



# PLAY BETTER GOLF THIS WINTER



Top 50 Coach **Adam Harnett** runs through seven key areas that are essential to good performance in the off-season



## 1. Hitting from different lies

One of the biggest mistakes club golfers make in the winter is not assessing the lie. Often, amateurs get a yardage, pull a club and then hit the shot, without even judging how the ball is sitting. You'll always see a good player having a proper look before they hit their shot.

Faced with a bare lie, perhaps where it's also wet and muddy, amateurs will often try to help the ball into the air, because they're so fearful of fatting it. In this situation, the radius of the swing shortens, which tends to lead to thin strikes and tops. Another common fault is leaning onto the back foot. To ensure that you get a clean strike, make sure that you're moving forward aggressively onto the front foot.

### The 'flier'

To avoid going underneath a 'flier', a lie which encourages the ball to travel further, move it slightly further forward.





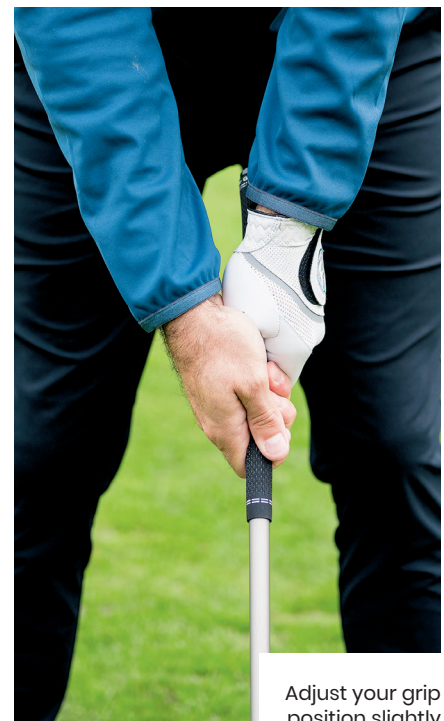
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## 2. Using hybrids and fairway woods

When the air is cool and the fairways are soft, the course is going to play longer. If you don't feel so comfortable hitting long-irons, try using a hybrid or fairway. Because of their wider, flatter soles, they can glide through the ground a lot easier than a long-iron. So, put them away and give the hybrids and fairways an extended trial over the winter. The only adjustment I'd make is to grip down slightly, which will give you a bit more control and take a little distance off.



Fairways and hybrids are better at gliding through the turf

Adjust your grip position slightly





### 3. Quality ball-striking

Now we're into the scoring zone (approximately 150 yards and in). This is where we can fritter away shots if we're struggling for a clean strike. There's a really effective drill I like to encourage students to use on the range and out on the course, which is to simply make a few practice swings with a focus on where you're going to make contact with the ground. Remember, the strike we're looking for is ball then turf. Here, I'm making my practice swing and trying to make contact with the ground ahead of the ball. This is going to encourage a downward hit and prevent 'backing up' or lifting, which is an attempt to try and scoop the ball.

If you need a stronger visual, try popping a towel down behind the ball, as I've done here. The idea is that you strike the ball without making contact with the towel. I find this exercise helps a lot of golfers to develop a much cleaner strike.

Focus on where you're going to make contact with the ground...



...which should be ahead of the golf ball



Laying a towel down gives a good visual cue



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## Shorter

Avoid making a full swing with a really lofted club as it'll encourage you to get too narrow and come down too steeply.

The right hand can't reach the clubhead

## 4. 70-yard pitching

If you find yourself fatting wedges from this kind of range, it might be because you're getting very narrow. I often see this fault, where the club comes in towards the player going back and the shaft gets vertical. From there, the club comes down steeply. This drill will help you get more width.

