

THE NEW WAY TO HIT YOUR WEDGES

TOUR TESTED
AND PROVEN
BY 40+ PROS!



First, the bad news: The technique you're using on chips and pitches is wrong. You were probably taught the "body-moves-the-club" method that seems sensible but often results in skulls, chunks and poor touch. The good news? A new, scientifically-proven short-game method is sweeping the PGA Tour and is easy for you to learn, too. The Top 100 Teacher who discovered it shows you the new way to control shots from 60 yards and in, with help from his star pupil Nick Watney. Turn the page to join this short-game revolution, and get up-and-down all day long!

By David DeNunzio
Photography by Angus Murray

Chipping Away

After four years struggling on mini-tours at home and abroad, James Sieckmann turned to teaching—and had an epiphany that’s now changing the way pros and amateurs swing when near the green. Here’s how our new Top 100 Teacher went from a failed player to the Tour’s hottest short-game guru.

During the 1994 Players Championship, James Sieckmann, then 29, caddied for his older brother, Tom, a PGA Tour winner. After a valiant but failed attempt to make a dent on the leaderboards on the Asian Tour, the younger Sieckmann had turned to teaching. He had worked under the tutelage of Dave Pelz at the short-game giant’s schools in Austin and Boca Raton, and was about to become the director of instruction at Shadow Ridge C.C. in Omaha, Nebraska. He’d come to TPC Sawgrass to haul his big brother’s bag—and do some homework.

When not looping that week, Sieckmann spent hours pacing the practice area, observing and recording several players on videotape. He captured Greg Norman chipping, Ray Floyd pitching, and short-game savants Corey Pavin and Wayne Grady hitting bunker shots. He also recorded two of his brother’s close friends who would prove pivotal in his teaching of the short game: Tom Pernice, the onetime UCLA star considered a master of the short game; and Seve Ballesteros, the greatest greenside shotmaker of his era, if not ever.

When Sieckmann reviewed the footage back home in Omaha—studying it over and over, backwards and forwards—he noticed something unusual. Ballesteros, Pernice, Norman—all the top players—were breaking nearly every short-game rule he’d learned. Sieckmann, like most of us, was told to keep his hips in front of his chest, but there was Seve with his chest *in front* of his hips. He was told to keep his head still and turn his lower body, but there was Tom Pernice moving his head forward on both the backswing *and* downswing while keeping his legs quiet. He was told to keep the clubface square and his hands ahead of the clubhead, but there was Ray Floyd releasing the clubhead, toe over heel.

Then a thunderbolt struck Sieckmann. The short-game swing that’s taught as Gospel—and that he learned in junior golf; while a standout at the University of



Sieckmann on Tour and at work with (from top to bottom) Ben Crane, Charley Hoffman and Kevin Chappell.

ANGUS MURRAY (3)

Nebraska; from PGA teachers—was wrong. He was certain of it. “I’m not saying I was lied to,” says Sieckmann today, now 48. “People just didn’t know. Neither did I.” He smiles. “But now I feel like I did.”

And now he had a plan to change the way golf is played around the greens.

Since the 1990s, Sieckmann has continued to spotlight the subtle technical differences between what golfers are taught versus what the best players do on short shots. His research and analysis has formed the backbone of the short-game method that’s now used by more than 40 players on the PGA and LPGA tours, and which he says is easily learnable for everyday players. (see “*The New Way to Hit Your Wedges*,” p. TK.)

“The methods I teach are iron-clad,” boasts Sieckmann. “They’re born from the techniques used by some of the greatest short-game players in history.” He adds, “The average player can’t copy the full-swing flexibility or sheer power of a Tour player, but he can copy the way the best pros dial it in from inside 60 yards.”

Dave Pelz credits his former protégé’s work ethic as one reason for his success. “James already had extensive knowledge of how to play the game when he worked for our schools,” says Pelz. “But the fact that he worked so hard on his own skills gave him a deep understanding of what it took to improve. And he had sincere empathy for the struggles golfers of all skill levels endure, an attribute of all top-notch teachers.”

