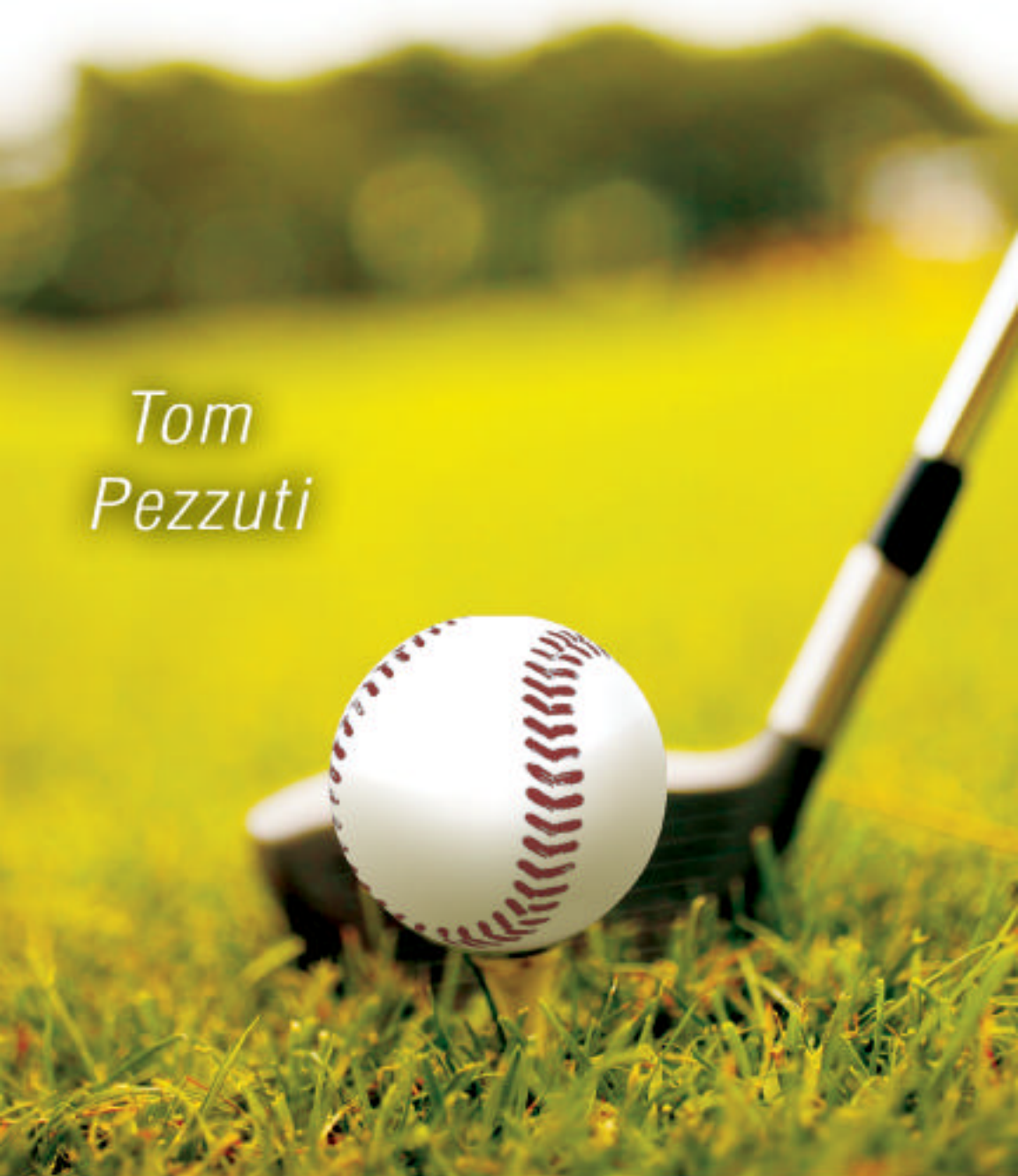


*Easier Baseball Techniques Will Lower Your Golf Score*

# ***Baseballgolf***

*Tom  
Pezzuti*



# BASEBALLGOLF



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EASIER BASEBALL TECHNIQUES  
WILL LOWER YOUR GOLF SCORE

*Tom Pezzuti*

iUniverse, Inc.  
New York Lincoln Shanghai

**BASEBALLGOLF**  
**EASIER BASEBALL TECHNIQUES WILL LOWER YOUR GOLF SCORE**

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To my family:  
Diane, Graham, and Rhett.  
Thanks for your patience and your caring.



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# *Introduction*

Ted Williams said it best: “If you can’t hit Major League stuff, you’ll never make it (in the Bigs). That’s why many dads quit baseball and start playing golf.”<sup>1</sup> He nailed me like a fastball in his .400 red spot. Yeah, sure, I played baseball. I played from Midget Leagues through high school to American Legion ball, but I wasn’t very good. You’ve heard it before, “good glove, no stick.” I played every position except first base and catcher. When I pitched, the grounds crew would run out and rake the warning track between innings. While playing briefly for the U.S. Army, my ridin’ the pine as a designated “utility infielder” got me out of doing KP. Believe me, all my splinters were worth it. During all that time though, no Major League scout ever came to call. Hmm, wonder why? Bob Uecker saw his sunset: “I knew my career was over when my baseball card came out with no picture on it.”

True to Ted Williams’s scenario, I transitioned to golf. I played a lot but wasn’t very good at that either. Sometimes during my old, party animal days, I even played sober. I think I remember somewhere in the Midwest, I played my best round. After an all-night party, five of us hit the public links before the sun came up and before the moneychangers hit the clubhouse. Blasting off dew-soaked grass was fun, especially since no one else was on the course. I actually broke 80. Confidentially, I think I cheated. I know I never counted at least two balls lost in the dark.

Years later, I lost golf. You know the drill, work-a-day world, marriage, children, bills. So now I am watching two wonderful sons grow up and am considering retirement. Why does the word “retirement” trigger the word “golf”?

A friend of mine suggested tennis. Nah, too much starting and stopping for an old fart like me. Either the young ones will kill you or the old ones will whine you to death. After further consideration, it was back to the days of long, long ago, and far, far away. I grabbed my grimy, old bag of clubs and hit the links for some retirement golf. Golly gee, for some reason, I had not improved any. But golf—my god, what a mess! The pros have made golf too complicated. I don’t know how they can break par with all their nit-picky techniques. During this writing, Tiger Woods lost his Number One ranking to Vijay Singh for the first time in 264 weeks (amazing!). Critics say Tiger is in a slump and blame it on

everything and everybody. This is Tiger Woods we are talking about here. He was born with enormous golf talent, taught by his golf instructor father, was a guest on a Bob Hope television special at the age of two, was featured in a major golf magazine at the age of five, and practices six hours a day.

If Tiger Woods can misplace his groove, what hope is there for us? After much navel contemplation, my donkey and I set out on a king's quest: we would make a simple game simple again.

The first quest[ion] was obvious. Why could I hit an 80 mph baseball (rarely), but not a %#&%@ dimpled, little ball lying motionless in the grass? My donkey suggested baseball might have the answer. Fine, I'll try anything. The world has changed in many ways since my days on a baseball diamond, including the invention of the computer. Though many strategy and player management changes have occurred, baseball techniques have remained fairly consistent over the decades. To ensure I was up-to-date on the latest methods, I purchased some baseball instructional books. Besides containing the latest and greatest, the baseball techniques presented support my own original golf ideas and reinforce their validity. The following books are quoted here in *Baseballgolf*:

- *The Science of Hitting* by Ted Williams and John Underwood. This is considered the first baseball book to scientifically study the art of hitting, and it's written by one of the greatest hitters of all time. Ted Williams is only one of two players in the history of Major League Baseball to win the Triple Crown twice. The other player was Rogers Hornsby way back in the twenties.
- *The Louisville Slugger® Complete Book of Hitting Faults and Fixes: How to Detect and Correct the 50 Most Common Mistakes at the Plate* by Mark Gola and John Monteleone. The book's players include Alex Rodriguez, Will Clark, Willie Stargell, Mark McGwire, John Olerud, Jay Bell, Wade Boggs, and Rod Carew.
- *How To Hit/How To Pitch: A Complete Self-Coaching System for Winning Baseball* by Bob Cluck. He is a Major League pitching coach and the founder of the San Diego School of Baseball. The school's co-directors include Alan Trammell, Dave Smith, and Tony Gwynn, who is considered by many as one of the best-ever pure hitters in baseball.
- *The Superstar Hitter's Bible: Winning Tips, Techniques, and Strategies from Baseball's Top Players* by Bernardo Leonard and Peter Golenbock. This book contains Leonard's Twenty Commandments of hitting tips and techniques from players including Tony Gwynn, Ozzie Smith, Dusty

Baker, Ryne Sandberg, and Hal McRae. Bernardo travels the world and teaches players of all ages and their coaches.

Later I discovered another valuable resource. Major League Baseball Productions has an official DVD called *Hitters on Hitting—Finding the Sweet Spot*. Everybody is in there—Ken Griffey Jr., Barry Bonds, Ted Williams, Mark McGwire, George Brett, Tony Gwynn, Nomar Garciaparra, Mike Piazza, and on and on.

*Baseballgolf* is written in the same sequence in which you would play the game of golf. The first portion of the book is full-power shots off the tee. Learn how you can launch a rocket ball straight and true down the fairway to the green. Next, loft a perfect control shot the exact distance dead on the pin, using your personal distance guide. *Baseballgolf* continues with the putting chapter showing how you see the cup without going cross-eyed, and how you putt with a trouble-free, more reliable stroke. For you macho dudes who don't care about reasons or concepts, or who refuse to read manuals and documentation, you can skim the summary in the final chapter. If you don't understand the summation bullets or want more detail, then refer back to the specific chapter text.

*Baseballgolf* apologizes to left-handed players. Everything here has been presented for the right-handed player. With any luck, you southpaws who continually experience this dilemma will have little or no problem adapting these techniques.

OK, enough. We're ready. The umpire yells, "Play ball!"

The dugout comes alive. "All right. Here we go! Let's get 'em!"



# 1

## *KISS the Course*

Aaaaah, the exhilaration! The soaring feeling you get from standing on the golf course with its tree-lined fairways, water hazards glistening on a cool morn, mountains, blue sky, and bonding with Bambi. My scrubbed ball sparkles, as I cheerfully survey my green, sunny surroundings. Suddenly, comments by other players on the course smother my spirit.

“I got me this here bag full of titanium that cost me a couple grand, but I still can’t break ninety.”

“I waited all this time for retirement so I could finally play golf. Now I think my body retired before I did. Maybe I should’ve started when I was younger.”

“Oi, I’m so overweight and inflexible, I can’t even bend over and touch my knees.”

“Hey, lighten up, dude. I’m trying to learn this game, so I can get in with my bosses.”

“Ow! Ow! My back hurts when I swing. Probably my spinal cord acting up again. A cart, please, somebody get me a cart.”

“I heard it’s safer to walk down the stairs backward. Do ya think that’s true?”

“%&#@ it! Another lousy shot. Just call me Darth Fader.”

“Yeah, and I’m the Unhappy Hooker.”

“This golf stuff is too tough. Think I’ll try me some lawn bowling.”

PGA touring pro Bruce Lietzke laments, “Those of us over fifty are learning new words all the time, and they all seem to have ‘-itis’ at the end of them.”

Aaaaah, the reality!

## 1.1 TOUGH TRUCK

A few years ago, *The Sporting News* rated boxing as the toughest sport, demanding the most athletic ability and stamina. Hockey was ranked second probably because it usually has fighting in it. Rodney Dangerfield observed, “I went to a



boxing match once, and a hockey game broke out.” As a tough sport, golf is ranked so low you can’t find it.

Evaluating all sports, most professional athletes agree the toughest job is hitting a baseball, a belief fervently held by Nomar Garciaparra. “A round ball coming at you at 90 mph plus, and you have a round stick and you’re supposed to hit it flat!” he says. “It’s amazing the ball is even hit.”<sup>1</sup>

Bob Cluck presents some mind-numbing stats: “A ball thrown at 90 miles per hour only remains hittable in fair territory for an estimated 0.015 (fifteen thousandths) of a second. Thus, if you begin your swing 0.02 (two-hundredths) of a second too early or too late, you will miss the ball. Can you see why only a handful of players hit .300 each year?”<sup>2</sup>

Bernardo Leonard says, “Ty Cobb had the highest batting average in the history of the game, yet for every hundred at bats, he still made an out sixty-four times. It takes the average major league fastball four-tenths of a second to travel the distance to the plate. The hitter must see the pitch; judge the velocity, rotation, location, and trajectory; and complete a solid, smooth swing faster than it takes to say ‘Nolan Ryan.’”<sup>3</sup>

During his lifetime, Ted Williams would argue, “Hitting a baseball—I’ve said it a thousand times—is the single most difficult thing to do in sports. I get raised eyebrows and occasional arguments when I say that. If Joe Montana or Dan Marino completed three out of every ten passes they attempted, they would be *ex-professional* quarterbacks. If Larry Bird or Magic Johnson made three of every ten shots they took, their coaches would take the basketball away from them.”<sup>4</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* reported Arnold Palmer once argued with Ted Williams. After Williams made his case, Palmer responded, “Yeah, but you don’t have to go into the stands after you hit a foul ball.” The *Times* report continued with its opinion by rating the “toughest thing in sports is getting group dental insurance for hockey players.”

In baseball, you cannot hit what you cannot see. In golf, you *always* see the ball. Therefore, you should always hit it properly. Michael Jordan, the world’s greatest-ever basketball player, loves golf. But he’s not a golf superstar. Jordan also had trouble playing baseball at the Major League level. Unless you have an abundance of athletic talent for a specific sport, you are hard-pressed to become a pro, let alone a superstar.

Do you have pro-level golf talent? If not, then forget playing the pro style. The best alternative is borrowing an occasional technique or two that fits your pistol. Cal Ripken Jr. makes a blunt case. “Skills required to be a good hitter are very much genetic,” he says. “Talent you either possess, or you don’t possess.”<sup>5</sup>

Clint Hurdle, Major League Baseball hitting instructor, says, “Good hitting follows the Sperm Theory.”<sup>6</sup> It’s the same in golf. If you were not born with extraordinary talent and do not intend practicing like a pro, then you need a simpler golfing life. And, if you are a senior retiree with a bad back, aching knees, arthritic fingers, and sore legs, then, my friend, you have no choice.

## **1.2 KISS—KEEP IT SIMPLE & STRAIGHT (Gee, I hope you didn’t think I was calling you stupid.)**

The touring pros play an extremely complex game of controlled draws and fades, ever-shifting hands and feet, subtle twists and turns of every bodily part. Another layer of complexity is piled on by one pro’s technique being the opposite of another pro’s technique. Here are two titles of golf magazine tips issued in the same month by two PGA pros: *Keep Your Backswing Long and Slow*, and *My Backswing—Short and Sweet*. Another article was titled, *Thirty-seven Keys to Better Golf*. Wow! Got it down to only thirty-seven, eh? Think you can remember thirty-seven keys? How about twenty-seven? Seven? At my age, I have a problem remembering why I walked into a room in my own house.

One of those keys says, “Stand open and put sixty-five percent of your weight on your left foot.” (Excuse me, how do you do that?) Another key for hitting a green bunker blast teaches, “Use a sharp descending blow on the downswing, and chop/slide it under the ball with the right hand, and fold your left arm soon after impact.” (Huh? In your dreams.) What sounds complex and impossible for the average weekend warrior is second nature for any pro. They practice, practice, practice their personal techniques until they’re automatic. Most athletes are not conscious of what they do. They just do it.

Mickey Mantle, one of baseball’s all-time greatest players, vehemently rejected offers to manage a team. Mantle believed he’d be a terrible manager, because he wasn’t a student of the game and was doing only what was natural to him. Sam Snead, a top student of the golf game, cautioned, “Golfers [should] avoid too much thinking.”<sup>7</sup> This causes paralysis by analysis.

One of baseball’s best-ever hitters, George Brett, says, “How scientific do you want to be? I tried to make hitting a baseball as simple as possible. Because the less things I had to think about, the less things I could screw up.”<sup>8</sup>

The extremely complex and sophisticated style practiced by strong-minded, individualistic pro golfers creates contradiction and confusion for the average golfer. But one thing virtually all pros agree on—a bad backswing is the root of swing evils. Jack Nicklaus, one of golf's all-time greatest players, says, "The old maxim that the entire swing is governed by its first few inches is certainly true in my case. Generally, when I start back incorrectly I hit a mediocre shot.

