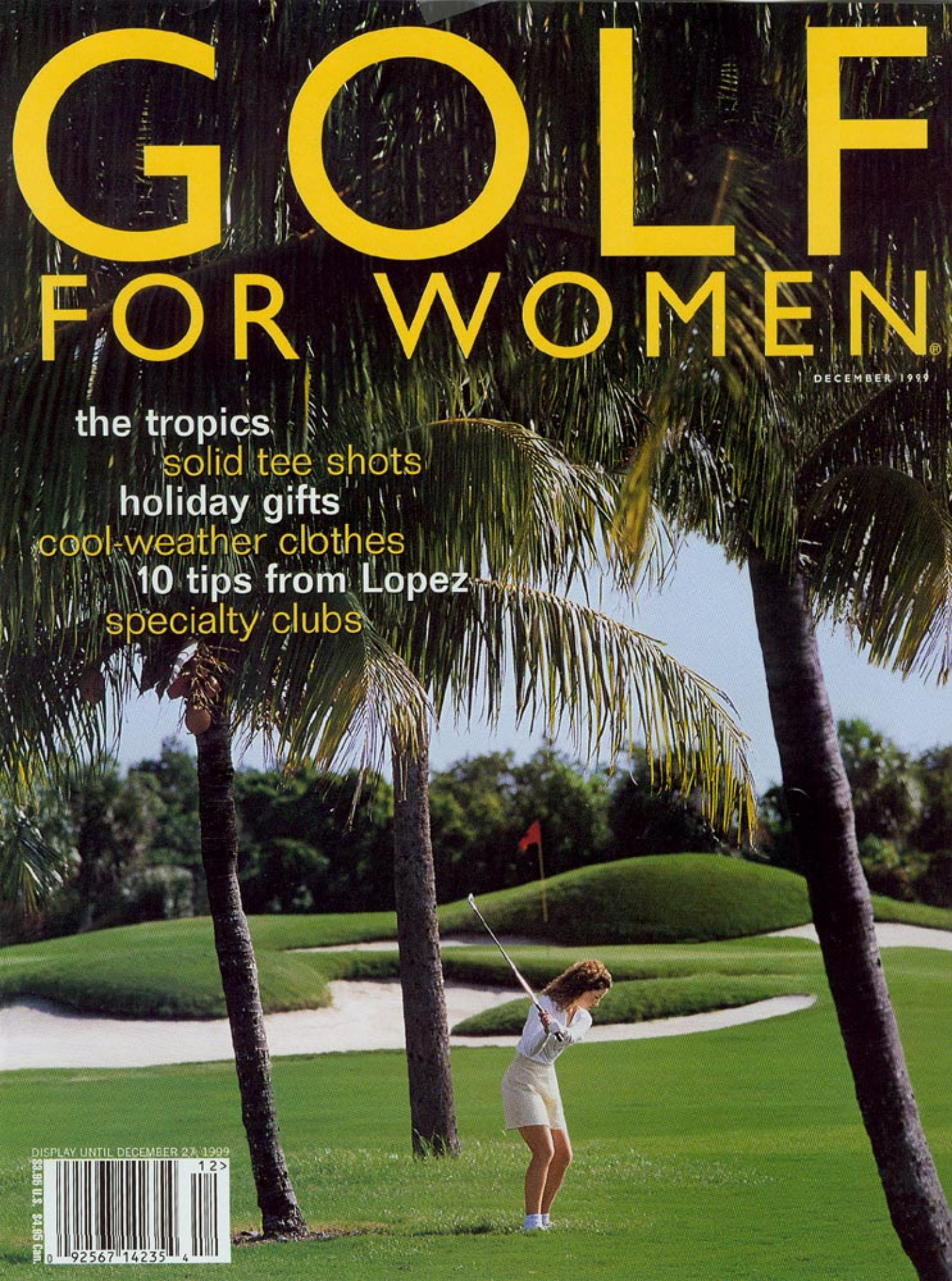


GOLF FOR WOMEN[®]

DECEMBER 1999

the tropics
solid tee shots
holiday gifts
cool-weather clothes
10 tips from Lopez
specialty clubs

DISPLAY UNTIL DECEMBER 27, 1999



ON-COURSE #6 LESSON SERIES



Playing Tropical Golf

For our sixth and final On-Course Lesson, we take on the tropics. The setting may be easy on the eyes, but its elements—wind, sand and water—conspire to set up a challenging round. Karen Palacios, an LPGA Teaching Professional at the Jim McLean Golf School at the Doral Resort & Spa in Miami, offers tips on how to play your best.

