



Practicing bunker shots helps you recognize and successfully play from various sand conditions. (USGA John Mummert)

MASTERING INCONSISTENT BUNKERS — IT'S A BLAST!

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One of golf's greatest attributes is that it is played outdoors. As golfers, we get challenged by changing environmental conditions that impact our shots. Every golf hole is unique and factors like wind and rain play an important role in how the ball sets up for play. The natural variation in playing conditions is an aspect of golf that should be enjoyed and celebrated.

That being said, the unpredictable nature of the ball lies can leave us scratching our head on how to play our next shot. Over time we all learn how factors like slopes, moisture and even small depressions in the turf can affect our golf shots.

As an example, consider playing a ball that is below your feet. More than likely, the ball will tend to go right for a right-handed player or left for a left-handed player. So, we learn to adjust our alignment and swing accordingly to produce the desired result. Another example is learning how to play in windy conditions. Golfers who can master a low-trajectory shot can limit the wind's impact.

Adjusting to the natural variability of lies in the fairway or rough is easy to understand, but it's sometimes forgotten when it comes to bunkers. Many people wonder whether maintenance practices can be adjusted to make bunkers play consistently. What they may not realize is that bunker playing conditions are influenced by a wide range of factors that are outside the superintendent's control.

Bunker design, elevation, slope, exposure to sun and wind, sand characteristics and rainfall are a few of the key factors that cause inconsistent playing conditions. Maintaining consistent playability in all bunkers on a daily basis is an impossible task because it's impossible to precisely control factors like these. While some adjustments in daily bunker preparation can be made to improve bunker sand consistency, it is impossible to obtain perfect uniformity in all bunkers.

Instead of scratching your head after a tough bunker shot, try to embrace the challenge of playing from various sand conditions. In the same manner that we learn how to play an uphill or downhill shot, the best players learn how to play from firm sand, soft sand, and the various stances and lies that we encounter in bunkers.

Take lessons from a local pro or watch some instructional YouTube videos. Practicing bunker shots regularly is the key. Feel the firmness of the sand as you dig your feet in while preparing for a bunker shot and adjust your stroke accordingly. Hopefully, you will be rewarded with better bunker shots and fewer strokes during your round. For more information, read the USGA articles, "[Five Reasons Why Bunkers Are Not Consistent](#)," "[How Management Practices Affect Bunker Consistency](#)" and "[Bunker Consistency – Can You Handle The Truth?](#)"