"In fact, the longest slump of my career was caused by an incorrect take-away movement that became habitual and thus very difficult to cure. It began in 1967, lasted through the better part of 1970."<sup>9</sup> Summarizing his other statements, Nicklaus believes that if you have a faulty downswing, look to your setup and backswing for the problems.

After I played many rounds fighting those backswing and downswing problems, one day a light turned on and begged the question: Who needs a backswing anyway? Baseball players sometimes hit 95 mph heat without using a backswing, and hitting a baseball is rated as the toughest job in all of sports.

Why do we use a backswing in golf? Golf tradition says you will use a backswing. Golf tradition says you will use all of its old techniques and tips, even if it makes your game error-prone. Golf tradition says tradition is good for you.

Lenny Bruce said, "Screw tradition."

Why can't golfers do the same as baseball players? That dimpled, little pain in the grass lies there begging, "Hit me, oh, please hit me." After a long, disheartening slump, Tom Watson attributes the rejuvenation of his game to a slo-o-o-o-w backswing. Stick a wood stake in the evil backswing, because maybe it's time for *no-o-o-o-o* backswing. "Nah—probably isn't legal," you say. The *USGA Rules of Golf*, also approved by The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland, show absolutely no restriction on the use or nonuse of a backswing. Therefore, eliminating the backswing is perfectly legal. But does it work? Yes. It's tested and approved for human consumption. If eliminating the backswing works, could other baseball techniques apply and make golf a simpler game? Again, the answer is yes, but first you gotta get the straight skinny.

### 1.3 SLIMASH PRINCIPLE

Professional golfers shift their feet, curl their shots right or left, adjust their grip by double and triple twisting their hands, "hood the club face a hair," then go out and practice, practice, practice until they morph their natural, god-given physical structure into a dysfunctional mutant. Many years ago in a television interview,

legendary golf champion, Ben Hogan, told the interviewer, Ken Venturi, that he used to practice six to eight hours a day to compensate for what he perceived as his lack of raw talent. Hogan believed he had to outwork the others. He practiced hitting fades and draws so much, he couldn't hit a straight ball even if he wanted to.

The pros' crookedness has directly descended from their desire to hit a crooked ball. It's called "shaping the shot." The pros do not want to hit a straight ball. First, they believe a straight shot is very difficult, and secondly, they believe it lowers their percentage of landing in the fairway. If you play a tee shot down the right side of the fairway, and you shape the shot left, then you have the entire width of the fairway as a landing field. If you aim straight down the center, and your ball hooks or slices, you only have half the fairway width as a landing spot. If you believe their first reason—"straight shots are difficult"—then their second reason makes sense. But remember, they use a backswing. If you choose not to use a backswing, you'll be amazed how much straighter your shot will be. Your straight shot will bounce and bounce, then roll and roll and roll some more. Why? Because you will reduce the erratic sidewinder spins on your ball and not banana onto the adjacent fairway. The ball will have a more perfect topspin, which propels it forward. However, to shoot straight, you must think and act straight.

A common denominator in *Baseballgolf* is "straight lines make straight hits." Converting this theme into a slogan, we'll create an easy-to-remember acronym—**S**traight **L**ines **M**ake **S**traight **H**its, or SLIMASH. This Principle occurs everywhere in this book—the stance, the grip, the swing, everywhere. The SLIMASH Principle will help you accomplish what is considered difficult if not downright impossible—hitting a straight golf shot. With fairways getting narrower, with more and more traps, hitting a straight ball has become increasingly desirable. With SLIMASH, you can bid a fond farewell to all your slicing and dicing.

## 1.4 IN MEMORIAM

In southern Arizona near the Mexican border, the old Wild West prospectors discovered a silver lode in Tombstone and turned the hot, tumbleweed settlement into a lawless boomtown. It was so raucous, the town newspaper was called the *Tombstone Epitaph*. At the OK Corral, Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday cleaned out the dreaded Clanton gang. Hollywood shows the gunfight raging for hours, with old man Clanton urging his kin onto victory. For the record, old man Clanton

had died a couple of months earlier and could not attend the festivities. Inside the OK Corral itself, the gunfight lasted less than a minute. Two opposing groups stood about thirty feet apart and fired twenty-three shots. One “gunfighter” ran away, two were wounded, and three were buried in Boothill.

Around the Sonora Desert, Tombstone’s tombstones in Boothill created their own fame with colorful epitaphs such as: “Here lies an atheist. He’s all dressed up and no place to go;” “I told you I was sick;” and “Here lies George Johnson, hanged by mistake.” The most quoted tombstone reads, “Here lies Lester Moore, four slugs from a .44. No Les, no more.” Had Lester Moore played golf, his epitaph might read, “Les is more. Then yell fore!” In memory of Lester Moore, let’s KISS the course.



# 2

## *No-Dance Stance*

In the clubhouse, you pay your green's fee and buy a three-pack of golf balls. Then you walk onto the course and head straight for the ball washer. That ball has to be perfect. While drying your sparkling clean ball on the dirty towel hanging from the ball washer, you take a deep breath and survey the scene. After teeing up your ball, you're immediately confronted with the first of many questions of detail—the nagging minutiae of golf. What's my target? Where do I stand? How do I stand?

### **2.1 PLAN AHEAD**

First question, where's my target? Sometimes planning a golf shot is easy. Simply blast it off the tee down the center of the fairway. Sometimes it demands intense analysis based on personal style, location of sand traps, and game conditions. If you are well ahead during the round, maybe you'll play it safe. If you are far behind, you may think, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead." If you are not aiming directly at the pin, then pick a definite, visual target, such as a tree, a cactus, a lake, or a submarine periscope. No matter how obvious, stand behind your ball and look down the fairway. Determine the exact distance, choose the correct club, and plan the direction you will hit the ball and why. A clear picture of what you're doing improves your game by reducing the thought processes during the swing, and it instills confidence. Baseball's Will Clark believes, "Confidence is as important to hitting the baseball as the bat in your hands."<sup>1</sup>

If you are a beginning golfer or an experienced player who's always uncertain if your feet are on target, there's nothing wrong with or embarrassing about using an alignment club. Simply take another club out of your bag and lay it on the ground in front of you about one foot or more from your ball (Figure 2a). Walk back and check if the alignment club is on target. Make any necessary adjustments.

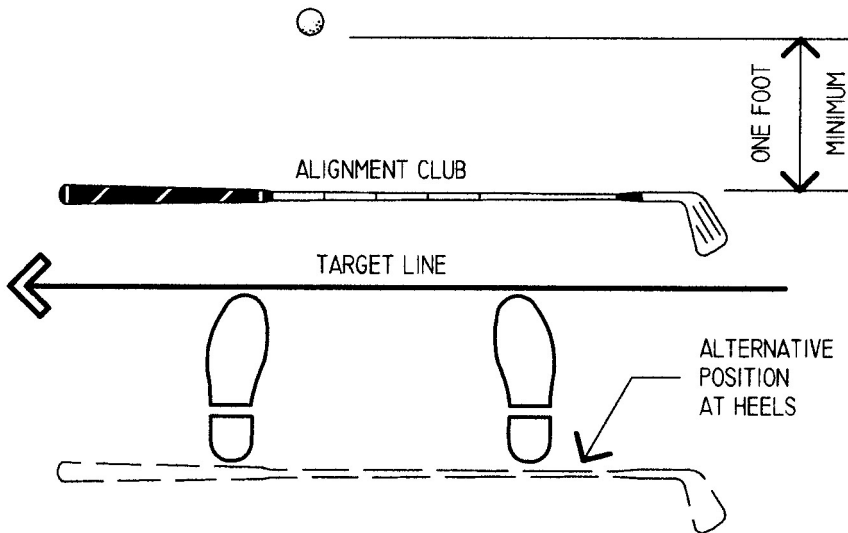


Figure 2a. Alignment Club

During your swing, leave it in the grass. If the club you're using to hit the ball hits the alignment club when you swing, then simply move the alignment club closer to you. An alternate location is placing the alignment club behind your heels (shown as a dashed line in Figure 2a). Some players "splay" their toes during their stance, which places the toes out of straight-line alignment with the target. Your heels don't do that and remain square with your shot.

Another alternative is use the club you choose for the shot as your alignment club. Once your feet are positioned correctly, pick up your club and use it for the shot. By choosing an alignment club, you will never worry about bad foot positioning again. This removes more clutter from your mind. At this point, you have your target, have mentally pictured your shot, have chosen your club, have set your "line of play," and maybe have laid an alignment club in the grass. Now you ask, "Where do I stand?"

## 2.2 SAME STANCE—CASE CLOSED

In the batter's box, baseball's power hitters use the same stance. It is called the "closed stance" (Figure 2b). They only vary their body location in the batter's box moving back a little for extra time against pitchers like Roger "The Rocket" Cle-

mens or “Bullet Bob” Feller, or move more to the front of the box against junk ball pitchers so they can swing before the ball makes its big break and cannot be hit.

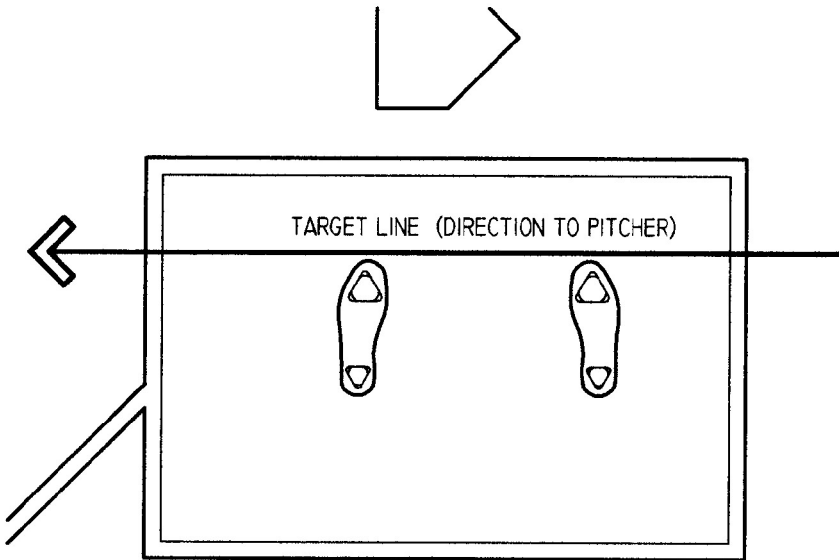


Figure 2b. Closed Stance

But no matter where their location in the batter's box, power hitters use the same stance. “Ninety percent of hitters in the majors today use a closed stance,”<sup>2</sup> says Bernardo Leonard. A closed stance is the most effective. The other ten percent either open their stance to adjust to the pitcher they're facing or cover up a weakness in their swing.

Bob Cluck reports, “Tony Gwynn, Reggie Waller, Alan Trammell, George Brett, Joe Morgan, Willie Stargell, and others recommend a slightly closed stance.”<sup>3</sup> Some hitters will move their front foot a bit more toward home plate, but the basic stance remains the same. A few of baseball's “bitty bingle” hitters will open their stances by moving their feet all around the batter's box to spray the ball into all fields (Figure 2c). You know, “hit 'em where they ain't.” The rare Major Leaguer will open so far he is actually facing the pitcher (shown as a



dashed line in Figure 2c). Brian Downing, a former catcher and left fielder for the Angels, when they were still the California Angels, faced the pitcher and was reasonably effective, but that is not advised. “Opening your stance may work temporarily—until you face a smart pitcher—but it will not make you a complete hitter,” write Mark Gola and John Monteleone in their book *The Louisville Slugger Complete Book of Hitting Faults and Fixes*.

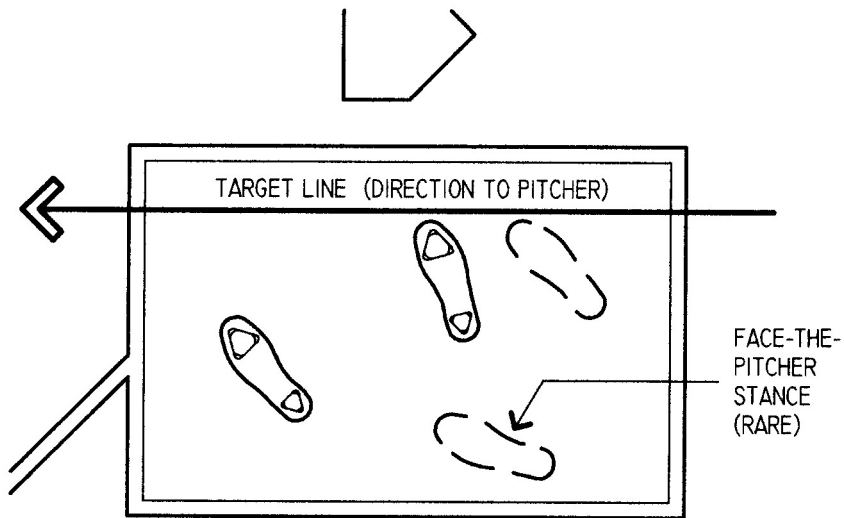


Figure 2c. Open Stance

In golf, you don't want to spray your ball all over the course. You want a power shot down the middle of *your* fairway. If one stance is the most effective Major League stance against the incredible array of top pitchers and all their brush backs, paint the outside corner, slurves and junk, then that consistency must be true for golf. Quite obviously, use the power hitters' closed stance.

While establishing your stance, the location of your feet in relation to the ball is temporary. At first, align the ball with the inside of your left foot. Later, you will make slight adjustments according to your grip (Chapter 3) and your pre-swing (Chapter 4). The final big question in this chapter is, “How do I stand?”

## 2.3 TEN-HUT! ASSUME THE ATHLETIC POSITION

Gola and Monteleone have a concise, but comprehensive, description of the athletic position in sports:

“The correct batting stance begins with an athletic position. You’ve seen this position many times in other sports: the basketball player guarding his opponent in a man-to-man defense, the linebacker in football waiting for the snap of the ball, or the tennis player anxiously waiting for the opponent’s serve. Each uses the athletic position in one form or another.

“What is the athletic position? Here’s a simple way to establish it. Square your feet and spread them slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Bend at the knees and push down on the inside balls of your feet, with your weight evenly distributed. You should feel balanced and ready to move.

“The athletic position puts most of your weight on the balls of the feet. You can stabilize and control your upper-body weight, moving it from backward to forward, or rotating it around an axis (your spine). No one can move efficiently in any sport from anything other than this position of balance and flexibility.”<sup>4</sup>

Ted Williams taught the same stance. “Your weight should be balanced, distributed evenly on both feet and slightly forward on the balls of the feet, with the knees bent and flexible,” he said. “If you insist on resting back on your heels, find another occupation.”<sup>5</sup>

Mark Easler, Major League Baseball hitting instructor, said, “No matter what sport you’re in, you gotta have balance.”<sup>6</sup>

Bernardo Leonard does not use the phrase “athletic position,” but his instructions for a proper batting stance are a mirror image of the previous sources. The following is a compilation of what Leonard considers the facets of an effective Major League Baseball stance.

- (1) Your body weight should stay within the borders of both feet and should rotate around the axis of your vertebral column.
- (2) Be relaxed and comfortable.

- (3) Bend slightly at your knees and bend your body slightly at your waist. It's impossible to hit a baseball standing straight up. Do not crouch; you cannot hit anything from a crouch.
- (4) Position yourself to have good plate coverage when you swing.
- (5) Allow the hitter to start from a coiled position, which increase the power hitter's ability to explode into the ball with the hips and knees.
- (6) Both feet are placed a comfortable width apart, far enough that a stable base can be maintained and not too far as to lock your hips and allow them to rotate into the ball. The rule of thumb here is place your feet shoulder-width apart.

A neighbor once asked, "How in the (Hades) does this foot-width thing help my playing golf?" The reason is golf pros swing and sway with rhythm and tempo. It's the nature of their game. They accomplish this by always varying the width of their stance. The pros call it "light feet." Because they believe their feet react quicker during the swing, "light feet" allows constant adjustments to suit every shot in their arsenal and helps them do their dance. Some pros advocate a much narrower-than-average stance believing it promotes even better tempo and an unrestricted body turn. In frustration, my neighbor said, "I don't have light feet anymore, and I can't get the lead out."