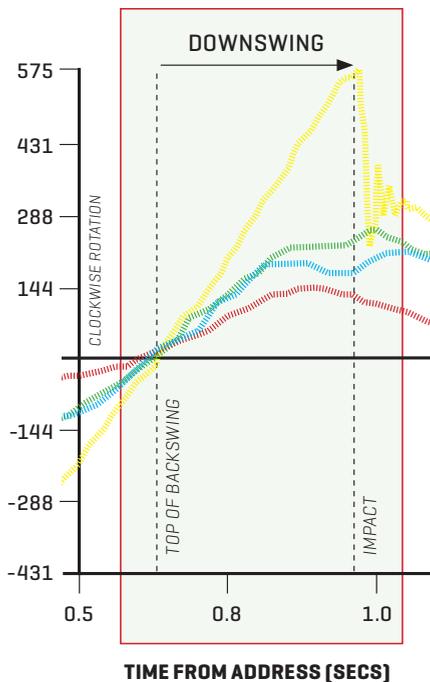
Success, if not celebrity, came in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Pernice made Sieckmann his full-time short-game coach in 1996 (“I credit James with prolonging my career because my scoring relies so much on short shots”) and helped his teacher land clients such as Charlie Wi, Skip Kendall, Frank Lickliter, Bob Tway and Duffy Waldorf throughout the rest of the 1990s and early 2000s. Despite a Tour client list most instructors

would die for, Sieckman toiled in relative obscurity.

“Part of it stems from living in Omaha,” suggests Sieckmann. “And I never thought I should market myself or advertise. I was happy teaching the members at Shadow Ridge and helping my guys on Tour when they needed it.”

Sieckmann’s stock skyrocketed after 2009, when Greg Rose, co-founder of the Titleist Performance Institute, asked the best wedge player he knew—Pernice—to help Titleist staffer Ben Crane with his pitching and bunker game. “I just told [Crane] to go see my coach, James Sieckmann,” says Pernice.

Sieckmann met Crane at Madison Club in Palm Desert, Calif., in January 2010. They worked primarily on sequence. Crane was following the chain of events common to full swings: The hips and torso move, and the arms and club follow. But the method Sieckmann created from watching the likes of Ballesteros and Floyd reverses that sequence on swings when you’re 60 yards or less from the green. “Basically, the clubhead moves faster than the →



The motion-capture sequence of a Tour-level short swing validates Sieckmann’s theories.

SECRET'S IN THE SEQUENCE

Titleist’s 3-D motion capture data proves Sieckmann’s system is correct—20 years after he began teaching it.

In a solid **power swing**, the hips reach max speed first, then pass the energy on to the torso, then the arms and finally to the hands and clubhead. This “Kinetic Sequence” is undisputed in golf teaching and research. In a **finesse swing**, the sequence changes, and the graph at left (plotting the rotational speed of different body parts on a short-game swing) proves it. Notice how the green line [torso] and blue line [arms] jump ahead of the red line [hips] at the start of the downswing—the opposite of what you do in your full swing. Also notice how the chest keeps pace with the movement of the clubhead, supporting its motion instead of slowing down into impact like it does on power swings. The lesson: Reverse your sequence for tighter short shots.

THE SIECKMANN SOLAR SYSTEM

The serendipitous genesis of the hottest short-game method on Tour



The West Omaha course, designed by Tom Sieckmann, allows James to operate his own golf academy starting in 1994.

17-year Tour veteran exposes younger brother James to the best short game players in the world and facilitates several coaching jobs.



TPI co-founder whose 3-D data verifies Sieckmann’s finesse sequence 15 years after James identifies it using videotape.



Friend to Tom and the best short-game player in history. Videotaped extensively by James, Seve became the main model for Sieckmann’s short-game system.



PGA Tour player introduced to Sieckmann through Pernice and Rose. His success starts an avalanche of Titleist staffers to the Sieckmann camp.



Tom Sieckmann’s closest Tour pal (they finishing 1-2 at the 1985 Q-School) becomes James’s first full-time pro student—and biggest proponent.



Short-game expert who coaches both Tom and James. Gives James his first teaching job and helps cultivate critical thinking about practice and the short game.



As a rookie in 1996, becomes Sieckmann’s second Tour client, starting a 17-year association that helps him reach No. 1 in Total Putting several times.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: NIGEL MURRAY; SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; GETTY IMAGES; PATRICK O'BRIEN; AUGUSTA NATIONAL; GETTY IMAGES; ANGUS MURRAY; AUGUSTA NATIONAL; GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY TPI; ANGUS MURRAY; ROBERT BECKUS



Bo Van Pelt is the latest in a long line of Tour stars to join the Sieckmann camp and unlock the new secrets to the short game.

arms and hands,” says Sieckmann. “And that revelation can be an eye-opener.”

Crane’s eyes were opened. One month after his session with Sieckmann, Crane won the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines en route to setting a career high in season winnings with \$2.8 million. A week later, Sieckmann met with Brad Faxon, a famously deft chipper and putter. Even the eight-time Tour winner was wowed by Sieckmann’s philosophy. “He knows more about the short game than anyone I’ve ever met,” said Faxon.

