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Lessons for President Obama, and No Mulligans

By [BILL PENNINGTON](#)

EDGARTOWN, Mass. — Gene Mulak, the golf pro at the Vineyard Golf Club on Martha's Vineyard, does not know how many golf lessons President Obama has taken. But Mulak is certain he was the first to tutor him on his bunker play. And Mulak is certain Obama needed the help.

Obama played at the Vineyard Golf Club twice last summer and again last week while on vacation. The club, which is [believed to be the only entirely organic golf course in America](#), also features treacherous, British Isles-style bunkers.



Steven Senne/Associated Press President Obama played a round at Vineyard Golf Club's organic course Friday.

When Obama asked Mulak for a lesson on how to escape the deep bunkers, Mulak noticed that his setup in the sand was all wrong.

“He had the ball back in his stance, his hands were forward and the club face was closed about 40 degrees before he even started,” Mulak said last week. “It would be tough to get out of any bunker that way.”

Mulak spent 25 minutes teaching Obama. The first thing he did was move the golf ball forward in Obama's stance — toward his right foot since he plays left-handed. Then Mulak moved Obama's hands back toward his left leg to open the club face. This allowed the natural bounce shaped into the sole of a sand wedge to help carry the ball out of the bunker.

“He was popping balls onto the green in minutes,” Mulak said. “He thought that was pretty amazing, but it wasn’t rocket science. It was an easy fix, something any P.G.A. professional could have done.”

Mulak later watched Obama play three holes. What did he think of the first golfer’s game?

“He’s a trouper, that’s what he is,” Mulak said. “He accepts that it’s a hard game. We had another president — I’m not naming names — who liked to play a lot of mulligans.”

A mulligan is a term for a do-over golf shot, one meant to replace a poor shot. Former President Bill Clinton vacationed on Martha’s Vineyard and was known for frequently using do-over shots — they became known as “Billigans.”

Mulak said: “When President Obama hit his ball into the junk out here, he went and found it and hit it again. He did that wherever his ball ended up. You have to respect him for that.”

Mulak, who has taught golf for 20 years, was asked if he was nervous giving a golf lesson to a president.

“I’ve worked with PGA Tour players, and that’s more nerve-racking,” Mulak said. “Those are the best players in the world, and they’re trying to stay on top. With the president, I had nothing to lose. He was already at the bottom of the bunker-playing world. I was just happy to help.”