For the non-professional golfer, placing your feet too close together can create an out-of-balance condition. Before making a decision on the width of foot placement, try this simple test. Stand straight up with your arms hanging down and your feet only a couple inches apart, almost together. Slowly begin leaning sideways left or right, it doesn't matter. The foot opposite the direction you are leaning quickly lifts off the ground, and you almost immediately start falling out of balance (Figure 2d). If you place your feet close together during your swing, the center of your body weight moves outside your support foot causing over-twisting, slipping, legs tangling, or worse-case scenario, you fall down and go boom.

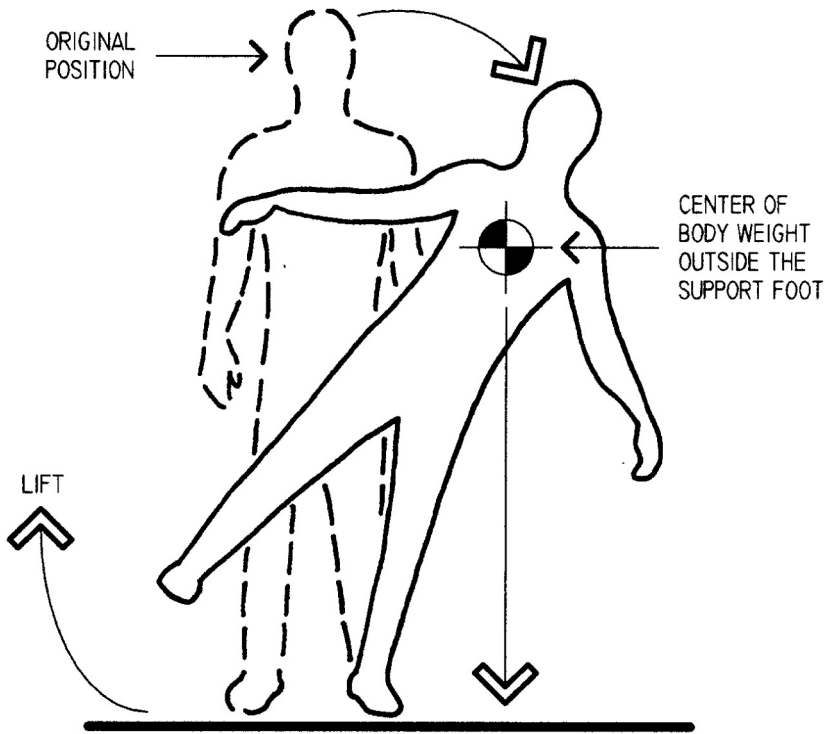


Figure 2d. Stability Test

The next part of this test is to place your feet wide apart, almost as wide as you can. Leaning directly sideways from this position, the center of your body weight cannot extend beyond your support foot, and you can't possibly fall over. But the problem is you can't swing a golf club with any power either. Forget all the light-foot dancing and tripod formations, the obvious answer lies between those two foot-position extremes. Place your feet shoulder-width, or slightly more than shoulder-width apart, period! Gola and Monteleone emphasize this point.

"The width of your stance is important. Many hitters have their own quirky nuances in the batter's box, but their stance-width is nearly universal. Setting your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart puts you in a position to take a short, controlled stride as the pitch is released.

“If your stance-width is too broad, you’ll lose power from the lower half of your body. As you widen the stance, you decrease the ability to rotate the hips efficiently and quickly.

“Several adverse effects can stem from a stance that is too narrow. First, you won’t be in a good, balanced position. A narrow base offers less stability. Also, standing too tall can create tension in your stance. A narrow base after the stride foot is planted limits your lower body to simply spinning on the ball rather than driving through the ball with your legs.

“A batting stance will not make or break your success, but a flawed stance can adversely affect your swing and contribute to poor results.”<sup>7</sup>

Bernardo Leonard adds, “It is a must to be relaxed and comfortable.”<sup>8</sup> For golfers, there is a small, corollary benefit. By maintaining a shoulder-width stance, you lower your body slightly. This automatically places you closer to the ball and reduces any need for a crouch.

In these excerpts from baseball sources, you can substitute “golf” or its nomenclature, and the result and the value of the baseball recommendations are the same. This shows the relationship between baseball and golf is “simpatico.” In the next chapter, you’ll see how this holds true for the grip.

## 2.4 TRENCH WARFARE

Believe it or not, football began as a crude game in ancient Greek and Roman times. Throughout the Middle Ages, a form of football with no rules took root in England and became very popular even after many royal edicts banned the killer game. Various forms of football evolved, from a pure kicking, soccer style to a running and tackling rugby style game. By the 1870s, the Ivy League created intercollegiate matches of soccer and rugby with some basic rules. American football, as played today, evolved from their rugby matches.

Before Knute Rockne, American football was Flying Wedge Right and Flying Wedge Left by 170-pound “monsters” who wore no helmets. Rockne revolutionized football theory. In 1913, playing for a small, unknown, Midwest school called Notre Dame, he and teammate Gus Dorias combined to invent the forward pass and engineer a sensational upset of the mighty Army team. Banner headlines were everywhere. Later as head coach at Notre Dame, Rockne stressed offense, perfected line play, and developed the precision backfield, including the

famous “Four Horsemen” using the Notre Dame shift. Rockne’s winning percentage of .881 ranks as the highest of any coach ever.

Everyone knows you cannot win a football game without the big uglies up front. Be happy you do not have to learn all the stances of offensive and defensive linemen. They learn the run block, pass block, the three-point stance, the bowling ball maneuver, the cross-over, and the pancake, as well as learning to move as a unit and to get under their opponents to control them, all while their opponents want to do the same thing. Today these big offensive and defensive linemen weigh more than 300 pounds, even while they’re juniors in high school. In the Battle of the Trenches, you do not want to stand in their way.

NFL running backs, who stand in their way, are blasted more than 2,000 times in their average, professional life span—that’s a couple hundred tons of beef cracking their bones into the ground. So if you have problems learning a new stance, or even if you fall down, remember the words of the Green Bay Packers’ legendary coach Vince Lombardi: “It’s not whether you get knocked down; it’s whether you get back up.”<sup>9</sup>



# 3

## *In the Grip of Mother Nature*

From Chapter 2, we know the pros dance around the ball with their “light feet.” They also frolic around the grip shaft with their itchy fingers. At risk of irritating the world’s best golfers, I will quote from a very old, golf magazine tip I had saved. I do not know who wrote it, and if I did, I would not mention his or her name anyway, given my reason for using the excerpt. This old grip tip will remind you of the incredibly complex game the pros play and whether you should adopt their style as your own. In contrast to the Great American Slice Golfers, who are in the majority, I have a natural, unwanted hook. I had saved this tip, titled “Anti-Hook Shot,” hoping it would straighten me out.

“Playing from a lie with the ball above your feet, you’ll tend to hook the ball left of target. Instead of merely allowing for the hook, change your grip to counteract this flight. First, grip more firmly with the left hand. The firmer grip will allow you to pull through more strongly with the whole left side, delaying the crossover of the hands (the right hand over the left) and helping keep the blade square at impact. As further insurance, ‘weaken’ the grip by turning both hands slightly to the left. The weaker grip also encourages a fade. Together these grip changes will straighten the shot. Important: to keep your balance on this shot, put more weight than usual on the balls of your feet. Also, ‘hood’ the club face a ‘hair’ at address.”

Quite honestly, I still don’t understand it. Titles from other old grip tips and articles I saved over the years include “Firm Left—Weak Grip” and “Light Left—Strong Grip.” Again, I don’t even understand the concepts behind those titles. The benefits derived from these tips are nuances only the pros can appreciate. And remember, to gain these benefits, you must become another Ben Hogan—practice, practice, practice hours a day and never be able to hit a straight ball again. So what’s a grip to do? Straighten up and return to basics, that’s what.

## 3.1 SLIMASH GRIP

Subchapter 1.3 told you, “Straight lines make straight hits.” The SLIMASH Principle also applies to your grip. Here’s the basic concept. Place your hands on the club shaft in a straight, natural position. Do not twist or turn to compensate for anything. If you twist and turn your hands gripping the club, Mother Nature will bring your hands back to their normal, natural position when you downswing. She has endowed all those tough, little hand muscles and ligaments with a strong, natural tendency to return to their original, anatomical position during the downswing. The more you twist and turn your hand muscles and their ligaments at address, the more you risk club-face misalignment at impact. Mother Nature scowls, “You can fool me once, maybe even twice. But if you keep twisting your hands, I’m gonna getcha.” By continually contorting your hands at address, you are forced into overcompensating or adjusting your natural swing because of your unnatural hand positioning.

Why do all that? What’s the point? Do you get turned on by unnatural hand positions? Gola and Monteleone don’t. They write: “There are two common mistakes you can make gripping the bat. The first is too much pressure, and the second is improperly holding the bat in your hands (rather than your fingers). Either mistake alone will hinder bat speed, reduce power, and restrict bat control.”<sup>1</sup>

Stan Musial puts it this way: “The first thing I ask a young hitter is grip the bat and swing it. Nine times out of ten, the problem is right there.”<sup>2</sup>

If you willfully ignore Mother Nature, then you must retrain your hands from being their natural selves. You know what that means. If you don’t, check Ben Hogan. You should align your hands in a straight and natural relationship with the club shaft—no sidwinder spins on the ball allowed.

Start your SLIMASH grip by leaning over slightly and letting your arms hang down straight, natural, and loose. Align your palms perfectly parallel and facing each other before closing down on the club shaft (Figure 3a). Next, place your left hand on the club. There are three basic club shaft locations for your left hand: center of the palm (Figure 3b), across the finger joints (also Figure 3b), and across the knuckles (Figure 3c). For clarification, my “knuckles” reference is the big joints where the fingers meet the palm. The two joints along the fingers, I call “finger joints.” Placing the club shaft across the center of the palm does not work at all. The hands have no feeling for the club, their holding strength is reduced, and the power transfer is clumsy and inefficient.



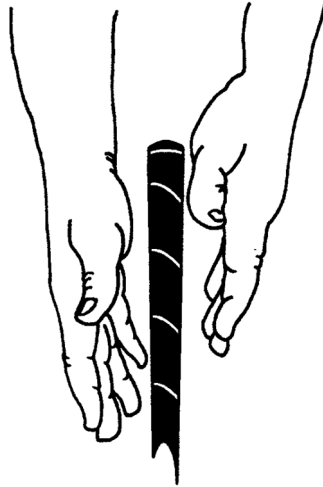
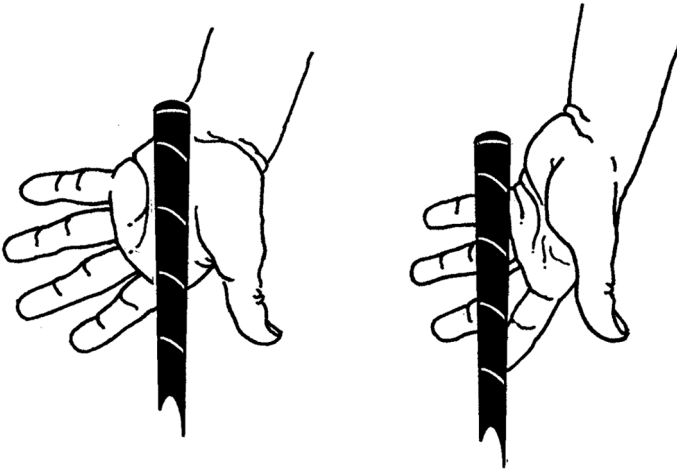


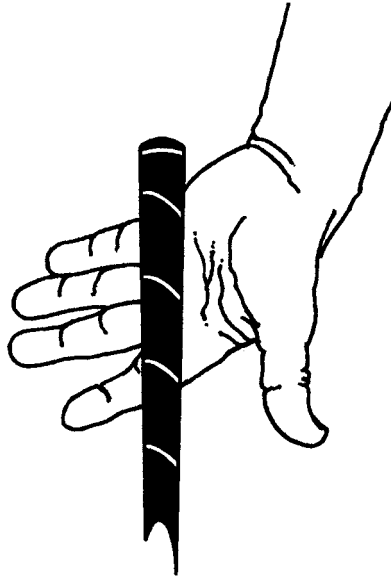
Figure 3a. Parallel Palms



CENTER OF PALM

ACROSS THE FINGER JOINTS

Figure 3b. Bad Club Locations



ACROSS THE KNUCKLES

Figure 3c. Best Club Location

Bob Cluck warns: “Never try to hit with the bat placed back in your palm. You won’t be able to control it if you put it in the fatty part of your hand.”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Ted Williams says, “To hit the ball to the best advantage, I recommend an extremely firm grip, the pressure applied by the fingers and not *against the palms*.”<sup>4</sup>

The second possible location is across your finger joints. In that location, you cannot fully close your hand around the shaft without instant hand contortion—a bad start! The finger joints have little or no power transfer, and the position even feels awkward.

The third possible location is the best. It’s right down the middle of the road—across those big, ol’ knuckles. The knuckles are strong, efficient, and quite capable of making the power transfer without hand or finger injury. The knuckle location automatically forms the best and most natural arm relationship with the club shaft. Gola and Monteleone write, “Lay the bat across the line created by the bottom of your fingers.”<sup>5</sup>

Finish using the knuckle location by closing your left hand around the shaft with your thumb straight down the shaft and your left arm (the lever arm) in a straight line with the club shaft. Avoid all angles between your lever arm and the club shaft (Figure 3d). At this point, check your club-face alignment with your chosen target line. Sometimes you can focus so intently on your grip that you forget about the club face and the ball.

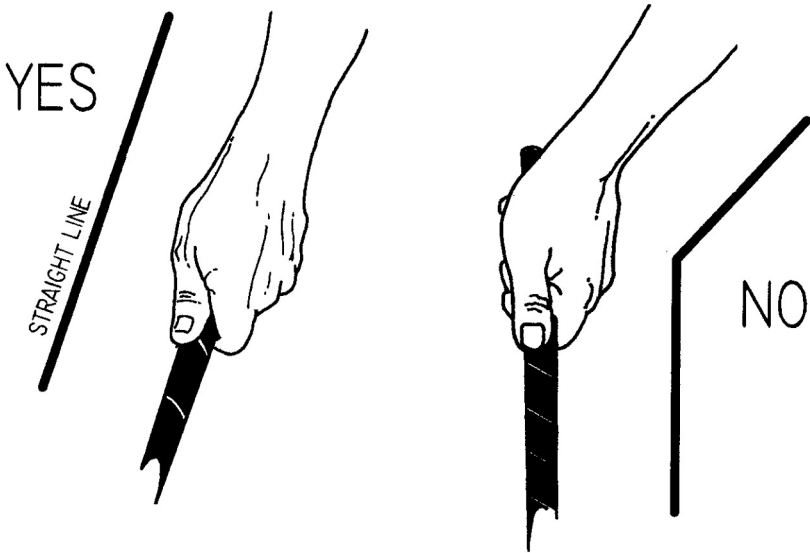


Figure 3d. Lever Arm

Now for the other arm, your power arm. Of course, your right arm cannot have a straight-line relationship with the club shaft, because the left arm is in the way. But the right hand does remain straight with the right forearm with no twisting and turning at the wrist (Figure 3e). The right hand fits over the shaft and the left thumb. Make this relationship as close and snug as possible—no gaps and no interwoven fingers (Figure 3f).

