

# YOUR BIGGEST MISTAKE

YOU HAVE MORE DISASTERS FROM **GREENSIDE BUNKERS** THAN YOU REALIZE **BY PETER SANDERS**

**C**HANCES ARE YOU'LL FACE two greenside bunker shots in your next round. Depending on the design and number of bunkers on the course, as well as the state of your golf swing, this figure can escalate in a hurry. But contrary to what you'd expect, low-handicappers aren't that much better at avoiding sand than higher-handicappers. Using data from the 156,000+ amateur rounds posted on my website, shotbyshot.com, I found that 0-handicappers face an average of 1.2 greenside bunker shots per 18 holes and 24-handicappers face only slightly more at 2.1. Sure, lower-handicappers are more skilled at targeting shots away from trouble, but they're also more daring in their shot selection to challenge it. ✨ What's true for all golfers is this: *Once we get in bunkers, we suck at getting out.* Defining a mistake as missing the putting surface entirely—leaving the ball in the sand or skulling it over the green—and defining a good shot as leaving a putt within eight feet of the cup, I came up with the chart on the opposite page. Notice that a 12-handicapper is just as likely to make a mistake as hit a good shot. And even a scratch golfer gaffes nearly one in 10 attempts. ✨ The psychological effect of being scared of sand can creep into your entire round. The mere sight of bunkers can make you tense and your swing tentative. Even though the greenside-bunker shot is rarely practiced, take it from a man whose eyes grow bleary studying statistics: This is the shot that presents to all of us a big opportunity to avoid blowups. Learn to master the out. —WITH MAX ADLER

**SANDERS**, a *Golf Digest* Professional Advisor and statistician, operates the subscription-based game-analysis website *shotbyshot.com*, which is used in *Golf Digest's* *Make Me Better* program.

## A SUREFIRE WAY TO FIX IT

BY JASON BIRNBAUM

**Y**ou're probably wondering why I have a ball teed up in the sand and I'm swinging a driver. No, I'm not cheating. This is to demonstrate the feeling you should have when you play a sand wedge from a greenside bunker.

The most common fault is a narrow, arms-only backswing. This causes a steep angle of attack where the wedge digs deeply, and the result is usually a chunk that stays in the bunker. By imagining you're holding a driver—not a wedge—you'll be inclined to make a wider, rounder swing using your core. Also, it will feel natural to address the ball with a wide stance and the ball just inside your front foot.

This simple thought of swinging a driver will help you generate a longer, flatter sweep through the sand, which will produce more consistent bunker shots. □

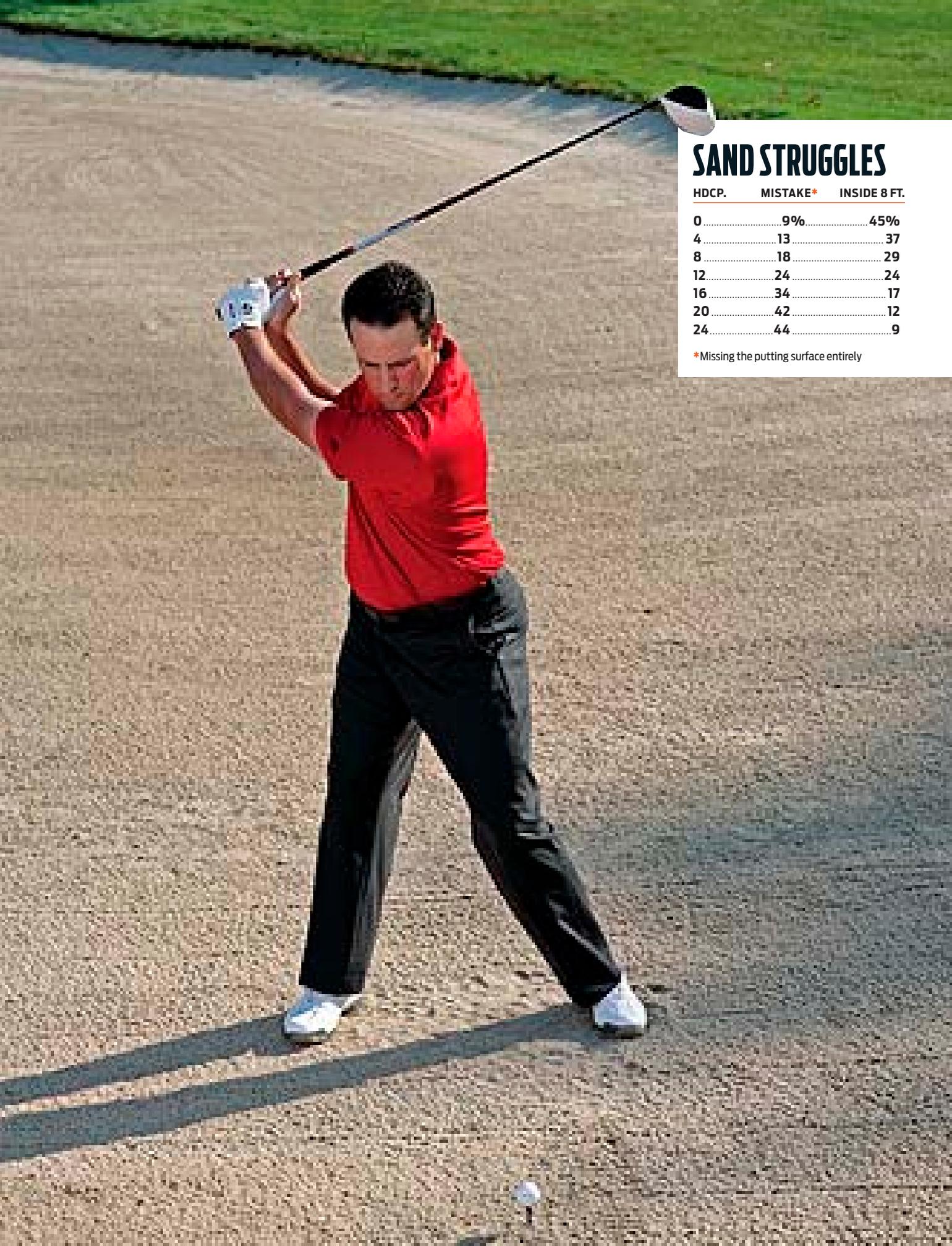
### ABOUT BIRNBAUM

**FACILITY** Alpine Country Club, Demarest, N.J.

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**BACKGROUND** "My grandfather not only taught me to play golf, he bought me a video camera when I was 13. It had slow motion, which was a big deal, and I've been fascinated by how the swing works since."

**BEST LESSON** "Always maintain an even demeanor. If a student is shanking, obviously you don't want to be discouraging. If a student is stripping it, you don't want to get too excited, either. This game is hard enough. You don't want a guy to feel he has regressed when he can't sustain his very best."



## SAND STRUGGLES

HDCP.	MISTAKE*	INSIDE 8 FT.
0	9%	45%
4	13	37
8	18	29
12	24	24
16	34	17
20	42	12
24	44	9

\*Missing the putting surface entirely