

Hitting a golf ball straight is difficult enough from a flat lie. When you and the ball are suddenly on different levels, it becomes even harder. Facing an uphill lie, downhill lie or sidehill lie is daunting, but like many situations in golf, it can be handled well with an appraisal of the physical situation and proper compensation for it.

How  
To Hit

# Great Shots

## From The 3 Toughest Lies in golf

By I.J. Schecter with  
Doug Weaver

Photos By Rob Tipton/Boomkin Golf

When faced with an uphill, downhill or sidehill lie, it is most important to focus not on the slope of the ground, but on the angle of your clubface against it and in relation to the ball. Many amateurs make the mistake of thinking they need to change their swing in these situations. In fact, the adjustments necessary in these scenarios have to do with the position of the clubface relative to the ball against the ground, not the fundamental action of the swing itself. Let's look at each of these shots and the adjustments they demand for successful results.

## Uphill Lies

You've hit a nice drive that has stopped on a sloped part of the fairway, causing you to stand below the ball for your next shot. Don't panic. Think about how your club will rest on the ground relative to the ball. If you were hitting off a flat lie,

the clubface would sit flush against the ground, with the heel and toe aligned on the same horizontal plane. Here, however, the toe will sit slightly higher and the heel lower than the ball, requiring you to make some subtle adjustments.

On an uphill lie, your clubface rests against the ground the way it would if you were using clubs too long for you. The toe will sit higher than the ball and the heel lower, creating sidespin that will cause the ball to draw.

With the toe and heel misaligned in this manner, you will unavoidably impart sidespin to the ball, causing a hook. Keeping this in mind, the first thing you must do is adjust your target line. Since your ball will hook, adjust your stance so that you are aligned not directly toward the target but to the right of it.

There is no specific rule for determining how much you should aim right other than that dictated by common sense. The greater the slope, the farther right you should aim. Time and practice will

enable you to develop an instinctive feel for how slight or severe an adjustment to make when faced with this type of shot.

Take several practice swings to allow your feet to get accustomed to the unusual alignment. The goal is to adapt your normal feeling of vertical bal-

ance to the uphill slope.

Many amateurs respond to uphill, downhill or sidehill lies by shortening their backswing, follow-through or both. Remind yourself not to do this. All the adjustments you need to make are done prior to the swing.

Once you've adapted your balance, choke down on the club a bit to ensure the clubface is still sitting even against the ground. If you stand too erect, the heel will lift slightly, making the toe dig into the ground and encouraging a poor strike.

As you set up, bounce on your knees slightly to make sure your balance is centered over your thighs and the balls of your feet. It is critical to ensure your weight doesn't slip backward toward your heels or forward toward your toes. Again, your primary objective here is to maintain a feeling of balance despite standing on an uneven slope.

Finally, because you've choked down, effectively shortening your club and compromising some distance, take an extra club. From a sloped lie, you'll most likely hit shorter than usual, so swallow your pride, compensate with more club instead of less and you'll probably be happier with the result.

Here's a simple drill you can use to practice adjusting to uphill lies. Take your 5-iron and pretend it's a baseball bat instead of a golf club. With a smooth swing, imagine trying to hit pitches thrown at three different levels — chest height, waist height and just above the knees. Once the swings start to feel natural, picture yourself standing below your golf ball. Continue taking the swings, which represent uphill lies at three different levels of severity. Take plenty of these swings so that, when you're actually faced with an uphill lie, the swing required for it is part of your repertoire.



### ● UPHILL LIES

Golfers are sometimes faced with an uphill lie, where the ball is higher than the plane of the feet. Often in this situation, the club's toe will sit slightly higher than the heel (inset), requiring you to make subtle adjustments to prevent a poor strike.



● **UPHILL CURE: THE BASEBALL BAT DRILL**

To practice adjusting to different uphill lies, take a baseball bat and imagine yourself smoothly swinging at pitches thrown at different levels — chest high, waist high and just above the knees. Once the swings feel natural, picture yourself standing below your golf ball. Continue taking the swings, which represent uphill lies at different levels of severity. Take enough swings so that when met with an uphill lie, the swing required to complete the shot is part of your repertoire.

## Downhill Lies

Let's now consider the opposite situation, where your drive has ended up on a slope that is going to cause the ball to

be lower than your feet at address. Apply the same type of approach as you would when confronted by the uphill lie. Because the toe of your club is going to be lower than the heel, the sidespin you impart to the ball will push it in the opposite direction, causing a fade instead of a hook. Therefore, you must align yourself not right of the target but left of it.

On an uphill lie, your weight is likely to fall back-

ward toward your heels. On a downhill lie, it falls forward toward your toes. Keeping this in mind, take your practice swings with the goal of centering your balance again through your thighs and over the arches of your feet. A good way to remember this is to focus your weight under your shoestrings.

Just as when facing an uphill lie, take some extra club in this situation. In fact, on a downhill lie it is even more important to compensate for likely lost distance, since reaching down for the ball when swinging is more difficult than reaching up toward it. When the ball is above your feet, your swing plane naturally becomes flatter, making your golf stroke more like a baseball swing, which is why most golfers fare better with uphill lies than downhill lies.