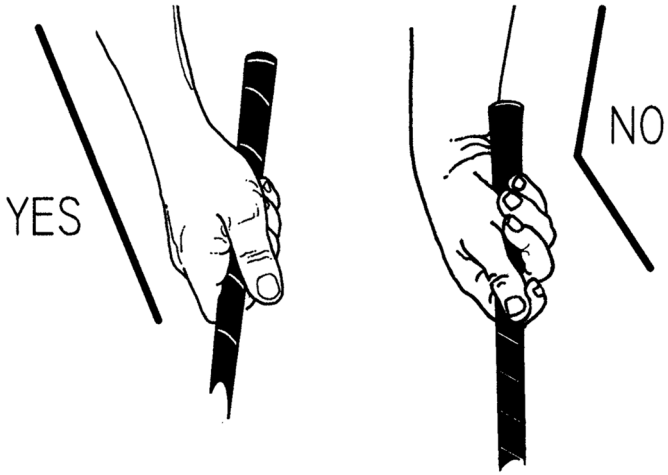


Figure 3e. Power Arm

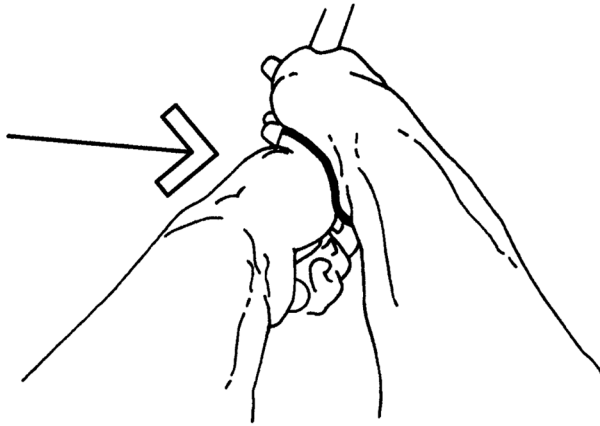


Figure 3f. Snug Fit

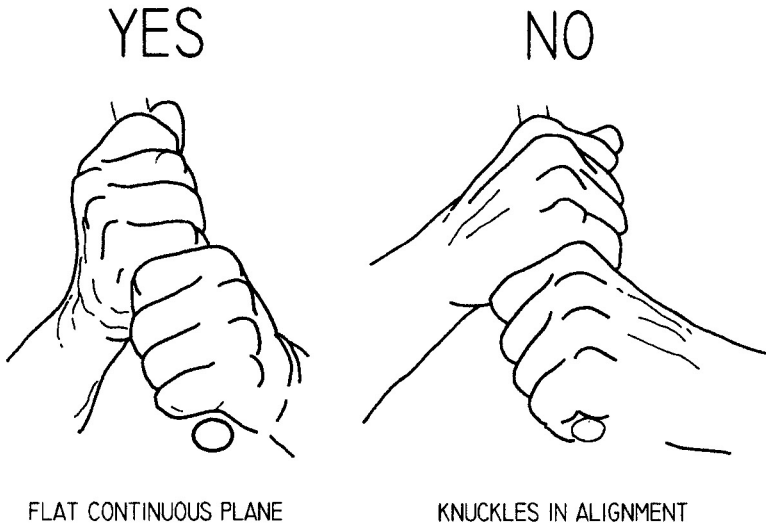


Figure 3g. Final Checkout

After you've positioned your right hand, make a final check of your grip. Lift the club, pivoting from your elbows, and then tilt the club back with your wrists so you can see the back of your hands. Look at your knuckles. The flat area created between your knuckles and first finger joint should line up in *both* hands (Figure 3g). Putting it another way, the big knuckles of one hand line up with the first finger joint of the other hand creating a straight, flat area. "Don't ever line up your knuckles," says Bernardo Leonard. "You won't have flexibility OR the power to hit the ball consistently hard"<sup>6</sup> (also Figure 3g).

If your final checkout is OK, your grip is finished. I once told a young man playing in my foursome that his new, SLIMASH grip was finished, and he responded, "Hey, no way, dork. You forgot overlapping and stuff."

### 3.2 GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF

Some golfers overdo the grip in their zeal for a better game. Overdo is overlapping. Overdo is interlocking. Touring pros will try anything if they believe it gives them an edge. The PGA pros' concept of grip unity is weekend warrior dis-

unity. If overlapping or interlocking grips were such an advantage for wrist unity and power, baseball players would use them. And if they did use them, you would see a lot of big league ballplayers walking around with broken fingers.

To prove this point, perform the following simple test. Make a fist with your right hand and extend your little finger straight out. Grab the little finger with your left hand and push down hard. Offering resistance by the right, little finger causes immediate pain. The more your left hand pushes, the more your right hand resists and the more the pain intensifies until eventually your fist cannot hold its position and flies open. Your little finger anchors your grip, and you should not lose it by overlapping or interlocking. If you do, then swinging the club stresses your overlapped, little finger when you subconsciously squeeze the shaft too tight. This causes playing pains from your fingers through your forearms and all the way to your elbow joint.

Another problem with the interlocking grip is it takes your left forefinger off the club shaft. Now you have *two* fingers not holding the club. The questionable hand-unity benefits derived from the overlapping and the interlocking grips are not worth the problems for the average golfer or any player with weak hands, especially a senior with creeping arthritis.

There is a corollary benefit from eliminating these overdo grips. Your right hand moves down the club shaft the short width of the overlapped or interlocked left forefinger. That simple, slight movement down the shaft fully extends the right arm and helps straighten the elbow. A bent elbow promotes weak and off-line hits. With a straight elbow (SLIMASH again!), you eliminate the arm imbalance problem, meaning you have one less thing to think about.

Some golfers overdo their grip by squeezing the club shaft too tightly. When you're swinging for distance, you should hold the club relaxed and easy. Baseball's power hitters do not grip the bat hard, because that inhibits their swings and slows the bat. Charley Lau, the late Major League Baseball hitting instructor, once said, "Tension is the enemy."<sup>7</sup> Gola and Monteleone write, "Gripping the bat with too much pressure will slow your bat down and delay the whip of the barrel.

"Hitters often step into the batter's box with a tension-free grip but are strangling the bat by the time the pitcher begins his motion. Many major leaguers, such as Will Clark, allow their fingers to flicker on and off the bat as they await the pitch. This is called 'milking' the grip. This keeps the hands active instead of locked in place on the bat handle. The bottom line is to stay relaxed and loose."<sup>8</sup>

Gripping a baseball bat or a golf club with maximum tension is counterproductive. Don't swing a brick. For full-power shots, grip the club nice and

easy—kind of loosey-goosey. You want those wrists swinging free and generating maximum clubhead speed. The key to quickness is your hands working together and making your swing a natural motion. Mother Nature will love you for it.

### 3.3 THE OUCHLESS OPTION

Do your hands sometimes become so sore you subconsciously hate hitting the ball? Even when wearing gloves? FYI, touring pros shred two or three gloves *per round*. We hope our one pair of gloves lasts all summer. If you, as a golfer, would go hit baseballs in a batting cage, you would not inflict the blisters that you would from hitting golf balls at a driving range. Baseball hitters get sore spots, yes; blisters, rarely. One of baseball hitters' sore spots is deep in the lower, left-hand palm caused by the bat knob. Golfers get blisters from smashing the club into solid ground or wrapping their fingers too tightly around the club shaft.

This makes no sense until you learn that the club shaft itself is Culprit Number One. The standard golf club shaft is too skinny. When you grip the club, the skinny shaft bunches and crunches your fingers' skin. The bunching areas become ripped from swinging the club. Baseball players do not have this problem because the thicker bat handle does not bunch and crunch their fingers. To avoid blisters and sore hands, you might consider the Ouchless Option. It comes with a full guarantee: You will never need gloves or bandages again. Plus, it does not, repeat, *not*, reduce power transfer or create less distance on full-power shots.

This Ouchless Option does not alter alignment of your arms and hands using the basic SLIMASH grip but does alter the finger placement around the club shaft. In the conventional grip, the fingers wrap around the skinny club shaft in a circular formation, which causes bunching skin and blisters—we'll call it, the "Bunchkins." The Ouchless Option has a different finger formation—it is triangular (Figure 3h). The upper palm and the fingers form straight lines creating a triangle. The fingertips rest against the fleshy part of the lower palm. The fingers are now free of the Bunchkins and the palms no longer collapse like an accordion around the club shaft. This triangular grip increases the holding strength of the hands, because, of all the two-dimensional forms in nature from circles to squares, the triangle is the strongest. Another benefit is this triangular grip fits any size club shaft for any size hand.

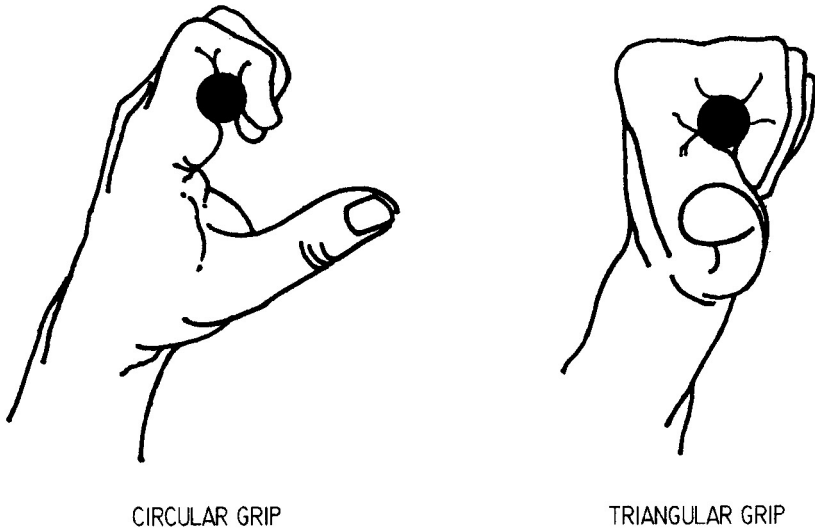


Figure 3h. Grip Types

You may call this the “Ouchless Grip” or the “Triangular Grip.” You have the option of using it on all shots except putts, not using it at all, or using it in combination with other grips. You could use the Triangular Grip during full-power shots and the conventional circular grip for the “chop-and-drop” pitch shots. Whatever you choose, the average golfer will benefit more from using the straight and solid triangle than from the complex variations of the circular grip. And remember, you will not need any bandages, and you won’t have to “hood the club face a hair” either.

### **3.4 THE OTHER MAN’S SHOES**

You’ve heard the adage, “Don’t complain, because there is always someone else who is worse off than you.” Well, don’t complain about your grip or incorporating a new grip style until you’ve heard about Jim Abbott. In case you don’t follow baseball, Abbott was born without a right hand but dreamed of being a Major League pitcher. You can imagine the taunts of the other kids: “Hey, Abbott, you can’t even field a bunt. Ninny, ninny.” “Nice swing, Abbott. Ha ha.”



Like a child possessed, Abbott would spend hours bouncing balls off a wall, learning to rapidly change his glove from his stump onto his throwing hand for effective fielding. After that, he'd pitch and pitch until his arm hurt. His determination paid off. Abbott signed a Major League contract with the California Angels and was immediately inserted into the starting rotation. He pitched so well with the Angels that he was later acquired by the New York Yankees. In his first season with the Yankees, he pitched a no-hitter. Jim Abbott went on to pitch for ten years in the Majors.

If that isn't enough, with only one arm to swing a bat, he got two hits out of twenty-three times at bat including a 400-foot triple in an exhibition game. And if that isn't enough, he was the starting quarterback for his high school football team, which made it to the finals in the Michigan state championship.

So now tell me, what's your grip complaint again?



# 4

## *Stop at the Top*

A golf swing is composed of addressing the ball, swinging the club backward over your head from a standing start, then instantly exploding in the opposite direction, returning your body and your club to their original address alignment at impact, with good leg thrust and hip action for extra distance and a flat shoulder turn. And you should accomplish all this with grace, fluidity, rhythm, and tempo. Challenge most weekend golfers with these qualities needed for a perfect golf shot, and the response you'll probably hear is, "Forget it. I'm outta here!" The golf swing, as traditionally defined, is high maintenance. Without constant practice, your swing rapidly loses its groove. Without a groove, you have no accuracy. Without accuracy, you will lose. Which of the following would you prefer?

- (1) A potential 310-yard drive that makes a midair course correction into the woods for a blind second shot?
- (2) A 245-yard drive down the center of the fairway for a clean second shot?

Of course, some of you will want both—a 310-yard drive down the center of the fairway. But if you are incapable of hitting accurate 300-yard drives, then your obvious choice is an accurate, shorter drive. In baseball, the fastest pitcher who has no accuracy (called "control") is worthless. This also applies to golf, because the absolute first priority of winning golf is accuracy, especially on today's new, tighter course designs. When swinging a golf club, accuracy begins at address.

### **4.1 HELLO, LITTLE BALL**

Some golfers look so-o-o-o good addressing a ball. Some look OK, but have a bad habit or two. A few crumple into so many crooked lines, they look like a living origami. They don't swing, they unfold! Others constantly move their feet in a

nervous hunt for the perfect form. As Gola and Monteleone write: “To have ‘hot feet’ at the plate means your feet are moving around as the pitcher delivers the ball. You’ll appear to be taking tiny steps in place and look uncomfortable or fidgety in the batter’s box. Hot feet makes it difficult to maintain balance and to control your lower body. To swing the bat powerfully, you must stabilize your legs. Last, hot feet expose the hitter’s impatience or discomfort.”<sup>1</sup> Just as significantly, hot feet reveal a lack of confidence for all to see. In any sport, if you have no confidence, you have no game.

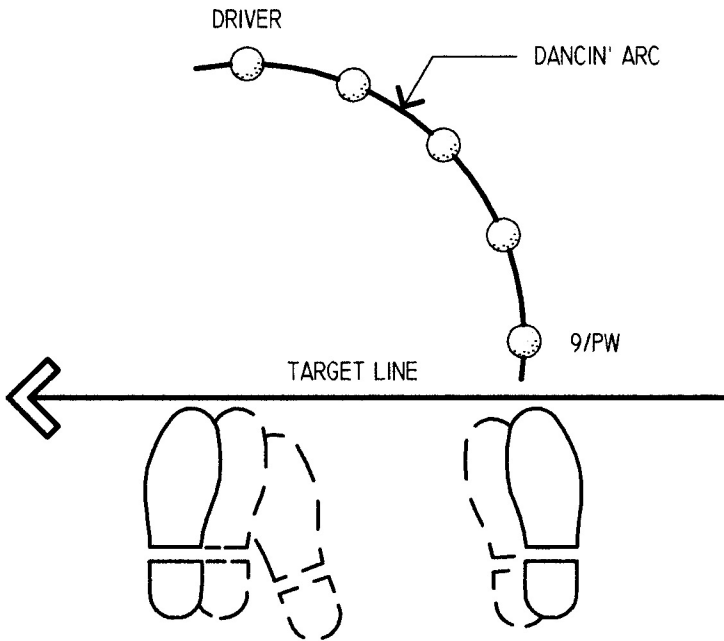


Figure 4a. Dancin' Feet

A good address begins with the athletic position, followed by a SLIMASH grip, and ends with proper ball placement. As mentioned in Chapter 2, tradition has dictated a dancing pattern of ball placement determined by the club you are using combined with hot feet (Figure 4a). To perform this ritual, you must practice, practice, practice folding and chopping your way into unnatural muscle memory. You are forced to constantly modify your swing to suit your club. Do you intend to develop and practice a different swing for every club in your bag?

Why? Doing so leads to errors and frustration. If you persist in different ball locations for each club, then you must constantly adjust your swing arc and your wrist speed to compensate. Unless you are a practicing pro, it ain't gonna happen.

## 4.2 LINE OF SWEET SPOTS

In *Baseballgolf*, you place the ball on one, straight line (my, how novel). This one, straight line is perpendicular to your target line and is the same for all full-power shots, all control shots, and all your clubs, except the putter. Ball location along this line only varies with the length of the club you have chosen (Figure 4b). Now you force the club to fit you, your style, your swing. This gives you the best chance for the best golf shot, because the ball placement line relates to the point of maximum impact on the swing arc using the maximum effect of the golf club's design.

