

>THE ONE CLUB YOU NEED

TRY THESE SEVEN SHOTS WITH A HYBRID

BY NICK PRICE

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HE HYBRID has revolutionized the long-iron game. It's so much easier to hit, even the 4-iron is no match. The ball flies higher and comes down softer, and you don't have to swing as hard to achieve the same distance. Club manufacturers will love me for this, but I really believe if you don't own one, you should rush out right now and buy two.

You haven't left yet?

The benefits of hybrids don't stop with replacing long irons. I'll show you how to play an entire round with this club. Well, maybe not putt or hit greenside bunker shots. But you can deal with just about every other situation on the course using this wonder club.



1 TEE

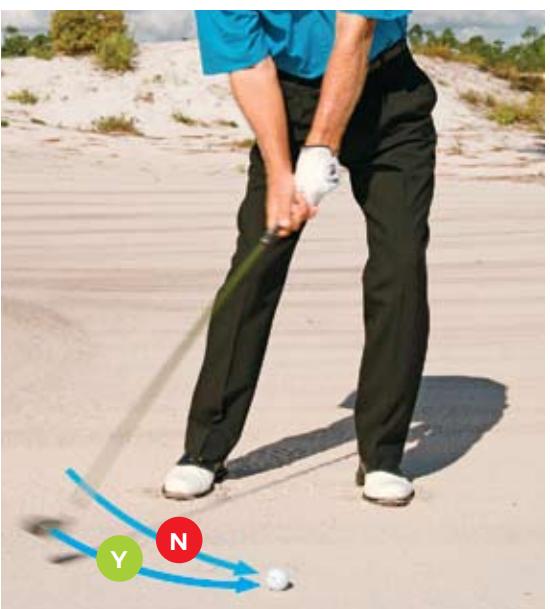
SET THE BALL LOW. Ideally, you want the clubface covering most of the ball. Maybe a quarter of the ball can be above the face, but that's it. The way the hybrid is weighted, it's easy to get the ball airborne when you tee it low. The only other tip for a hybrid tee shot is to swing as if you're hitting a fairway wood: You want a sweeping approach into the ball.



2 SAND

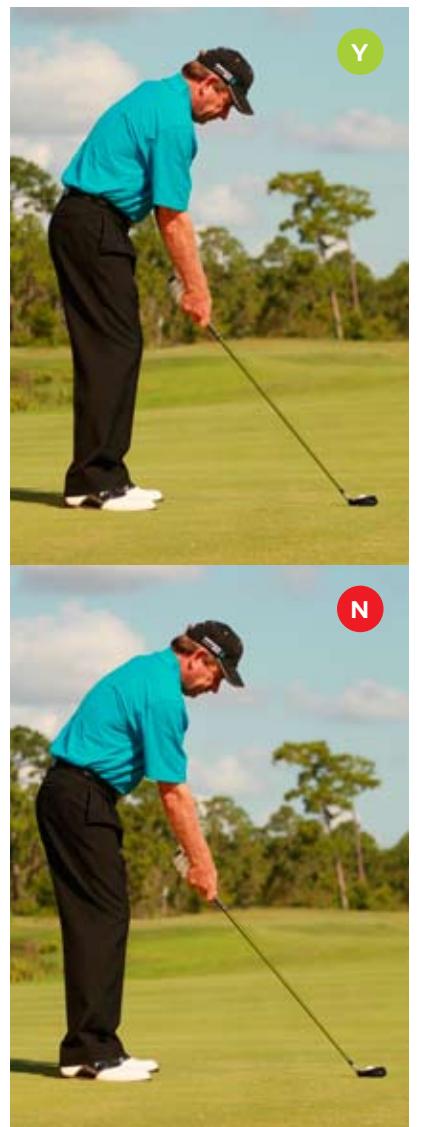
SHALLOW OUT YOUR SWING.

From a fairway bunker, the most important thing is angle of attack. Play the ball slightly back of center in your stance, and then swing the club on a shallower path into the ball than you would with an iron. Coming down more from inside the target line will help.



3 FAIRWAY

STAND CLOSER TO THE BALL. When your ball is happily resting in the middle of the fairway, remember to stand a little closer to it. Because hybrids have a fairway-wood look about them, the tendency is to address the ball as if you were holding a 3- or 5-wood, with the arms extended away from the body (*bottom photo*). But some hybrids are only 39 inches long—that's a standard 3-iron length. So make sure you address the ball as if you're hitting a 3-iron (*top photo*), not a wood. Having to reach for the ball greatly decreases your chances of making solid contact.