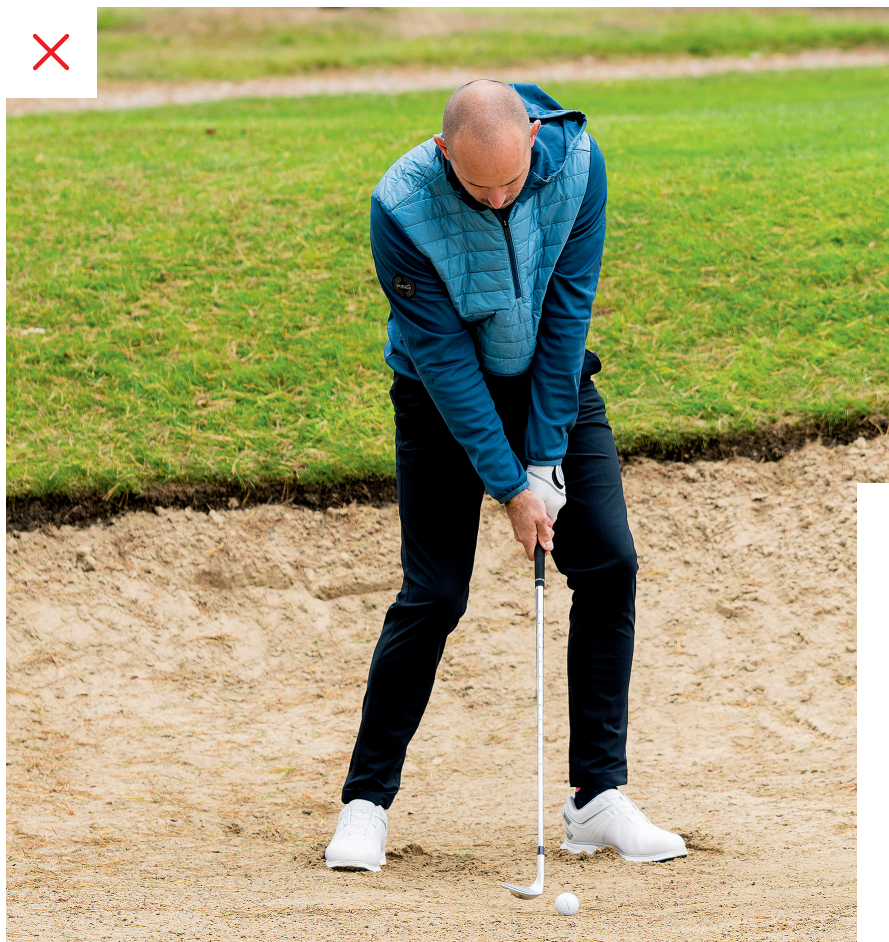
Simply take a three-quarter swing. Note that when I take my right hand off the club, I can't reach my clubhead. This shows me that my backswing has a nice amount of width. Keep working on this feeling and you'll soon find yourself picking the ball off the turf using the bounce of the club. In other words, no 'digging' with the leading edge into the ground.







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## 5. Compact bunker shots

With a fluffy lie, the type you get more in the summer, you want to use the bounce of the club. In the winter, the sand is often wet and compact, which makes it easy to bounce off the hard surface into the middle of the ball – and there's your thin strike. For the winter months, I'd encourage you to carry a wedge that has a low bounce, so six or eight degrees. This will help to keep the leading edge down in the sand. In this scenario, we actually want the leading edge to dig a bit. To encourage this, make sure the ball is a little bit more central and square the face up.



Low-bounce wedges can be good in winter

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## 6. Short chips

When the ball is sitting down in the wet rough, we still need a little bit of a downward angle of attack to get to the bottom of the ball. However, we don't want low bounce at the same time, because that's just going to encourage a dig. With a bit of bounce on the club and a steeper angle, we'll be able to just 'pop' the ball out.

With tight, wet lies, we want high bounce. Get comfortable with hitting the ground and feeling how the club interacts with the turf. When you know it's not going to dig in, you start to appreciate how bounce works and how it can slide through in wet conditions.



### Bump-and-run

With a flatter-faced club, we want the swing arc to remain fairly shallow, almost like a putting stroke.

Focus on tempo and ensure you don't hit at the ball



## 7. Long putts

A common mistake club golfers make on slower, winter greens is to hit at the ball. To be good, consistent putters, we want the club to be moving at a constant speed – so no sudden acceleration on the downswing. To combat this, try to be more aware of the length of your stroke. We want the backswing and the downswing to be the same tempo. On the putting green, work on matching up the backswing length with the length of putt you're facing.



West Hill Golf Club

Photography: Tom Miles.  
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