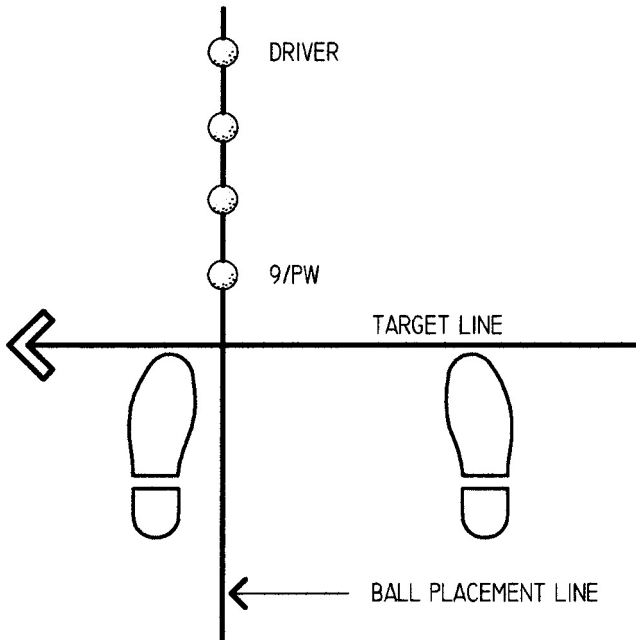


Figure 4b. Line of Sweet Spots

If you perform in this way, you will focus all components at the instant of impact. Bob Cluck says, “The *center of percussion* [is] the ‘sweet spot.’”<sup>2</sup> A tennis racket has one. A ping-pong paddle, a hockey stick, a cricket bat all have one, and of course, so does a golf club. All athletes want to hit their equipment’s “sweet spot,” and they want to hit at the maximum impact point in their swing. In other sports, the ball or puck is constantly moving. You may hit the sweet spot of your racket or your stick, but may not be at the sweet spot of your swing. Golfers are lucky. With the ball lying motionless in the grass, golfers can control hitting the ball on the club face sweet spot *and* at the sweet spot of your golf swing.

Your personal sweet-spot line relates to the center of your swing arc and the maximum point of impact. This line has no relationship to your feet. The maximum impact point is the instant you end your downswing and begin the follow-through. In golf, this maximum impact point is usually at a line off the inside of your left foot. “If you make contact out past your front leg, most of your power will have been used up,”<sup>3</sup> warns Bernardo Leonard.

This is true because the center of your swing arc is your left shoulder socket (think armpit), with your left arm and the golf club forming a straight line radius (Figure 4c). The swing arc is part of a big circle, which generates all the power (Figure 4d). Baseball does not always have the luxury of a perfectly circular arc made by the batter’s arms and the bat, as a golfer does. A golfer can obtain a full extension of his arms and achieve a pure circular motion with the clubhead, and keep it in the same plane.

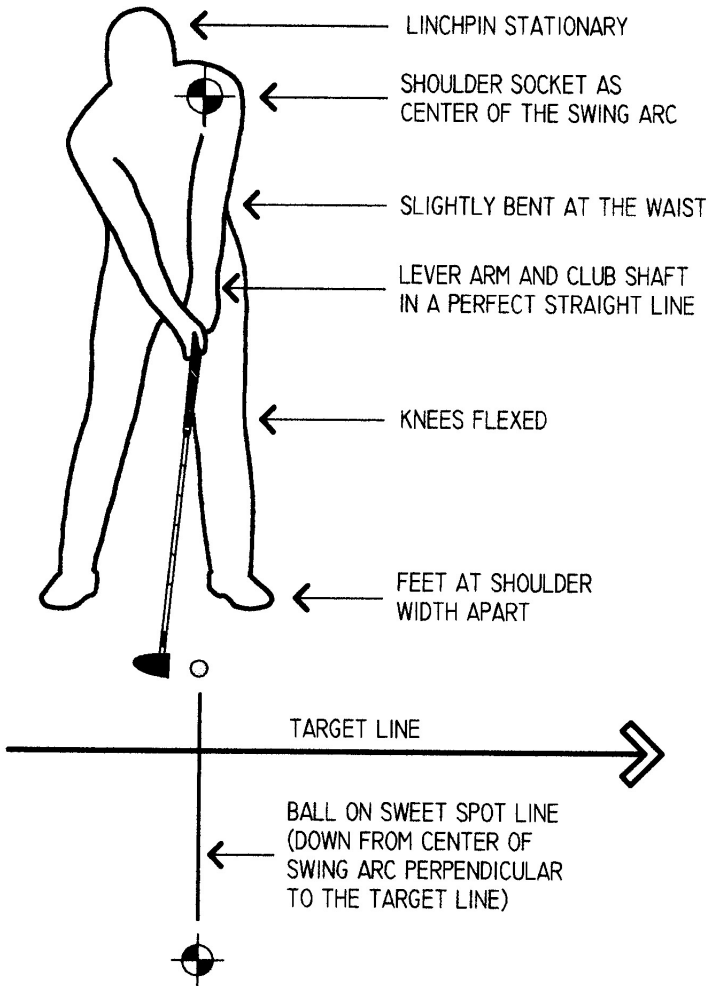


Figure 4c. SLIMASH Setup

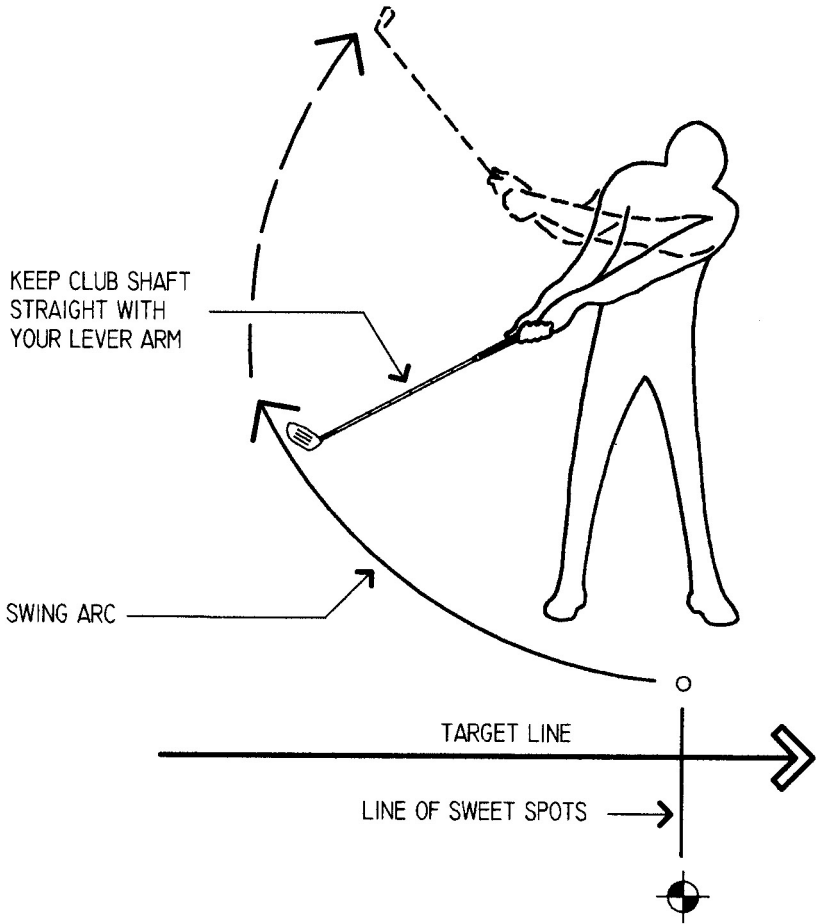


Figure 4d. Power Arc

But even golfers cannot swing a perfect circle, because you are using both arms. The human body will not allow it. With the left shoulder socket as the center of the golf swing circle, the clubhead takeaway from the address position will describe a perfect quarter circle until your arms and club shaft rise above parallel with the ground. At this point, your left shoulder locks and you cannot move it anymore. Your wrists and a slight elbow bend must continue the backswing, at which point, the perfect-circle arc ends and a flat arc, or ellipse, begins. The same

swing occurs on the follow-through, because the body mechanics work on both sides of the ball.

The best you can do is a big half-circle, but that is good enough for a full-power shot. The full, golf swing now becomes a perfect half-circle or a big arc (Figure 4e). The big arc gives you the big chance for distance. The big arc means your arms are fully extended, and the club face is out there and moving. It is swinging the club, not throwing it, not guiding it, not pushing it, not unfolding it. Distance is accomplished by developing good clubhead speed. This does not mean arm speed, especially if you can't handle it. Good clubhead speed is developed by the clubhead achieving a circular arc, and by you maximizing your own physical agility.

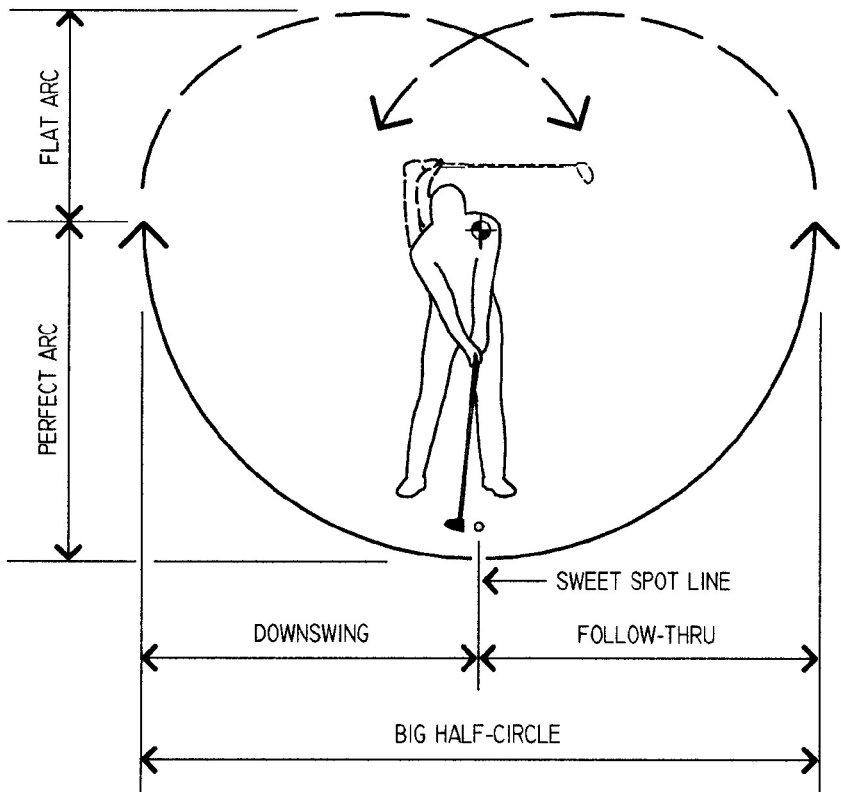


Figure 4e. The Big Arc



Hitting for distance is not a factor of pure physical strength. Oh sure, strength helps, but you do not have to bench press Hoover Dam to hit a golf ball for distance. In the National Football League, the smallest and usually weakest players on the team are the place kickers. These soccer-style kickers have leg muscles and ligaments with the agility necessary to pop the ball fifty to sixty yards. If sheer strength were the major distance factor, then the hulking, 300-pound linemen would kick field goals. Baseball players need physical strength for holding the bat in their hands when making contact with big-league pitching. A high, hard one can blast a bat out of the hands of a physically weak player. Nevertheless, home-run distance is still a factor of bat speed, called “head speed.” That is why home-run hitters strike out a lot. A corked bat is banned in baseball, because it makes the big bats lighter and promotes the bat’s head speed. Baseball’s head speed and golf’s clubhead speed are distance generators, but they are not generated by fast arms and a backswing. They are the result of fast wrists. Sure, big, strong baseball players like Mickey Mantle can impart more power into wrist speed and drive the ball farther, but without head speed, sheer power will not get the ball out of the park.

With no change in your swing, clubhead speed will automatically increase the farther the ball is from the center of the big arc (think armpit). That is why your driver is the longest club in your bag, and the wedges are the shortest. It’s the same principle as “crack the whip” in ice skating, or a kid spinning an airplane on a string. We’re talking basic physics here. This explains why the ball placement line should be as far forward on the target line as possible. Only with this forward location can you achieve the maximum clubhead speed at the instant of impact. If you place the ball toward your back foot:

- (1) You must adjust your natural downswing, risking errors.
- (2) Slow your swing and lose distance.
- (3) Lose clubhead speed generated by the additional distance your clubhead travels from your back-foot ball placement to your front-foot sweet-spot line (Figure 4f).

The result is a loss of distance on all your power shots.

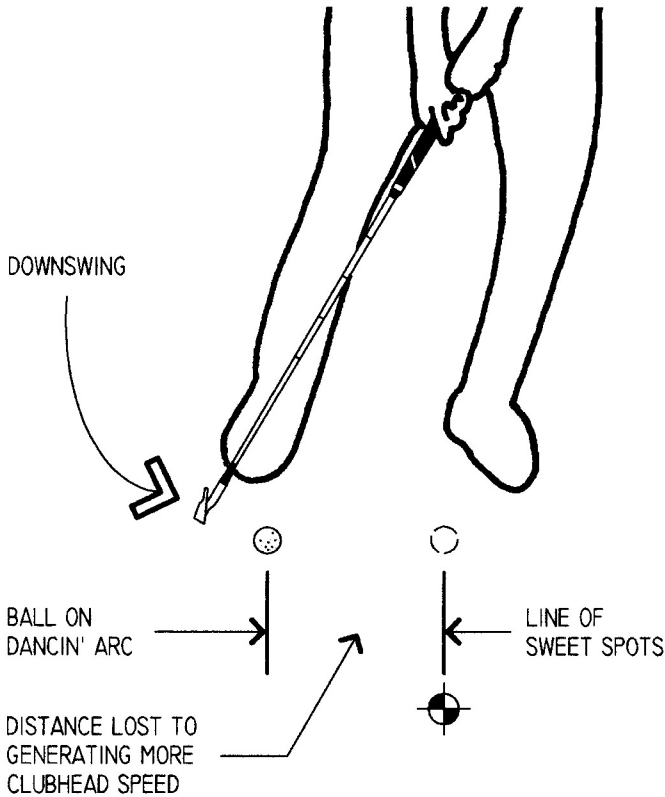


Figure 4f. Lost Power

Besides the ball location directly below your left shoulder socket, the second component of the sweet-spot line is maximizing your club's design. Your club is designed to be used in the following manner:

- (1) At your setup, the straight line created by your lever arm and the club shaft is almost perpendicular to the ground (refer to Figure 4c) allowing the width of the club face sole to lie flat on the ground (Figure 4g).
- (2) The length of the club face sole also lies as flat as possible on the ground (Figure 4g).
- (3) Place the club face sweet spot on the ball (Figure 4g). The sweet spot is the grooves that the *USGA Rules of Golf* defines as the "impact area."

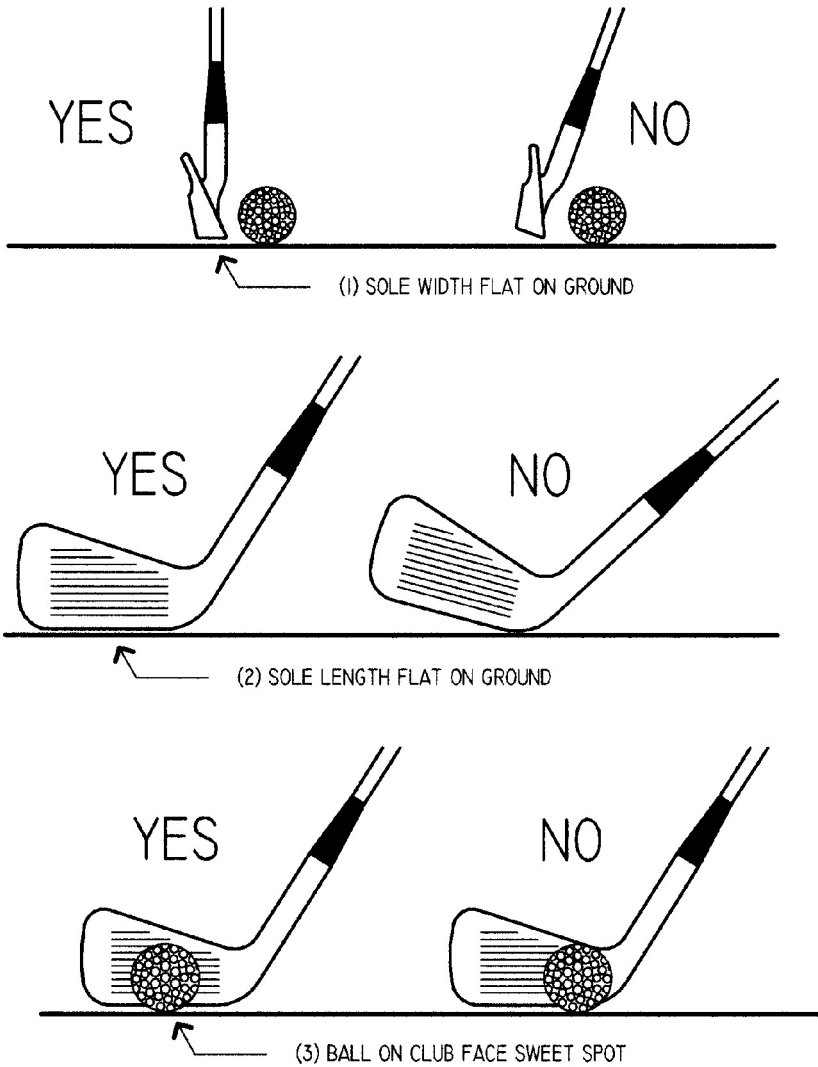


Figure 4g. Maximizing Club Design

The only way the width of the club face sole can lie flat on the ground is along the line of sweet spots. If you don't place it there, you create other problems. By setting your short irons back on your right foot, the club face has a steeper angle than its original design. Your 9-iron may have the club face angle of a 7-iron or

even a 6-iron (Figure 4g). This is unacceptable for full-power shots, because you will not gain consistency in knowing the specific distance and loft generated by each club. You want to properly use the lift as designed into the club face for each club length.

