswing and cock them all the way. This is a very "handsy" shot, with very little movement in my hips and legs.

- I'm a Right-Hand Man: The swing on the greenside bunker shot is dominated by the right hand. Through impact, the action is very similar to throwing a ball.

- I Go Ahead and Release: Even if I've really slung the club through the sand with my right hand, the toe of the clubhead hasn't turned over fully after impact. That's due to my weak left-hand grip. I know the ball will come out high and soft.

- I Slide, I Don't Chop: I don't hit down too steeply on the ball. I simply try to swing through impact into the follow-through, the ball coming out on a small cushion of sand.

HOW MUCH SAND DO I TAKE?

The amount of sand I take depends on how much spin I want to put on the ball. When I want the ball to run after it hits the green, I aim for a spot about 3 inches behind the ball. The ball then comes out on a thick cushion of sand with hardly any backspin.

When I want to hit the ball high and make it stop quickly, I'll hit maybe an inch behind the ball, sometimes less. I very rarely try to pick the ball cleanly without taking any sand at all, as the ball can very easily get away from me and fly too far.

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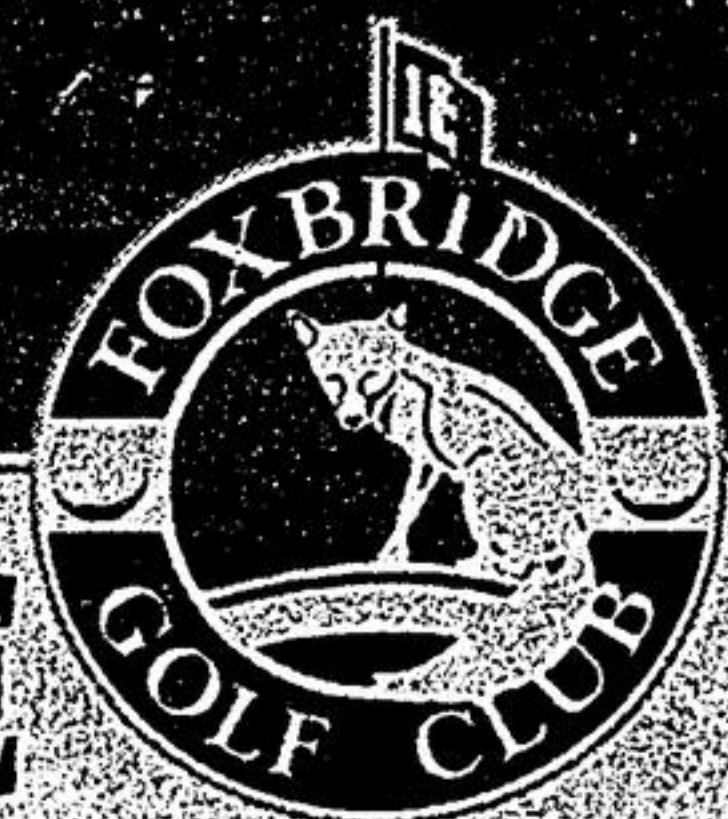
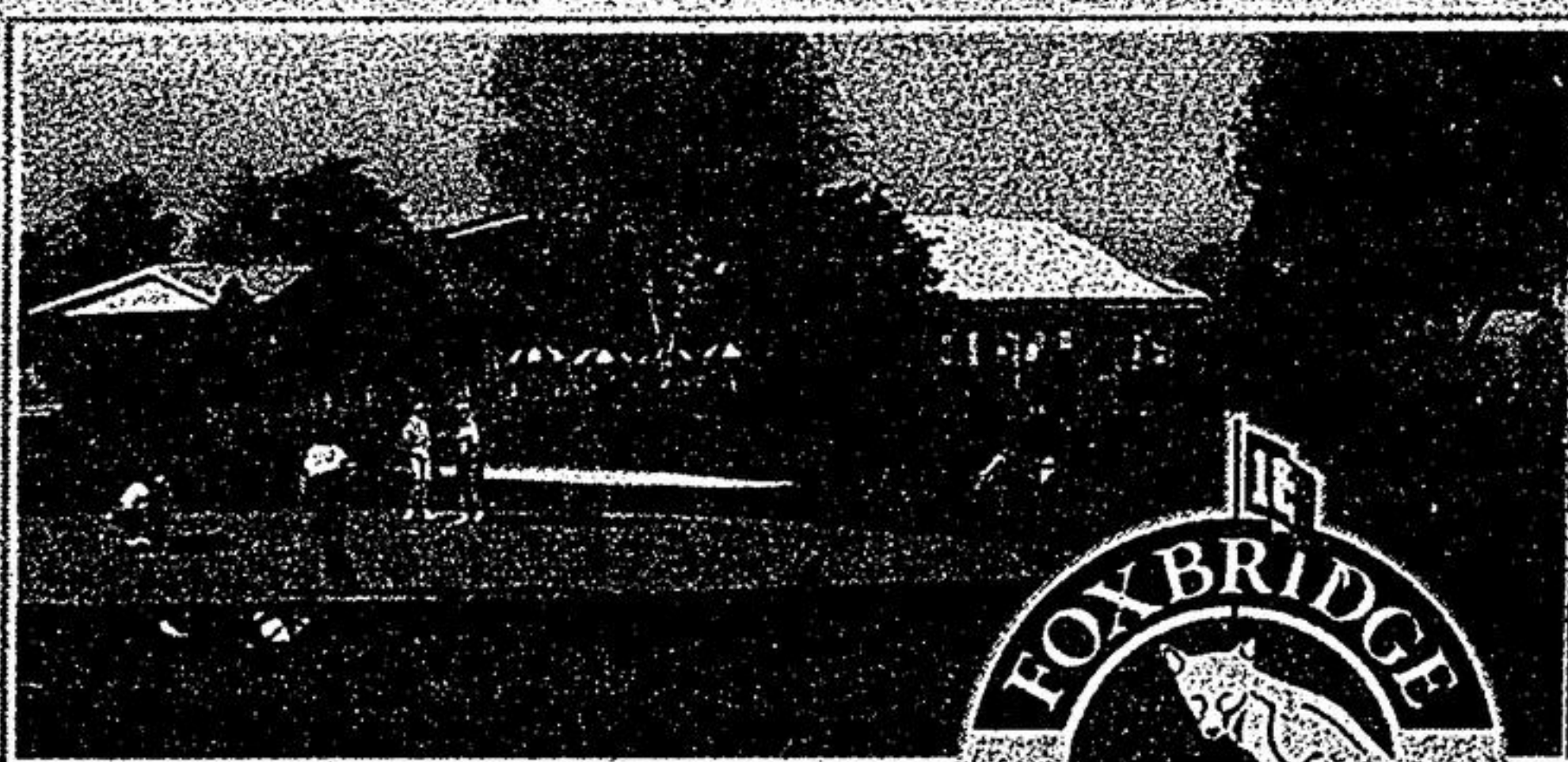
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