INSIDE ■ Reading Bermuda greens ■ The short lob
■ Draw the ball for distance ■ Fairway bunkers: out in one



ON-COURSE
LESSON #6

At a Glance: Tropical Golf

With its flat fairways and short grass, you may at first glimpse think this tropical course will be a breeze to play. Its bite, however, can take you by surprise: the gentle breeze that whips into a 30-mph wind; the Bermuda grass that twists your clubface; the sudden rain shower that steals your roll. Couple those with the high intimidation factor of water and sand, and you could have the makings of a scorecard disaster. Miami-based IPGA teaching pro Karen Palacios gives you the on-course savvy you need to prevail.

GREEN ZONE Greens are often protected in front by sand, water and other hazards, so you don't want to leave the ball short. Because of the level terrain, it can be tricky to gauge distance. From the fairway, the greens can appear smaller than they are and the pin closer than it is. When you reach the green, you see that you needed more club.



Crandon Park
Golf Course,
Key Biscayne,
Florida

WATER HAZARDS are everywhere on tropical courses—guarding greens, flanking (even crossing) fairways—and will make you pay in penalty strokes for errant shots. If you find a ball in the water that's not yours, it's probably best to throw it in your shag bag. Submerged balls absorb moisture and lose their zip.

LOCAL AGRONOMY On warm weather courses, Bermuda grass is common because it stands up well to the heat. You'll notice its effect in the rough, where the wiry blades can swallow balls and twist your club-face shut. When you're in deep, remember this: the taller the grass, the firmer your grip.



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Grass Tacks

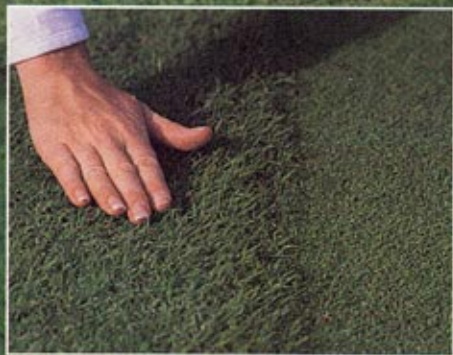
Ah, Bermuda. Grass, that is. Golfers used to playing on bentgrass greens, common in cooler climes, will have to make some adjustments on tropical courses where Bermuda grass is prevalent. Because it's coarser than other grasses, its grain (the direction in which the blades grow) affects the speed and path of your putts more noticeably than on bentgrass. Since the blades can run in any direction on your line—left, right, with it, against it—be prepared for putts that look straight to break, and vice versa.

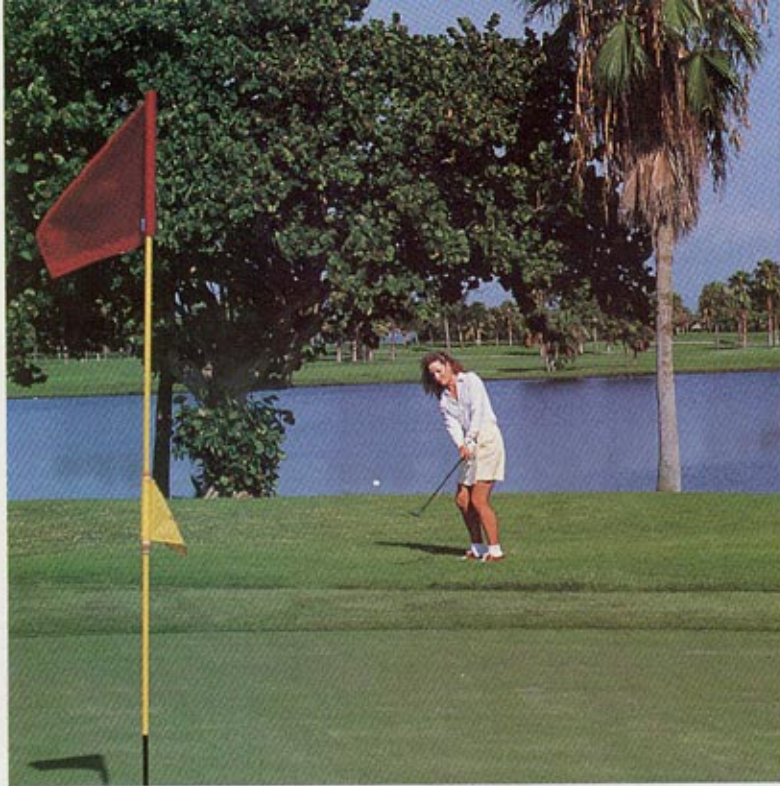


READING THE GRAIN

Putts will be slower when going against the grain and will tend to break in the direction it's growing. The following guidelines—none of them foolproof—can help you forecast the grain's effect on the speed and line of your putts.