By hitting a 9-iron shot off your right foot, your setup will twist the club while reaching over to the right from your left shoulder socket. In doing this, you risk club face misalignment and may hit the ball well off target, or worse, hook or slice the ball into the trees. There are other risks associated with dancing ball placement locations. If you place the ball forward of your sweet-spot line, you risk hitting the ball too late and upper-cutting it to the left. If you place the ball behind this line, you risk hitting the ball too early and pounding it into the ground to the right (Figure 4h).

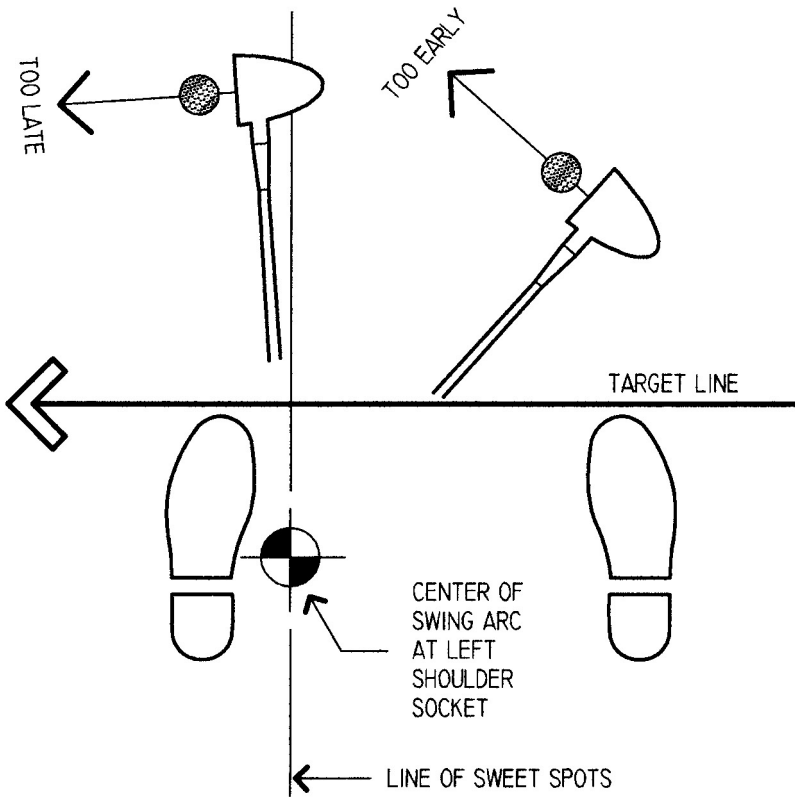


Figure 4h. Bad Timing

This has been a lengthy description of where the ball is located in relation to your body. In summation, begin your setup by letting your left arm hang straight down from your shoulder. Hold the club straight down your arm from your left shoulder socket (think armpit), then place the sole of the club face flat on the ground. Now that's where the ball goes. Your feet can be wherever they are comfortable and stable from that starting position. Though your feet are no longer a valid reference point, most golfers will play the ball off the inside of their left foot.

At this juncture in the book, hitting any golf shot (except putting) has been simplified. You always use the same stance. You always use the same grip. You always address the ball on the same line of sweet spots. Only the ball location on that same, sweet-spot line changes to suit your club length. Tony Gwynn says, "It's all about getting into the same position every time, and taking the same swing every time."<sup>4</sup>

### 4.3 NO-BACKSWING BACKSWING

In his book, *Modern Fundamentals of Golf*, Ben Hogan says the major culprit in a bad golf shot is the backswing. Other pros may tell you that you must have a perfect backswing before you'll have a good downswing, and that everything starts with the takeaway. The prevailing reason for a backswing is the belief that you have to crank it up, or you'll never get the ball out there. Sounds good, but it's really not true. By attempting to rev their motors to the max, a multitude of unpracticed golfers do not swing within themselves and lose control. They may have the fastest swing in the West—want to see it again? Or they may look like Herky Jerky, who looks like he was jabbed by electric cattle prods.

Remember, baseball players hit towering balls out of the park for home runs without using a backswing. They do so by swinging under control and not wildly throwing their bat at the ball. In golf, you do not need a backswing or wildly swinging arms to generate distance. Some of you may increase your distance by having greater head speed and by getting the extra bounce and roll from the pure forward spin the top-start swing normally imparts on the ball. Without using a backswing, there is no question some of you may not hit with the same power and distance. But whatever your distance factor, all of you will hit the ball with more consistency and more accuracy.

And that, my friends, is golf's bottom line.

You begin your no-backswing setup by ensuring you have a flat swing plane. Your lever arm extends straight from your shoulder in line with your club, which will form that good ol' straight line flat plane (Figure 4i). A flat swing plane helps generate consistent distance and accuracy. Many players set up crooked, and then when they downswing, their arms have a natural tendency to straighten out for power, pushing the club face beyond the ball location. If you set up crooked, you must do that wonderful muscle retraining thing again.

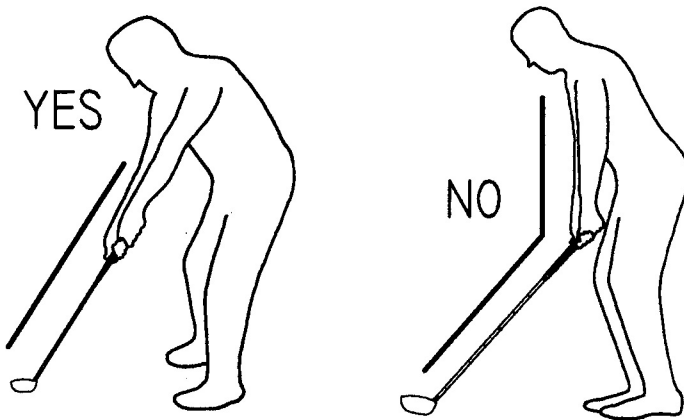


Figure 4i. Flat Swing Plane

Once you are set up and ready, start your no-backswing by raising your club slowly using the full-arc extension of your arms, then stop at the top. Keep your takeaway low and slow. Do not bend your lever elbow. Do not bend your wrists. Your backswing moves the club to the top, but it is not part of the swing in hitting the ball. Your backward motion is strictly a positioning movement. The position where you stop is your choice.

## 4.4 TOP-START POSITIONS

There are three, basic positions for stopping at the top. No matter which one you choose, you will always stop your backswing action slightly before the traditional top of the backswing. Remember, do not fold your left arm (lever arm) and do not break your wrists (Figure 4j). Let your body sway naturally with the arm and

club movement. Do not force anything. Do not lift your head or unbend at the waist from your address position.

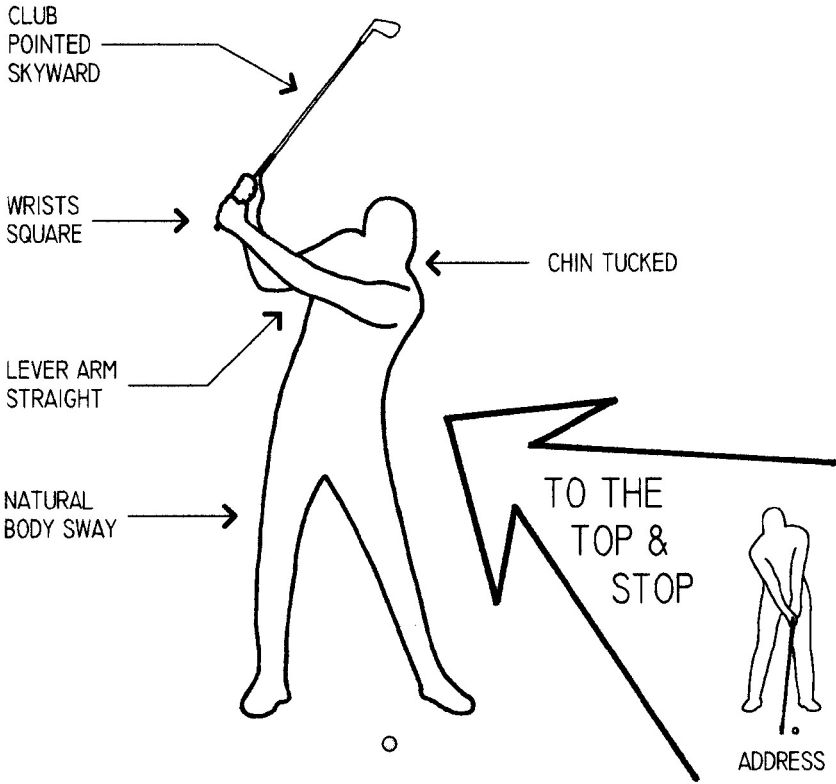


Figure 4j. Top-Start Position

As with anything new, the pros and many of you will shudder at this. The top-start positioning will definitely feel awkward at first. Once you've tried it a few times and have found which works best, you will never use a backswing again. Note that the traditional, full golf swing wreaks havoc on a player's spinal cord. A top-start swing reduces, and for some eliminates, the strain on your back and makes playing golf comfortable. Find your own comfort zone.

The three, basic top-start positions are the High-Five Position, the Flat Position, and the Tweener.

### 4.4.1 High-Five Position

The High-Five is the highest club location with the club shaft aligned directly over your neck (Figure 4k). The left arm is parallel with the target line, and your shoulders are at a slight angle with the target line. The club is usually sticking straight up in the air like it is giving the rest of your foursome a high five. This is the most vertical position possible, because any higher and the club is over or past your head, creating an awkward downswing and an out/in swing plane, producing that blankety-blank slice. A one-word description for the High-Five Position is “accuracy.”

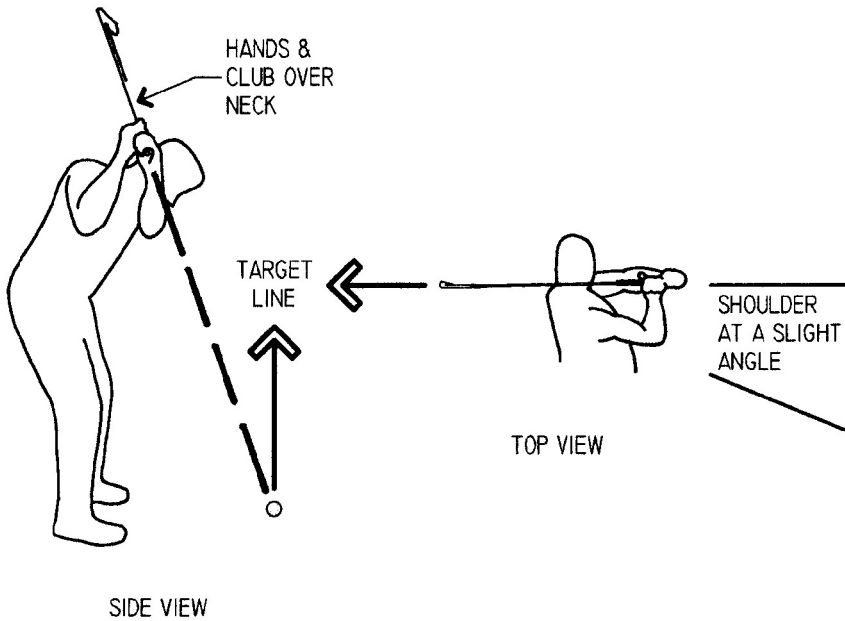


Figure 4k. High-Five Position

The High-Five Position advantages are:

- (1) The best theoretical results, because the more vertical the swing plane, the less chance for sidewinder spins on the ball.
- (2) It creates a vertical swing plane that is more in line with the target line.



- (3) It automatically creates greater accuracy. If you make a poor swing, there is more chance for a good hit, because the club face remains in proper impact alignment for a longer portion of the swing arc.
- (4) A high vertical plane can best be achieved from a top-start swing.

The High-Five Position disadvantages are:

- (1) This position is the most difficult to implement, because you must swing straight down on the ball. This requires your arms to be very disciplined and needs a little more practice than other positions.
- (2) Without this necessary discipline, your arms may have a tendency to “kick out,” giving you that blankety-blank out/in downswing.
- (3) It has the longest back-coil, which may cause discomfort, especially in your lower back. If you attempt compensating for the discomfort, you may cause swing problems.
- (4) For some players, the disciplined arm and body mechanics needed for this downswing cannot generate the fastest clubhead speed.

### **4.4.2 Flat Position**

This is the lowest club location. Pro golf instructors may tell you your swing is too flat and you won't be able to hit anything that way. This may be true for the traditional golf swing but not for a top-start swing. For many golfers, the Flat Position can be very powerful. Here, the primary alignment has your hands located over your right elbow (Figure 4l). Your left arm is at an angle with the target line, your shoulder line is almost perpendicular with the target line, and your chin is buried into your left shoulder. This is the lowest attainable position, because any lower down the back you could not swing the club. The advantages and disadvantages of the Flat Position are opposite of the High-Five Position. A one-word description for the Flat Position is “distance.”

The Flat Position advantages are:

- (1) It has the easiest body mechanics.
- (2) It allows full arm extension for the fastest clubhead speed.
- (3) It has the shortest back coil, which is a distinct advantage for some players.

(4) It's closer to the traditional location of the backswing and will, at first, feel more comfortable to most players.

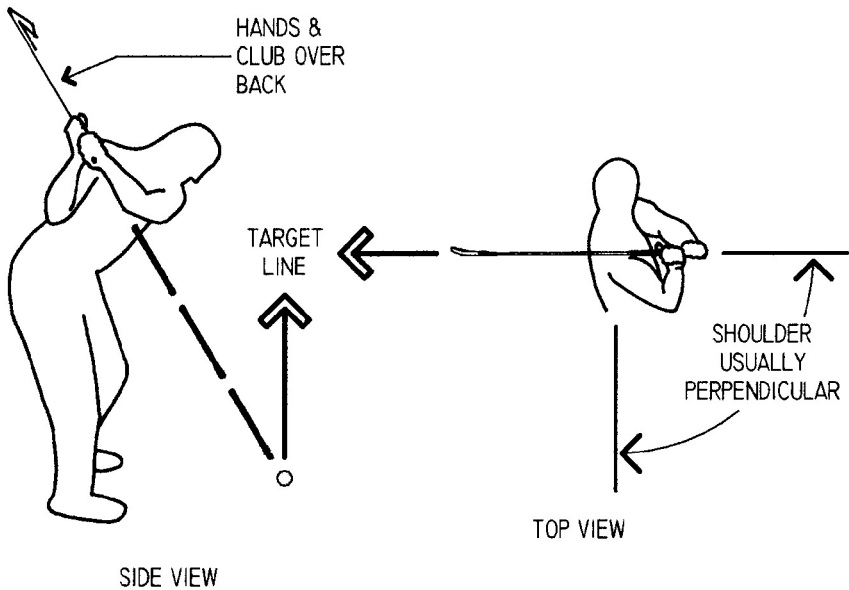


Figure 4I. Flat Position

The disadvantages are:

- (1) It has the poorest theoretical results, because the lower swing-plane angle with the target line can produce push/pull shots and sidwinder spins.
- (2) There is less tolerance on the swing arc for proper clubhead alignment at impact.
- (3) A tendency toward a soft, flexing left knee could cause unwanted body dipping during the downswing.