Downhill lies result in more shanks and pop-ups because your body instinctively wants to straighten up, and the more it does so, the more lower-body strength is inadvertently removed from the swing. No matter what the situation, it is always more effective to take more club and swing within yourself than to take less club and increase the chances of swinging out of control.

To help develop the right feel for a



● **DOWNHILL LIES**

When golfers are faced with a downhill lie, they find the ball below the plane of their feet. The club's toe is often lower than the heel (inset). A player must aim left of the target to account for the natural fade spin that will be imparted to the ball.



● **DOWNHILL CURE: THE SWIMMING POOL DRILL**

A drill to learn the correct feel of a downhill-*lie* swing takes place at the edge of a swimming pool. Stand at the edge of the pool with the balls of your feet and toes hanging over the edge. Swing your 5-iron and try to skim the water. With your weight distributed properly, you'll be able to swing from start to finish without consequence. Lean too far forward and you'll learn your lesson in a hurry.

downhill-*lie* swing, try the following drill. Stand at one end of a swimming pool with the balls of your feet past the edge. Swing your 5-iron and try to skim the water. With your weight correctly distributed, you'll be able to swing from this position without consequence. If you lean too far forward, however, you'll learn your lesson in a hurry.

## Sidehill Lies

When your body is tilted upward or downward in relation to the target, the factors you need to address are slightly different than those concerning uphill or downhill lies. When faced with an uphill or downhill lie, you must compensate for the hook or fade caused by sidespin. When standing sidehill, you must compensate for altered loft.

If your ball has landed such that, for the next shot, your front foot will be higher than your back foot, loft will automatically be added to that shot, since you'll be swinging more upward than if you were hitting off of flat ground. You need to compensate for this by reducing the degree of the angle at impact, thereby lowering the trajectory of the shot. Put more simply, you need to take an extra club, or perhaps two or three, to avoid popping the ball up and to adjust for possible loss of distance.

When your front foot is higher than your back foot, you'll find it easier to perform a backswing but more difficult to perform a follow-through. The natural response is for your arms to try to overcompensate, which will cause inconsistency. Try to stay in control.

● **SIDEHILL LIES**

Another tricky situation that differs from uphill and downhill lies is the sidehill lie. When standing sidehill, with the front foot or back foot higher than the other, you must compensate for altered loft. The change in loft can reduce shot distances by up to three clubs in some circumstances.



In the opposite case, where your back foot is higher, the ball is going to come off the clubface at a lower angle than it would from a flat lie, which may increase the distance of the shot or the bounce or roll you get at the end of it. Adjust for this by taking a club with more loft, since you'll probably achieve greater distance without even trying.

As when dealing with an uphill or downhill lie, you must be conscious of good balance and of taking a full backswing and completing your follow-through when faced with a sidehill lie, rather than allowing anxiety to cause an incomplete swing.

Many golfers exhibit tentativeness on sidehill lies, leading to swings made mostly with the arms. An arm swing is inconsistent, but a swing guided by proper weight transfer, in which the arms respond to the movement of the rest of the body, will produce predictable accuracy and distance.

On a downward-tilted sidehill lie, for example, you may feel the urge to shorten your backswing or resist the exaggerated

weight transfer toward your front side. Don't resist it. Go with it.

In this situation, and the others described previously, it is crucial to keep your shoulders tilted on the same plane relative to the slope you're on. That is, if you're on a downward tilt, don't lift your front shoulder because your brain is telling you that's what will make the ball go up.

The fundamental principle of golf is that you have to swing down to make the ball go up. So even if you feel yourself tipping downward toward the target on the follow-through, don't worry that you're out of position because you're not. This position will encourage downward impact, causing efficiency of power and correct backspin. A full follow-through is always better than a truncated swing.

Here's a drill to practice sidehill lies, modeled partly after Gary Player. Player always started walking toward the target immediately after finishing his swing. Why? Because his follow-through carried

him right into the walk.

Try it yourself. Find an area where you can practice lies where your front foot is higher, and then do the same with your back foot. With your front foot higher, focus on making a full, natural follow-through. With your back foot higher, concentrate on taking a full backswing and allowing the momentum going into your downswing to carry your finish into a natural walk down the slope.

When facing uphill, downhill or sidehill lies, remember that success comes not from altering your swing but from making proper adjustments before you even get into the address position. Practice these types of shots as often as you can and eventually they'll become just another part of your ever-expanding arsenal. **GI**

Doug Weaver is director of instruction at Palmetto Dunes Resort in Hilton Head, S.C. He can be reached at [pgaweaver@aol.com](mailto:pgaweaver@aol.com) or (843) 338-9598.



### ● SIDEHILL CURE: THE GARY PLAYER DRILL

The follow-through is one part of the swing greatly affected by golfers' uneasiness with sidehill lies. If you can swing completely through the shot and let the follow-through carry you straight into a walk up or down the slope, then you have likely made a full, natural follow-through.