Soon, Sieckmann’s stable of students grew to include Charley Hoffman, Nick Watney, Justin Rose, Lexi Thompson, I.K. Kim, Bo Van Pelt, Cameron Tringale, Jeff Overton and some 30 more touring professionals. “The floodgates opened for him after what he did with Ben,” says Titleist’s Rose.

Rose adds that three-dimensional computer mapping by the Titleist Performance Institute suggests that Sieckmann’s short-swing philosophy—“it’s a finesse swing, not a power sequence”—is dead on (*see graph, previous page*). “We had data on hundreds of elite



Says Sieckmann’s student Nick Watney, who went from 146th to 12th in Scrambling in just one season, “The most important thing I’ve learned is that the short-game swing is the direct opposite of the long game.”

short swings, but didn’t fully understand the data until I met James,” admits Rose.

Says Sieckmann’s star pupil, five-time Tour winner Nick Watney, “The most important thing I’ve learned from him is that the short-game swing is the direct opposite of the long game.” Indeed, Watney went from 146th in Scrambling in 2010 to 12th in 2011. “In full swings you want width and power, but with a wedge you want less width and more finesse, so the sequence has to change.”

For his part, Sieckmann now sees his years toiling away in Asia—hitting countless bags of numberless balls, all seemingly ending in failure—as a stroke of luck. “Because I did everything wrong,” he says, “I know what’s right.”

6 New Ways to Hit Wedge Shots

From chips to bunker shots to 60-yard pitches, here are James Sieckmann’s new rules for knocking down the flag with your short shots

1 **OLD WAY** Your Body Moves Your Club
NEW WAY Your Club Moves Your Body

Your short-game downswing should not be an assertive strike propelled by your body. In fact, it’s little more than letting the club fall back to the ball in a circle—letting gravity do the hard work—then letting your chest rotate to support the motion of the clubhead. Also, don’t force the rotation of your hips before the club starts down, like on full swings, or the club will drop under the ideal plane with the face open (what causes those weak shots to the right). In other words, swing with *finesse*, not power.

2 **OLD WAY** Square Stance at Address
NEW WAY Open Stance at Address

Set your back foot square to your target line and flare your front foot with your heels almost touching. Opening up like this with your chest pointing more toward the target moves the low point of your swing in front of the ball, freeing up the clubhead to produce crisper contact.



3 **OLD WAY** *Keep Your Head Still*
NEW WAY *Let Energy Flow Toward the Target*

Good wedge players don't keep their head rock-steady. Video evidence proves that they move their head toward the target a few inches during the backswing in what is essentially a reverse weight shift; then they either keep their head still or move it even farther forward in the downswing. This gets energy flowing toward the target—a must for solid contact.

4 **OLD WAY** *"Cut Across the Ball"*
NEW WAY *Trace an On-Plane Swing Path*

The most efficient way to deliver the club to the ball on a short shot is to swing both the clubshaft and clubhead on the plane line established by the lie angle at address. You can easily check if you're doing this by taking swings next to a mirror and charting the clubhead's path in your reflection. A neutral short swing doesn't require manipulation.

5 **OLD WAY** *Swing Square-to-Square*
NEW WAY *Rotate the Clubface*

As you swing the club back on plane, let the clubface rotate open. An open clubface lets you release the club properly without fear of hitting the ball left. A released club produces a higher shot and allows you to use both the loft and bounce of the club to ensure better contact with the ball and ground.

6 **OLD WAY** *"Hold" Your Follow-Through*
NEW WAY *Release the Clubhead*

Despite what's commonly taught, you shouldn't "hold" onto your release by keeping your hands ahead of the clubhead past impact. Doing so requires tension, and tension destroys your rhythm and feel. In addition, it reduces the effective loft and bounce of the club, sharpening the leading edge so that it's more likely to stick into the turf.