### **4.4.3 Tweener Position**

The Tweener is between the High-Five and the Flat positions. No hard-and-fast rules are chiseled in stone. The hands and the club shaft are located anywhere between the two top and bottom, bookend positions. Because the advantages and

disadvantages for the High-Five and the Flat positions are opposite of each other, the Tweener Position is on a sliding scale between these two opposites. If you do not choose one of the bookend positions, then experiment with an in-between position that offers the best combination of accuracy and distance to suit your style and personality. No matter which top-start position you choose, the following apply to all positions: (1) don't move your head, (2) eliminate the flying right elbow, (3) keep your wrists square, and (4) don't force it. Find where you are the most comfortable (think comfy chair).

## 4.5 LINCHPIN

The head is the heaviest single element in the human body. In the golf swing, your head is the anchor, the linchpin. If your head stays in place, then your left shoulder stays in place, and the center of the big arc stays in place. If you jerk your head out of its address position, it will definitely cause club face misalignment at impact. Though unlikely, your arms and wrists could compensate by getting the club face on the ball with reasonable effectiveness, but this is not good technique. In a quasi-scientific report, Bernardo Leonard writes:

“Keep your head motionless throughout the swing. The head is located at the top of the cervical spine, and it is the axis of the swing. Like the earth that spins on its axis, the body swinging the bat rotates around the motionless head.

“A motionless head keeps the hitter centered and balanced. Any head movement will alter the arc of the swing. Your head controls balance, because it is heavy. Move your head, and your body will move with it. It is difficult to keep your head completely still.”<sup>5</sup>

Of course, natural body sway means your head will sway a bit, but this is normal and will not adversely affect your swing.

Keep your head still and watch the ball is a sports axiom that certainly applies in Major League Baseball. Ted Williams says, “The head is *always* still. Much as in golf, the head stays put, as level as possible.”<sup>6</sup>

Steve Garvey concurs, “Good golfers and good hitters keep their heads still and down during the swing—even after the ball is gone.”<sup>7</sup>

Bob Cluck reports, “Joe Morgan, Dave Winfield, George Brett, Willie Stargell, Robin Yount, and—more recently—Tony Gwynn and Alan Trammell have all attached a great deal of importance to keeping the head still.”<sup>8</sup>

Mark McGwire puts it simply, “When you’re seeing the ball well enough, it doesn’t matter what they’re throwin’ you, you’re gonna hit it.”<sup>9</sup>

## 4.6 FLYING RIGHT ELBOW

The majority of golfers around the world have one common trait—a slice. The slice is caused primarily by an out/in downswing plane or “coming over the top.” Golf tips blame the out/in swing on bad grip, bad aim, bad alignment, bad posture, or the right shoulder moving into the target line. Of course, these are all possible causes of a slice, but the biggest culprit is the flying right elbow. Baseball calls it the “chicken wing.” During the traditional, golf backswing, the right arm has a natural tendency to fold up and kick out (Figure 4m). The power arm (right arm) is the leader and the lever arm (left arm) is the follower. In golf swing mechanics, the lever arm is helpless against the power arm. While keeping the left arm straight receives all of golfdom’s attention, the forgotten power arm dominates the lever arm. If you have a flying right elbow, this dominance by your power arm causes the slice. Try the following simple test and watch your own right arm ruin your swing.

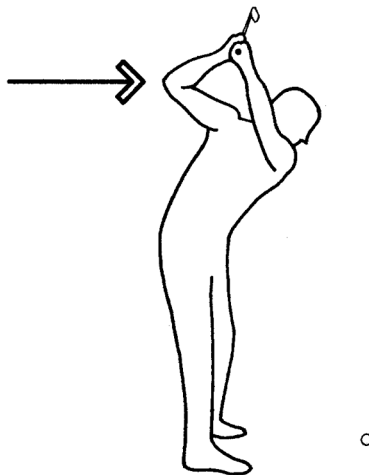


Figure 4m. Flying Right Elbow

Place yourself in High-Five top-start position and set your right elbow in the “flying” position as much as you can. While watching your right arm, slowly start

a downswing but do not drop your right elbow down to your side. By nature, your folded power arm unfolds for a powerful swing, dominates your left arm, and “kicks out” the clubhead from the swing plane (Figure 4n). If you perform this test slowly, you will see your own powerful right arm produce an out/in swing plane. Anyway you slice it, that ball will spin right into another fairway.

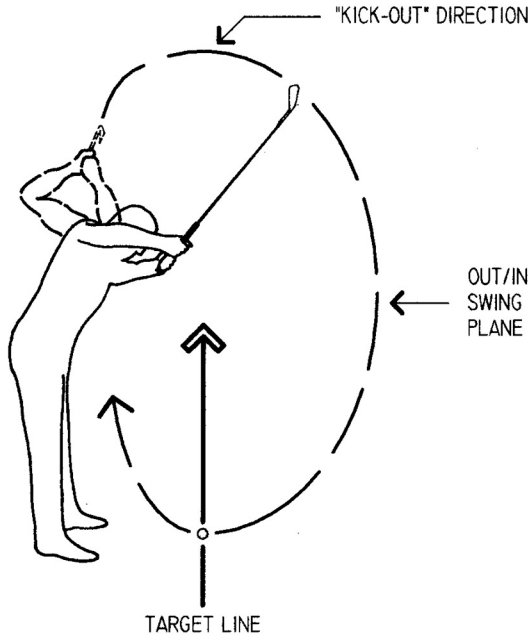


Figure 4n. The Perfect Slice

The solution is simple. For all top-start positions, tuck your right elbow down into the side of your body. Stating this in more geometric terms, set your right forearm perpendicular to the ground or at least pointing toward the ground (Figure 4l). From this perpendicular position, your right, power arm will not “kick out” during your downswing. It will move fully extended through the swing plane, exactly the same as standing sideways and throwing darts. Once you establish a tucked-in, right arm, your swing will feel more compact and professional. An inherent advantage in starting at the top is you can check for the problem and correct it before you downswing. Check by simply turning your head slightly sideways. Remember, don’t jerk your head out of position. While there, you have one more little checkout.

## 4.7 BE SQUARE OR BEWARE

SLIMASH is still in effect. No crookedness allowed here either. At whatever your chosen top-start position, do not break your wrists in any direction (Figure 4o). Keep your club perpendicular with your straight left arm (Figure 4p). Yes, your club will be pointing toward the sky, but at this phase of your swing preparation, that is exactly where you want it. You will learn why in the next chapter.

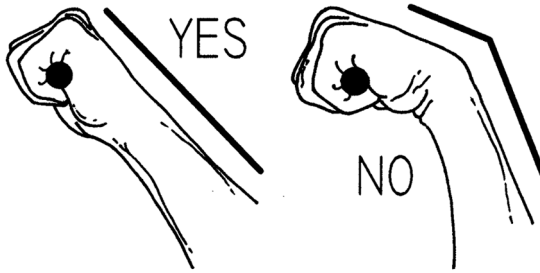


Figure 4o. SLIMASH Wrists

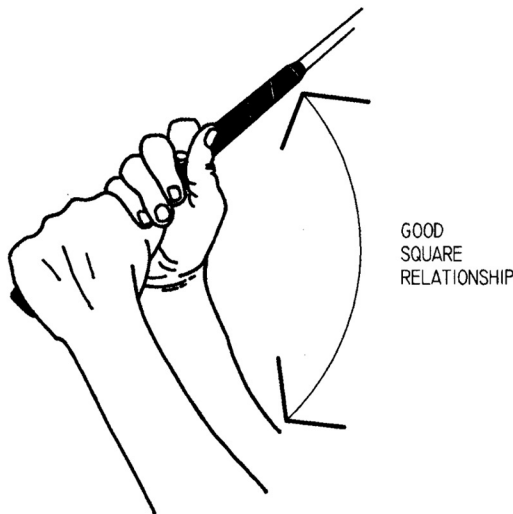


Figure 4p. Square Hands

## 4.8 FOSBURY FLOP

The Olympics began in ancient Greece sometime around 750 BC (exact date unknown). Freeborn men competed naked, and the women were forbidden to watch the Games, under penalty of death! After Rome defeated Greece, the popularity of the Olympic Games spread throughout the Roman Empire, attracting athletes from all the conquered lands and beyond. But alas, in AD 394, Emperor Theodosius I, a Christian, considered the Olympic Games a pagan festival and ordered them stopped forever.

In 1896, the Frenchman, Pierre de Coubertin, revived the modern Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. The male athletes wanted to compete naked, but clothes were the order of the day. The Games soon became an important international event. This was proven later when Chancellor Adolph Hitler used the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin to hype the supremacy of his white, Aryan race. Hitler raged when an American black man, Jesse Owens, won four gold medals beating the best of the Nazis' master race. Hitler stormed out of the arena.

Throughout the Olympic span, athletes have experimented with any innovation that would give them a competitive edge. From twirling in the shot-put pit to switching from rigid to flexible poles in the pole vault, no experiment has been more innovative than the high-jump technique developed by Dick Fosbury. The classic method, called the straddle, involved springing feet first, then scissoring the legs while twisting the body over the bar. This was a difficult maneuver, which Fosbury could not master. He evolved a head-first jump, with his back to the ground, while quickly flipping his legs into the air.

As you would expect from anything revolutionary, other athletes and the media sneered and jeered Fosbury, labeling his technique a flop, mainly because of the way he landed. Some anti-floppers even tried banning it on the basis of safety. Eventually, positions softened, and *Sports Illustrated* wrote a more positive article saying, in part, "The style is backward, but it may be avant-garde. It defies tradition, but it may be the way the Lord meant man to high jump."<sup>10</sup> Fosbury won a gold medal, and his flop has become standard procedure. The high-jumping kids of today are a making giant leaps backward.

In golf, if you defy tradition by using no backswing, and you hear the sneers and jeers of other golfers, tell them all to “flop off.” Who knows, maybe *Baseballgolf* will become the new gold standard.





# 5

## *It's Showtime*

In the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, both Butch and Sundance flee to South America to avoid capture by a relentless American marshall's posse. At first, their attitude in Bolivia was to become good citizens and to quit robbing trains. They interview for a job guarding money being taken up a mountain to mine workers. In the past, the guards carrying payroll had been attacked by banditos. The Bolivian interviewer asks Sundance for a demonstration of his shooting skills. Standing at rigid attention, Sundance slowly takes his pistol from his holster, aims at a can on the ground, fires, and misses. The interviewer is not impressed.

"Can I mooove?" mumbles Sundance.

"Sure, why not?" barks the Bolivian.

Feeling his groove by moving, Sundance fast-draws, shoots the can into the air, crouches, fans his pistol hitting the flying can a couple of times while it's still in the air.

"You're hired! You're hired!" screams the wide-eyed interviewer.

What was the difference? Sundance was able to move before firing his pistol. Moving with instant power and speed from a stationary position is virtually impossible for the human body. You must trick it. You must move first, preferably in the opposite direction. For baseball players, this trick is similar to Charlie Lau's butt waggle. As a top hitting instructor, he and his top student, George Brett, blazed a trail of ideas. Lau recognized the importance of getting the body moving before you swing. His favorite move was twisting your butt in a backward direction before swinging the bat forward.

Gola and Monteleone write: "Imagine trying to hit from a complete stand-still—no movement of the hands, no coiling action, no stride, no separation—just swinging the bat from an inert position. Your hits would come sparingly and be devoid of power. You must have some preliminary movement to generate fluidity and power.

“You must get some preliminary movement going back first before moving forward to the ball. This is true of most athletic movements. The hockey player hitting a slap shot, the lacrosse player firing a shot on goal, even a volleyball player striking a kill-shot all have motion going back to create greater force moving forward.”<sup>1</sup>

Will Clark says, “It’s very important to get something moving back before you start your swing forward. In our business, it’s called loading and it’s just like a prize fighter loading to throw a punch. By moving back first, you’ll generate more power.”<sup>2</sup>

## 5.1 TORQUE THE TORSO

For a golfer in a top-start position, the first move is to coil your torso backward. This back-coil will simulate the traditional backswing effect. You are literally exchanging your backswing for a back-coil. A rattlesnake must coil before it can strike for distance. A rattler’s back-coil can be your new role model. You will become deadlier, because your back-coil is not beset with backswing problems. Ted Williams says, “Cocking the hips, so essential to the golf swing but never articulated in baseball, is at the root of batting power.”<sup>3</sup>

Gola and Monteleone, co-authors of *The Louisville Slugger Complete Book of Hitting Faults and Fixes*, write:

“Like a good golf swing, a proper baseball swing employs coiling (and uncoiling) of the torso. Failure to create this coil results in a swing that inhibits hip and shoulder rotation, and ultimately hinders hand and bat speed. This results in weakly struck hits and balls to the opposite field.

“Unlike the golf swing, however, the coiling and uncoiling of a baseball swing is less pronounced, that is, the degrees of turning away from the pitcher (in golf, the target line) are fewer. The reason is the amount of time needed to complete a swing. When a baseball is speeding toward you at up to 95 mph, you do not have the time to make big turns of the hips and shoulders away and back toward the pitcher. You have, in fact, about four-tenths (0.4) of a second.

“In golf, where the ball is stationary you have as much time as you care to take.”<sup>4</sup>

Golfers who only use their arms for generating power, are advised to crank up their hips and shoulders for extra power. Many golfers cannot implement this good advice, because it is difficult while using the traditional backswing. With the top-start back-coil, it becomes automatic and much easier to ratchet up your body for that extra oomph. Gola and Monteleone write, “Think of your torso as a twisted rubber band—when you let go, it untwists.” Remember that your body’s back-coil must be done by your torso only. Your arms, wrists, and club are set. Do not bend or move them out of alignment. Let them flow with the back-coil (Figure 5a). They will indirectly benefit from the body’s reverse move.

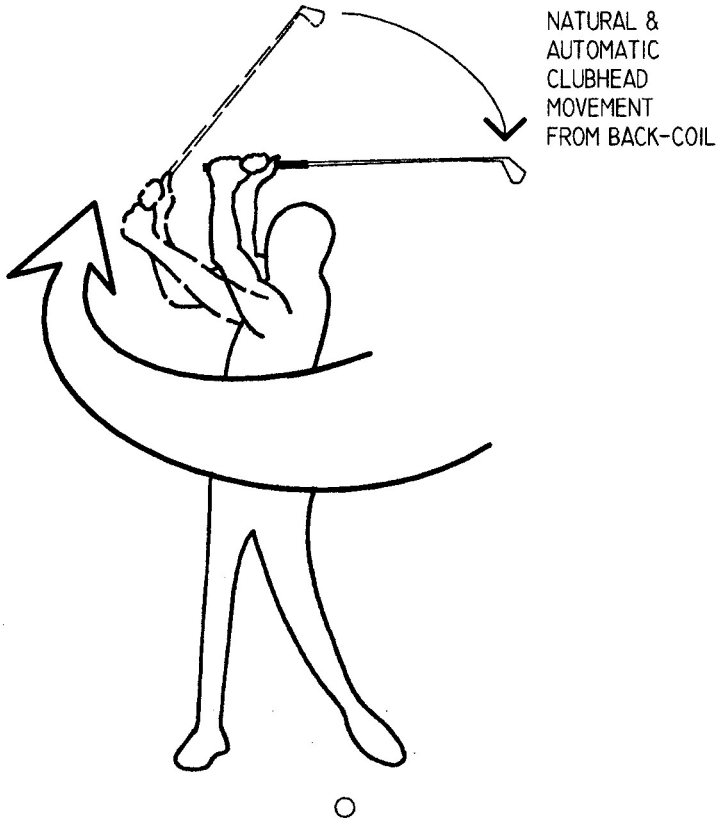


Figure 5a. Back-coil

The legs are not involved in the back-coil. The only possible leg movement might be a slight inward twist of your left knee. As a rule of thumb, don't even worry about your legs. Let your lower body go with the flow. The top-start swing does not rely on leg action as an integral part of its effectiveness. Iron Byron, the PGA's mechanical hitting machine, does not move his legs, and ol' Iron is the best. Leg thrust and lower body action do not directly increase clubhead speed or generate power. For the pros or anyone using the traditional swing, the legs' only real function is cranking up the entire body for helping the upper body indirectly achieve rhythm and tempo. For the unpracticed weekend warrior, excessive leg action leads to errors. Moving body parts must be coordinated and well-grooved and must return to their original address position at impact. If you increase lower body action too much, your body will be ahead of the ball before impact, guaranteeing a bad shot. This potential for bad hits is not worth the benefit of attempting an extra yard or two. Leave leg thrust to the pros. The top-start back-coil will move your legs once you unleash. Do not force any lower body movement, but do allow for a normal, natural body sway from the swing motions. Besides avoiding errors, you will increase your chances for hitting a shot straight down the center of the fairway, which is Priority One.