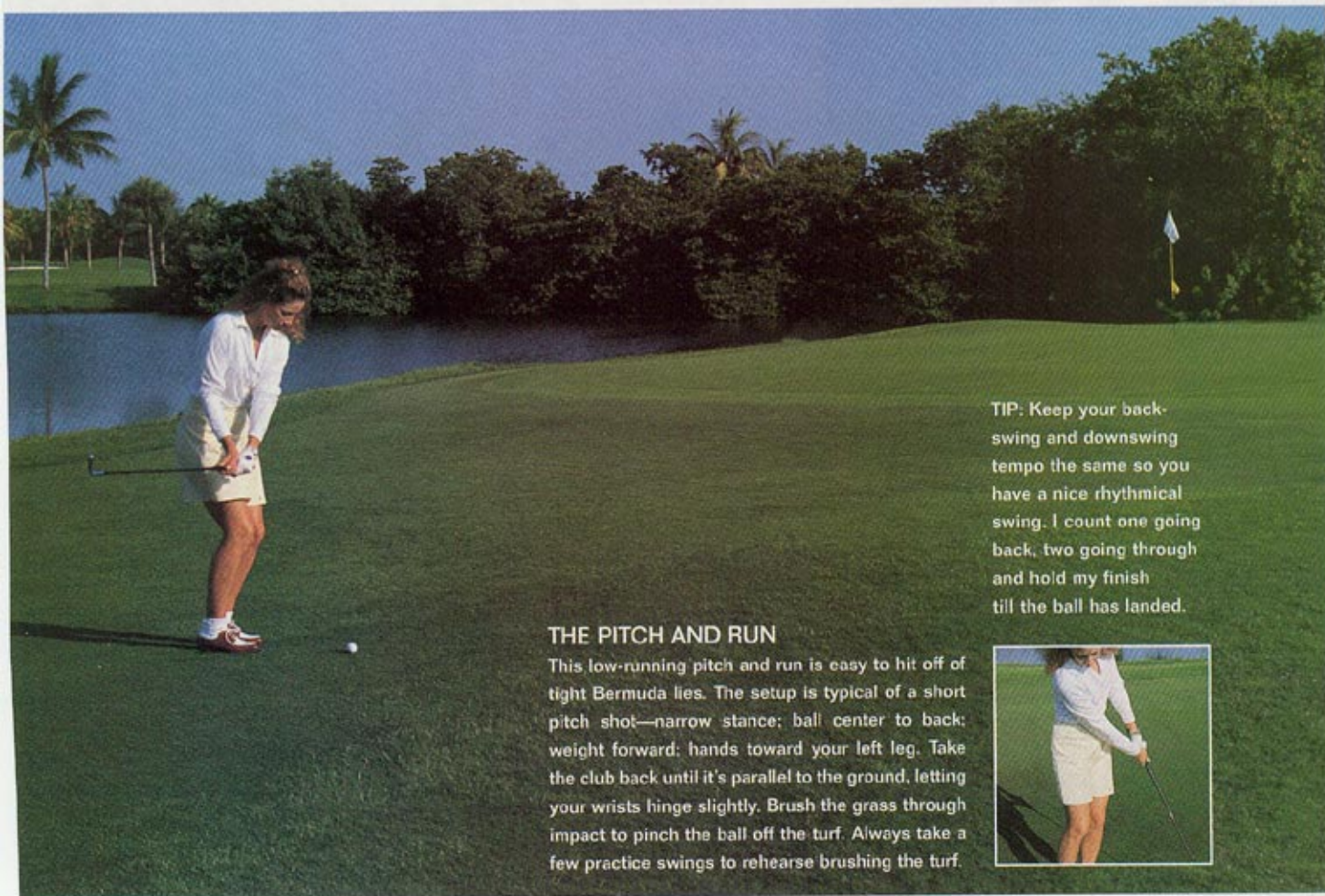
- Feel the fringe to see which way the grass is growing. But don't test the putting surface—it's against the rules.
- Look for a worn patch on the rim of the cup; this often indicates that putts are breaking toward that side of the hole.
- The grass grows quite a bit during the day and follows the sun. If you're playing late, bet that your putts will fall toward the setting sun. Bermuda also tends to grow toward bodies of water, so that can be another clue.
- When the grass looks shiny and dark, you'll be putting against the grain; if it looks dull and grayish, you're putting with it. Adjust your speed accordingly.