4 ROUGH

TAKE AN EXTRA PRACTICE SWING. One of the great things about this club is the way it cuts through the rough. The problem is, you need to convince yourself before you hit your shot that the rough will offer little resistance. I suggest taking an extra practice swing or two to see just how easy the hybrid gets through the long grass. Also consider playing the ball back a smidge, and hit slightly down on it instead of trying to sweep it.



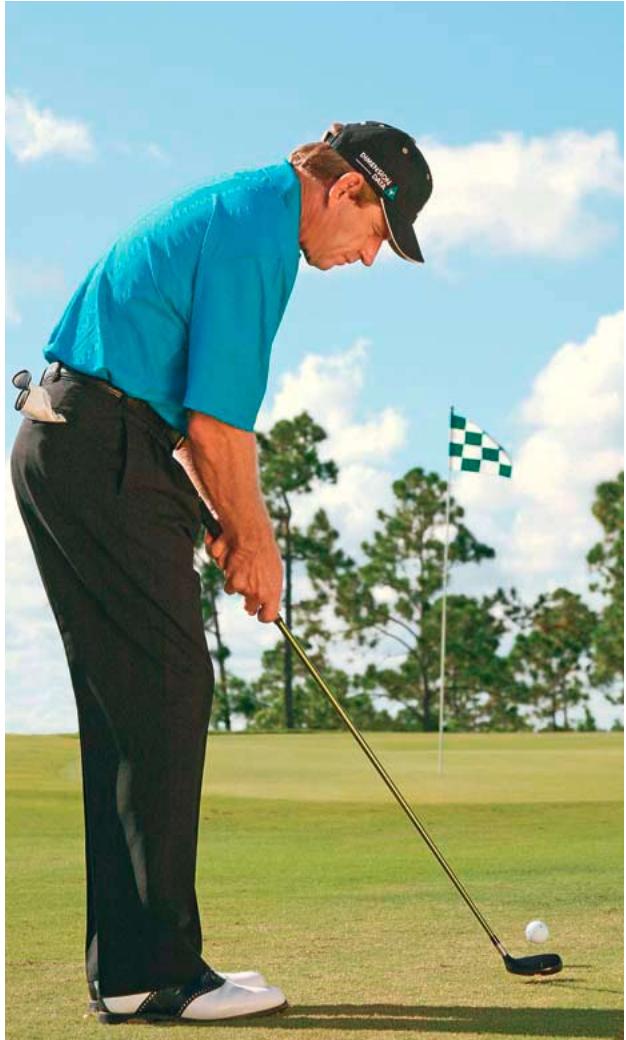
'IF YOU NEED TO PUNCH OUT, THE HYBRID IS YOUR CLUB, ESPECIALLY IN PINE STRAW OR SANDY AREAS.'

NICK PRICE, winner of 18 PGA Tour events, including the 1992 and 1994 PGA Championships and the 1994 British Open, lives in Hobe Sound, Fla., and practices at nearby McArthur Golf Club (shown here).



5 ESCAPE

GRIP DOWN, AND KEEP THE LOWER BODY STABLE. If you need to punch out, the hybrid is your club, especially in pine straw or sandy areas, because the leading edge won't get caught up in the junk the way an iron will. Grip down on the handle an inch or so, and play the ball toward your back foot. Then make a three-quarter swing with your arms and shoulders, keeping your lower body quiet throughout.



6 CHIP

BUMP-AND-RUN IT WITH A LITTLE WRIST HINGE. The swing motion you want here is a cross between a chip and a putt. The chipping portion comes from hinging your wrists as you take the club back. The farther the shot, the more hinge you need. The putting portion comes from making a stroke with a very quiet lower body. Your hips should barely move. The ball will jump off the face, so make a smaller swing than you think.



7 COLLAR

MAKE A LONGER BACKSWING. If you hate when your ball is just off the green but up against thick grass, then you'll love what the hybrid can do from here. No more having to belly a wedge. Instead, make a longer backswing, and gradually accelerate. It's not a pop shot; it's a smooth stroke. Acceleration is very important, but what I don't want to see is a short backswing and a quick move into the ball. ▶