

Win the Uphill

(and Downhill)

Battle

Recovery shots from awkward lies are tricky, but with practice you can become an escape artist

THE COLORFUL WALTER HAGAN was the Tiger Woods of his time. In many of his writings the five-time PGA Championship winner mentioned that even in the tournaments he won he would embarrass himself several times by hitting terrible shots that made him angry enough to kick his bag and shout. But he got over it and was thinking clearly before he executed his next shot - which was often brilliant, and demoralizing to his opponents. While Hagen expected the best, he was prepared for the worst. With that in mind, I was taught early not to try a shot I have not practiced. Sidehill lies are a worst-case scenario for many golfers because they are rarely practiced. Here are some tips on preparing for those shots, so you can perform a Hagen-like recovery. ■



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FOR ALL SHOTS hit from uneven, sidehill lies, the same basics apply. First, find your balance by leaning on your toes, then shifting your weight to your heels - you don't want to be in either place. Find a point in between where your balance feels like it is under your shoestrings. Once you find your balance, make multiple practice swings to allow your body to adjust to the feeling of that particular shot. When you're ready to hit, ask one of your playing partners to watch where your ball goes so you can focus on making solid impact and swinging under control. In addition to these general tips, keep the following specifics in mind for these different types of trouble shots:

1 BALL ABOVE YOUR FEET:

Grip down on the club in order to maintain your basic posture. You may lose distance, so consider taking more club. Remember that the ball flight tends to go in the direction of your body, so for a right-hander you'll probably hit the ball left. Your swing will feel flatter, but trust it and make a confident, controlled swing.



2 BALL BELOW YOUR FEET:

Take one more club than usual from that distance and avoid allowing your weight to shift to your toes. Your swing plane will already be steeper than normal, making it easy to lose your balance and fall forward if your weight is on your toes. Right-handers should aim to the left of the target to prepare for the ball to go right.



3 FORWARD FOOT HIGHER

than the back foot: In this scenario your backswing feels easy because your club and body are moving downhill. However, your downswing and follow through must be exaggerated to help you transfer your weight to the forward foot. Practice getting to your finish with your normal tempo and rhythm. This shot will fly higher and shorter than usual, so take one club more to compensate.



4 FORWARD FOOT LOWER

than the back foot: This shot can go farther than you would imagine. The key is to practice your backswing so that you get the normal weight transfer to your back foot. After impact your weight will transfer forward down the hill and you may lose your balance, but this is OK. Allow your swing to finish and take a step forward down the hill - just like Gary Player does on every shot.



FOR BEGINNERS:

One trouble shot that novice players often struggle with is hitting a full shot from a fairway or waste bunker. This is a tough shot, but it can be done. Start by choosing a club with enough loft to get the ball over the lip of the bunker, remembering that getting out of the bunker is a bigger priority than getting the ball all the way to the green. Visualize hitting the ball first and the sand second, swinging down on the ball to help it get airborne.



FOR BETTER PLAYERS:

A very Hagen-like shot comes when your ball ends up between your target and a tree or other obstacle, and is too close to the tree for you to take a backswing. If punching out sideways isn't an option, consider hitting the ball off the tree or obstacle and having it deflect toward the target. The key is to eliminate any follow-through on the shot. Keep your hands, wrists and arms soft to avoid injury in case you do make impact with the obstacle. Good luck!