THE SHORT LOB

Learn to blast the ball out of greenside rough with this short lob shot. I like to use a sand wedge because it has a heavy head and cuts through the wiry grass easily. (If you use a lob wedge, make sure you take a long enough backswing.) The trick to this shot is to deliver a sharp, downward blow, so setup is key. Play the ball in the center of a narrow stance, your weight favoring your front foot. Take a long, easy swing—hinging your wrists abruptly on the backswing—and accelerate through the hit. Keep your follow-through short with the face of the club pointing to the sky.



TIP: Keep your backswing and downswing tempo the same so you have a nice rhythmical swing. I count one going back, two going through and hold my finish till the ball has landed.

THE PITCH AND RUN

This low-running pitch and run is easy to hit off of tight Bermuda lies. The setup is typical of a short pitch shot—narrow stance; ball center to back; weight forward; hands toward your left leg. Take the club back until it's parallel to the ground, letting your wrists hinge slightly. Brush the grass through impact to pinch the ball off the turf. Always take a few practice swings to rehearse brushing the turf.





ON-COURSE
LESSON #6

Maximize Distance

The heavy, humid air at sea level may be good for your complexion, but it's a drag on distance. Also factor in the wind and the sometimes sodden fairways, and a shot the scorecard says is 120 yards may actually play more like 150. Since golf course architects tend to punish players more for leaving the ball short rather than long, take time to calculate yardage based on the above tropical factors—not solely on what the scorecard says—and for the first few holes, always take more club than usual to get the distance you're after.