ANGELUS MURRAY

How to Groove a Finesse Swing

Hit chips with one arm to feel the correct sequence of moves in your short swing

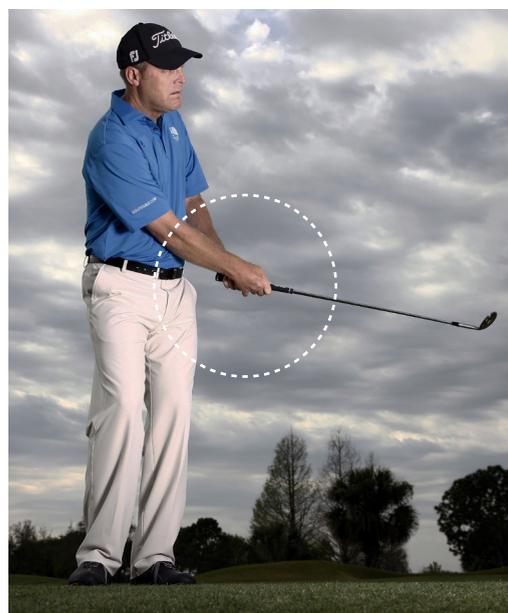


The new way to hit wedge shots comes down to changing the sequence in your downswing so that the club moves faster than your arms in the transition, then learning how to support the movement of the club with your arms and chest. To do this, try hitting shots with only your right arm (or your left, if you're a southpaw). "I know it sounds simplistic," says Sieckmann, "but it's a powerful drill." Why? Hitting solid shots this way automatically creates the correct sequence in your swing, without any thinking on your

part. In other words, you must swing in the proper clubhead-leading-the-body motion, or else you'll hit fat or thin shots. Here's how it's done:

As you start your downswing, focus on moving the clubhead first. It should reach top speed before anything else, followed by your arms, chest, and finally your hips. [Yes, this sequence is the exact opposite of what you use in your full swing.] It's critical that you turn your chest through impact to support the release of the club. Make a relaxed right-arm-only swing

in which you allow the clubhead to pass your hands and pause at the finish. You'll know you did it correctly if the grip points at your belly button and the face is slightly open. For the full effect, place your left hand on the handle while holding your finish. In order to fit your left hand you'll notice that your left elbow must fold and your left wrist must cup a bit [you should see wrinkles in the back of your left wrist]. These are key moves to successfully release the clubhead and optimize loft and bounce of the club.



Add your left hand to the handle at the end of the drill for a more realistic feel of the proper finish.

Short and Sweet

Steal Nick Watney's "finesse wedge" secrets in this frame-by-frame lesson

In a power swing, you want to generate as much speed as possible—loft and bounce are unimportant. "In a finesse wedge swing," says Sieckmann, "you want to *control* speed and maximize loft and bounce." There's not only a change in mechanics, but a

switch in the way you mentally approach both swings as well.

According to Sieckmann, the lone role of your lower body on short shots is to aid in balance. You don't use it to create power. Notice how Nick Watney, a Sieckmann student since 2010, initiates his downward

movement by moving the club first. You can think of it as a gentle casting motion, but Sieckmann prefers to let "gravity be your friend." You can see how Watney's hips don't turn until after the club gets back in front of his body.

"The feeling you're after," instructs

Sieckmann, "is finesse, with your arms and the club swinging past your lower body while your chest smoothly rotates toward the target at the same pace." If you hit your 5-iron this way, the ball would go nowhere. "Essentially," he says, "great wedge players are weak on purpose."



ANGUS MURRAY

"My biggest mistake is getting too much of my long-game swing in my short-game swing. Only when I learned to swing narrow and steep with the right sequence did I learn that my short game could become a reliable scoring weapon." —*Nick Watney*

FINESSE ON TOUR

James Sieckmann's Full-Time Professional Students

Nick Watney

12th in Scrambling (2011)

Bo Van Pelt

+ 57 spots in Proximity to Pin from 50–75 yards from 2012

Ben Crane

6th in Scrambling (2013)

Charley Hoffman

+17 spots in Sand Saves from 2012

Tom Pernice

1st in Putting, 11th in Sand Saves (2013 Champions Tour)

Charlie Wi

3rd in Scrambling (2013)

Jeff Overton

+81 spots in Scrambling since 2011

Kevin Chappell

6th in Sand Saves (2013)

I.K. Kim

17th in Sand Saves, 4th in Putting (2012 LPGA)

Cameron Tringale

16th in Sand Saves (2013)

Other Pro Students (past and present)

Justin Rose
Brad Faxon
Tom Purtzer
Alex Rocha
David Toms
Peter Jacobsen
James Driscoll
Juli Inkster
Tim Herron
Camilo Villegas
Kyle Stanley
Nicholas Thompson
Lexi Thompson
Skip Kendall
Duffy Waldorf
Chris Tidland
Charlie Beljan
Matt Harmon
Jason Knutson
Richard Lee
Steve Lowery
John Rollins
Danielle Kang
Candie Kung
Frank Lickliter
Grant Waite
Joe Durant
Bob Tway
Kevin Stadler
Scott McCarron
Olin Browne
D.J. Trahan
Sang-Moon Bay