

I would first like to start by saying thank you to UMCC and its entire membership for the overwhelming support I received last week at the NJ State Open! It was an amazing week for my family and I that we won't soon forget. I am also so very happy and extremely proud to have UMCC pride as my extra club in the bag, so thanks again!

After watching last week's British Open as well as reflecting on my State Open experience, I thought it would be very valuable to make note of what I saw that every golfer on every level can certainly benefit from. **WEDGE PLAY!** Now, I know that we are in an age where all we want to do is swing it harder and faster or "grip it and rip it" so to speak. However, I think if we really stopped to think about it, 10 extra yards off the tee compared to a deadly accurate wedge game, wouldn't even fall in the same realm. Yes we can all gain some benefit from a little extra yardage here and there, but in order to do that, we must tirelessly work on improving our flexibility, strength and mobility. And let's face it, sometimes there are just not enough hours in the day! There is, however, something inside of us all that knows how important it is to have a good handle on our scoring clubs, and most likely, we all realize that it is more important than a little extra distance. I watched one of the shortest hitters in professional golf win his second major championship with exceptional wedge play. Not driving!! I just won the State open by 7 shots in very similar fashion. I was on a golf course that could not be overpowered, instead relied on finesse and recovery. I will say that my wedge play from inside 100 yards was absolutely the key to my victory. Just like Zach Johnson displayed so beautifully at St. Andrews, a solid wedge game means more looks at close range birdies and/or potential par saves and that leads to one thing, lower scores!

In the spirit of solid wedge play I challenge everyone to come up with what I call a "Butter Distance". Meaning, a number that they feel so extremely comfortable with that no matter what the day brings, they can rely on a certain distance come rain or shine. Mine is 67 yards. From 67 yards, I know I am going to be tough to beat, so I am always trying my best to get as close to 67 yards into the green whenever the risk for going for the green is too high. What's your number? We use this number when we must recover from the trees, or layup on a par 5 or even a par 4. We use this number to always give our game a jolt of confidence when we are in a state of struggle. But in order to achieve this "Butter Distance" we must practice it!

Some great tips I learned along the way to become a solid wedge player is to plant your weight on your forward foot when hitting finesse wedge shots (inside 100 yards for me). We plant our weight forward so that we don't have to rely on timing the weight shift with such a short shot. Secondly, we make sure we turn the body and always have a relation between the arms, hands and chest. I like to feel as if my hands are always staring at my sternum through my wedge shots. Finally, in order to feel a great sense of connection and rhythm to the swing, place a towel under both of your arms or tuck your shirt sleeves in. This will create a great awareness of everything moving together in order to hit great wedge shots. Also, very important to avoid taking a full swing with any wedge if possible because this adds too much spin. We don't want to over spin our wedges, so instead we must swallow our pride and back off a little bit in order to hit the "one hop and stop"!

Stick with these tips and your wedge play will most definitely improve. So I ask again, what's your "Butter Distance"!?

Best of luck and I'll see you out there,
Tyler Hall, Director of Instruction