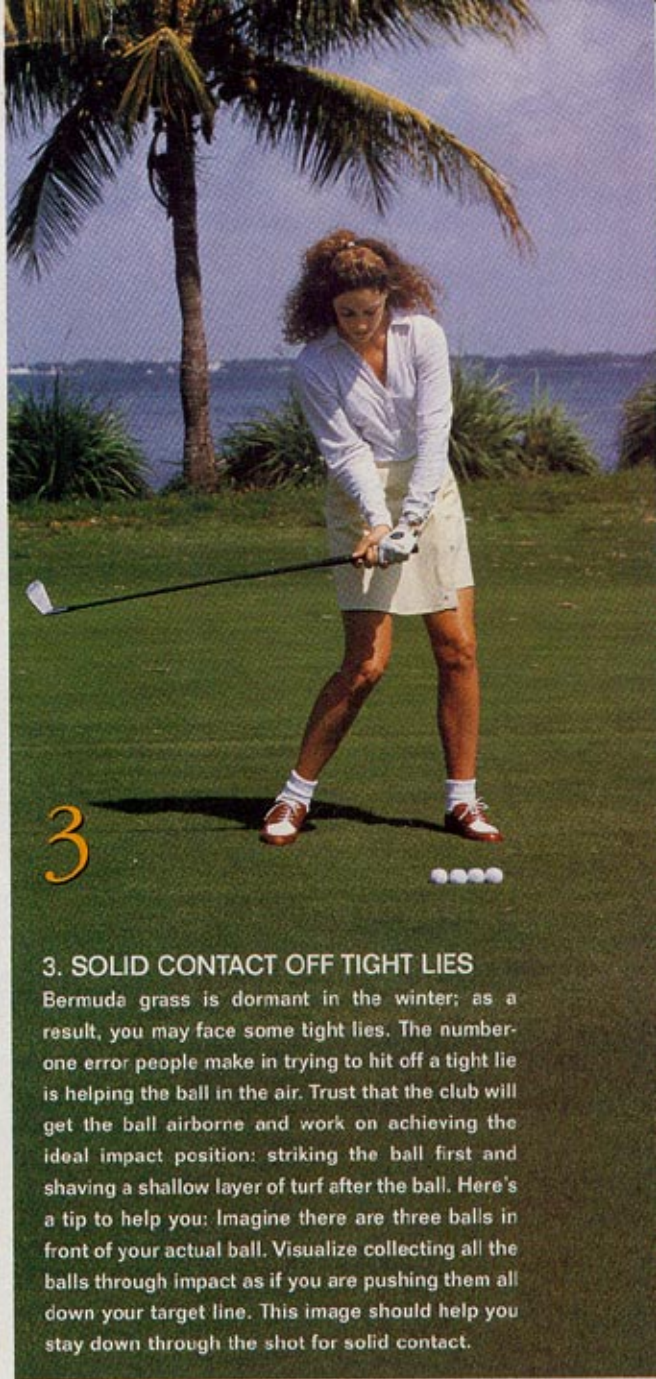


1. LEARN TO DRAW THE BALL

The teeing grounds are typically the same level as the fairway, so you won't have the distance boost from elevated tees and sloping fairways. High shots to the right, the bane of many a golfer, also curtail distance. So to meet the added demand for distance, learn to hit an intentional draw, where the ball curves left and rolls a good bit when it lands. To draw the ball, first take a stronger left-hand grip (you should see two to three knuckles). Close your stance by pulling your right foot, hip and shoulder back. Your body should point slightly right of your target, the clubface slightly left of it.

2. LOAD YOUR RIGHT SIDE

Flat lies, which require perfect contact at impact, can be difficult for high handicappers. When you golf on hilly courses, the slopes can help you out: Uphill lies limit reverse pivots; downhill lies can help with weight transfer. But on tropical courses, where the lies are mostly level, there's no such luck. It's more crucial than ever to transfer your weight fully to your right side and complete your backswing. At the top, a good checkpoint is your right shoulder over your right knee.



3. SOLID CONTACT OFF TIGHT LIES

Bermuda grass is dormant in the winter; as a result, you may face some tight lies. The number-one error people make in trying to hit off a tight lie is helping the ball in the air. Trust that the club will get the ball airborne and work on achieving the ideal impact position: striking the ball first and shaving a shallow layer of turf after the ball. Here's a tip to help you: Imagine there are three balls in front of your actual ball. Visualize collecting all the balls through impact as if you are pushing them all down your target line. This image should help you stay down through the shot for solid contact.

Tip

It's good etiquette to help your playing partners spot their balls, but when you're playing on a course with Bermuda rough, it's a necessity. Balls quickly nestle down in the roots and are easily lost, even when they're in the first cut of rough.

Keeping an eye on your ball—and your partners'—will save you time and strokes.

Par Hopping

World-renowned father and son golf course architects, Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Jr. have designed layouts around the world. Both have made their mark in the Caribbean. Some picks for an "RTJ" trail, island-style.

■ **Hyatt Dorado Beach and Hyatt Regency Cerromar, Puerto Rico**

These adjoining resorts, 22 miles west of San Juan, have two RTJ Sr. courses apiece. All 72 holes are being restored to their original design. 800-554-9288.

■ **Half Moon Golf, Tennis & Beach Club, Jamaica**

The Montego Bay resort's 1961 Jones layout is still one of Jamaica's top three courses. 800-626-0592.

■ **Four Seasons Resort, Nevis**

The first, and many say the best, of RTJ Jr.'s Caribbean projects, opened in 1991. It's hillier than most island tracks. 800-332-3442.

■ **Royal West Moreland Golf Club, Barbados**

Opened in 1995 to great reviews, the course runs through an old sugar plantation and rock quarry. 246-422-4653.

■ **Tierra del Sol, Aruba** This four-year-old course, managed by the Hyatt Regency Aruba, was the island's first 18-hole layout. The RTJ Jr. design has a nature preserve and ocean views on every hole. 800-554-9288.



PICK THE BALL OUT OF FAIRWAY BUNKERS

In fairway bunkers, so many of us incorrectly splash the sand, which robs you of distance and may even keep the ball in the bunker. Here's a tip to help you pick the ball clean. Keep your chin up at address and your head at the same level throughout the swing. If your chin dips, you increase the odds of taking sand. Take a wide stance to establish a solid base and play the ball in the middle of your body. Your hands should be level with, or just slightly ahead of, the ball. Grip down on the club and make a controlled backswing so you don't lose your footing. You may only be able to make a three-quarter backswing, which is fine, but make sure you accelerate all the way through to the finish.

Tip

The blazing sun will drain your energy and focus.

To stay fresh, use a sun umbrella (GustBuster makes one popular with tour pros). The reflective surface not only provides sun protection but keeps you 10 degrees cooler as well.