## 5.2 PRE-FLIGHT CHECKOUT

Before any takeoff, a pilot performs a pre-flight check. Pilots do it, and now, so can you. With a top-start golf swing, you can stop at any milestone, and check yourself out before you make your downswing. This advantage is not available with the traditional golf swing. With the traditional swing, you stand at address, backswing, and then forward swing in one blinding motion, hoping for the best. Here, once you've back-coiled your torso and before the downswing, you can check out each component of your body mechanics and make any last-second corrections before the big blast—a major benefit for any golfer!

At this point in your top-start positioning, you should be looking down at the ball. Therefore, the most logical checkout sequence is to start from the feet, go upward to the hands, and finish at the club. During this checkout, do not lift your body or your head (linchpin). Slowly turn your head slightly sideways as necessary for making your final verification. Make any necessary corrections.

If something does not feel right, STOP! Start over again from any milestone in the sequence you choose. Once you are happy with yourself, the last act is to tuck your chin into your left shoulder and concentrate on the ball. Bernardo Leonard

advises, “Resting the chin on the front shoulder helps keep the head still and in proper position to see the ball...”<sup>5</sup> All your planning, positioning, and checking are finished. You are now a jet fighter on the flight deck catapult, a coiled rattlesnake, a mean machine at the lights, a cocked rifle. Quoting your friendly range fire officer, “Ready on the right? Ready on the left? All ready on the firing line!”

### 5.3 PULL THE TRIGGER

The trigger is cocking your wrists backward. This produces an instant, natural tendency to move forward. By cocking your wrists, you are also back-coiling them as a reverse move before the main action. The wrist back-twist is the trigger pull. On a cocked pistol, you pull the trigger backward, releasing the bullet forward. Bob Cluck instructs, “Before you begin your swing, you must prepare for the swing with a cocking action of the bat. This ‘trigger’ is an attempt to overcome the dead weight, or inertia, of the bat.”<sup>6</sup> The wrist back-twist is not a “move then hold” action, waiting for some other body movement. The wrist twist is the trigger. Do not stop. Instantly snap your wrists into your downswing. Pull the trigger and fire.

You may establish a personal triggering ritual by back-coiling and pulling the trigger in different ways. Before back-coiling, take deep breaths, either long ones or short quick ones. Or, hold your breath. In sniper attacks, riflemen hold their breath, because it helps them concentrate and prevents extraneous movement. For the back-coil, create your own rhythm—one, big back-coil, or a double pump, or even a big triple pump. George Brett is emphatic when he says, “A hitter’s trigger is everything to him, and a wise coach leaves this area alone.”<sup>7</sup> At your top-start position, you may want to tighten and untighten your hands to start rhythm and tempo. Have at it! Eventually, your body will crank up tighter with a top-start back-coil than with a traditional backswing. For many players, this will generate greater distance. If you attempted a big, body coil and a wrist twist with a normal backswing, your entire swing could be thrown out of alignment.

As you may recall from the previous chapter, if you stop at the top with square, unbent wrists, the club is pointing skyward. When you back-twist your wrist as the final trigger, the club will move parallel with the ground, which happens to be exactly where most pros (not all) stop their backswings. When you cock your wrists, if the club shaft drops below parallel and points downward (Figure 5b), do not be concerned. Consider yourself lucky. The pros call dropping below parallel a “long swing,” or a “long backswing.” Some call it the “power

pull.” The pros believe the good, enduring golfers are the ones with the “long swing.” By coiling all the muscles longer in the backswing, the clubhead must travel farther to the ball. This long travel generates greater clubhead speed, and in turn, generates a longer shot distance. However, for you lucky “power pull” hitters, your wrist action must be faster for the clubhead to travel that extra distance to the ball.

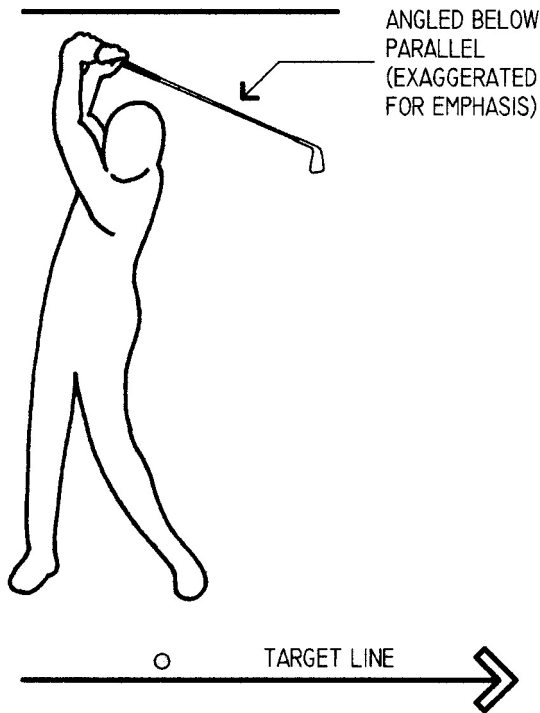


Figure 5b. Power Pull

Remember, you back-coil your body to torque the torso, and you back-twist your wrists to pull the trigger. Cock your wrists and fire!

## 5.4 SNAP INTO IT

You fire your downswing with a quick, snap of the wrists. Concentrate on it! Gola and Monteleone stress: “You cannot have a good swing without properly snapping the wrists. The snapping of the wrist fires the barrel of the bat into the path of the incoming pitch. The failure to snap your wrists leads to major power outage—weak, flaring fly balls and slow-moving groundouts.”<sup>8</sup>

Dave Gallagher, Major League hitting instructor, says, “Wrist snap is one of the key elements to the swing. If you do it correctly, it keeps the barrel through the hitting zone without changing its path or without lifting it over the ball and creating top-spin. It’s not a wrist roll, it should be a wrist snap.”<sup>9</sup>

Your wrist action is the one, big key for a successful golf shot, because you can check yourself out immediately before pulling the trigger. You can be out of position, screw up your arms or elbows, and make other little mistakes, but if you quickly snap your wrists through the ball, you may still get a good hit. Remembering thirty-seven keys to better golf is not required here. If your shot has no oomph, no pizzazz, or bounces into the ground in front of you and then caroms erratically down the fairway, first look to your wrists for the problem. From the top-start golf position, once you cock your wrists backward, do not hesitate—immediately snap your wrists forward and blast that little sucker!

## 5.5 DOWNSWING

Bernardo Leonard says, “How hard should you swing the bat? If you’ve done everything right, you won’t swing the bat hard at all. If you swing the bat too hard you lose bat control and accuracy with the bat head. The optimal swing is one with maximum swing *and* control. You must have bat and body control at all times.”<sup>10</sup> Though snapping your wrists into the downswing is the big key to a good golf shot, it does not require super-fast arms. Overswinging your arms produces a whole different set of problems, such as falling down.

“Overswinging is the number one reason hitters pull their head off the ball,”<sup>11</sup> write Gola and Monteleone. Your wrists, not your arms, do the primary work in the downswing. A simple graphic proves this point (Figure 5c).

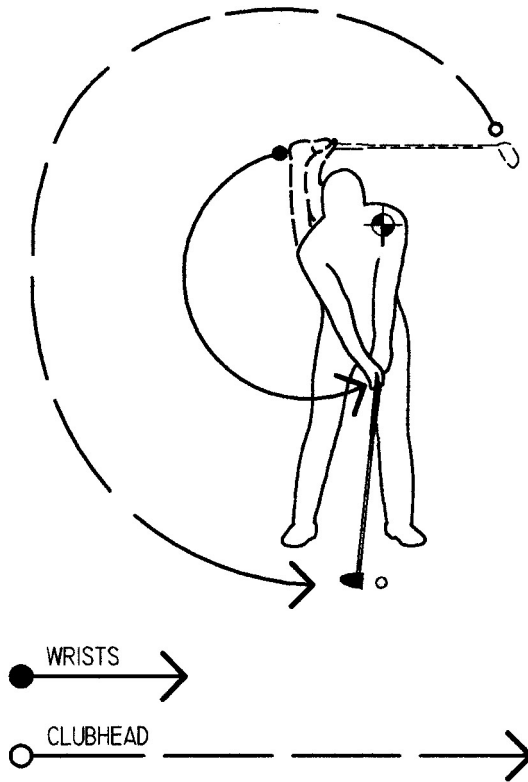


Figure 5c. Proportional Distances

The clubhead travels farther than your wrists in downswinging into proper alignment with the ball at impact. Only your wrists can make up this dramatic difference in travel distance. Nothing else can compensate. If your wrists don't cooperate by snapping into the ball, slowing or speeding your arms will not help. This fact is true for baseball, and both the traditional and the top-start golf swings. Baseball's best power hitters usually have super-fast wrists to launch a pitch out of the park. To launch a golf ball out of the grass, a golfer must get the clubhead around quickly, and the only way to do that is with fast wrist action. A corollary benefit to good wrist action is the clubhead will automatically help you. By downswinging the club with fully extended arms and fast-turning wrists, the clubhead's momentum will help bring itself around. In dynamics, this momentum is called centrifugal force. Without this, you will not hit the ball well.



Over the years, a problem developed where the pros have indoctrinated the amateurs with instructions such as: “Don’t overturn your wrists,” “Delay releasing your wrists,” and “Don’t break your wrists; you’ll lose control.” The result is a planet full of lemming-like golfers who under-turn their wrists and produce weak hits. If you swing your arms with any reasonable speed, it is virtually impossible for amateurs to overturn their wrists. And if you’ve entered arthritis country, you need all the wrist action you can get. Only the pros and the young kids have wrists so fast that the clubhead is in its follow-through phase before it hits the ball. That’s fast! And it’s rare. A good downswing can be summed up in one simple statement: “Swing easy, but snap your wrists around in a hurry.” That’s it.

## 5.6 FOLLOW-THROUGH

You pull the trigger, swing your club out there, and let it pull your body forward into the follow-through. Feel the whooosh! The follow-through is a smooth arc extension of your downswing. It is the forgotten phase. Once you hit the ball, suddenly, there are scant few tips.

Mark McGwire, the first player to hit seventy home runs in one season, says, “Keeping your bat moving through the ball after contact is what helps to get your entire body into hitting the ball.”<sup>12</sup>

LPGA champion, Annika Sorenstam, believes that you must follow through to a complete finish. Scientific experiments have determined that at impact the club face and the ball are in contact for two-thousandths of a second, give or take a millisecond or two. After contacting the ball, the player no longer has control of the shot and no more options. Athletes in all sports are indoctrinated with the importance of a good follow-through. But, the follow-through itself has absolutely zero effect on the shot. The importance of a good follow-through is reporting whether you made a good downswing. It’s part of your continuing checkout process. Ideally, the end of your follow-through should be the opposite of your top-start position. If not, then you did not swing the club in a perfect, flat plane. If your follow-through is faulty, your downswing is faulty.

If you were OK at your pre-flight checkout, then you have a problem in your downswing. Be a detective. Sleuth your downswing for full-arm extension throughout the entire Big Half-Circle (Figure 4e). Half of that half is the follow-through. Slowly backtrack through your routine and your downswing. A top-start swing makes troubleshooting easier.

## 5.7 FUNTIME

Showtime is fun. Think of watching a movie on *Showtime*, one of the premium movie channels. Or hearing, “It’s showtime,” from a character in *All That Jazz* or *The Incredibles*. Or watching the “Showtime” Lakers of old with Kareem-Abdul Jabbar, James Worthy, Byron Scott, and Magic Johnson.

In golf, showtime is the fun of watching your drives consistently go down the center of the fairway and seeing your pitch shots always landing on the green near the pin. Uh-oh, your “showtime” is not fun yet. You say you’ve got seventy-six trombones of trouble. Well, if you’ve got troubles right here, my friends, then head on down the river to the next chapter.



# 6

## *Trouble in River City*

At this point in your golfing career, you've read all the tips, established your setup, your stance, and your grip, and you swing for the fences. Then, the clouds open up, the choir sings "Hallelujah," and you hear a heavenly golf tip: "Wonderful. You have only one problem. You stand too close to the ball—after you hit it."<sup>1</sup>

Five-time American League batting champion, Wade Boggs, says, "You can do everything absolutely right, and still fail."<sup>2</sup> You want a 300-yard drive onto the green, but your squibber barely makes it off the tee. So what's the problem? A golf swing should be simple, like drinking a glass of water. But sometimes, you drop the glass. Maybe one of the following minor adjustments will quench your thirst for a good golf shot.

### **6.1 WINDAGE**

Your shot is consistently straight with plenty of extra roll for distance. You've done everything right, yet the damn ball never flies on target. It flies twenty yards left of target, or fifteen yards right of target. All of your sleuthing cannot detect a bug in your swing, but you are still off target. Don't break your clubs. Consider yourself lucky.

If you hit good, consistently straight shots, you have found your groove. You are your own machine. Do not tinker with the machine. The machine only needs a slight adjustment for windage. Adjusting a rifle sight for windage uses the same principle. You don't rebores the rifle barrel, you correct the sight settings or reposition the scope. Do not retrain yourself. Do not destroy your groove because of some minor quirk in your physique. The simple, trouble-free solution is to adjust your aim. If you are using a 3-iron and you know your ball will land twelve yards right of target, simply swing exactly the same as you always do but set your target line twelve yards left of target. Your ball will land dead on the pin!

For some of you, each club used for full-power shots will probably be off target by a different yardage, such as five yards for 9-iron and twenty yards for driver. Once you become consistent, make a list of different windages for each club, and then set your target line accordingly when you play.

## 6.2 CHOP TILL YOU DROP

Baseball has many swing faults, such as pulling the front shoulder out too early, uppercutting, casting your hands, or dropping the barrel. Happily, most baseball faults do not apply to golf. However, one fault applicable to both baseball and golf is chopping down at the ball. In baseball, “Chopping at the ball means your swing path travels through the hitting zone at a downward angle, never leveling off,” write Gola and Monteleone. “This type of swing makes it difficult to make square contact and initiates a steady diet of mishits—mostly ground balls.” In golf, how many times have you seen your drive bounce off the ground in front of your tee, leave a little divot, and then ricochet erratically around the course? That’s a chop. Many golfers do this, and the major faults are lazy wrists (again), body dipping, or a combination of the two. If your wrists are causing the problem, you did not bring the clubhead around fast enough, and by the time it got there, your body mechanics were still bringing the clubhead down on the ball. Read “6.4 Lazy River,” below.

If the problem is body dipping, you dropped your body (and club) down on the ball before the big arc reached its apex of maximum impact. For some golfers, the flexed knees, from the standard athletic position, cause an elevator swing—up and down, up and down. If you’re one of them, set your knees firm and straight. Their natural mechanics will still allow lateral movement but will resist any attempt at body dipping. Intentionally locking the knees into rigid immobility is not necessary. Straight and firm knees flow with the swing but will not create extraneous motion. Yes, it may reduce distance, but it’s worth losing some yardage for a good, consistent golf shot. Bob Cluck advises: “You should not concern yourself with power. Be smart: be satisfied with being a good, efficient hitter. Power is something that comes to some people *after* they learn a good swing.”<sup>3</sup>

## 6.3 DO-SI-DO, HEEL-TO-TOE

You have consistently straight shots, but your distance is not what it should be. If lazy wrists are not the problem, then look to your address (refer to Subchapter 4.2 and Figure 4g.). You are probably not hitting the ball on the club face sweet spot. The force of your downswing may change your body's alignment and alter your club face at impact. When you swing, if you hit the ball at the heel of the club face, then adjust your address by placing the toe of the club face on the ball. If you hit the ball at the toe, then, obviously, the converse is true. Address the ball with the heel of the club face on the ball. Simple little adjustments like this can produce very good results.

## 6.4 LAZY RIVER

This may seem like overkill, but wrist action cannot be overstressed. Your address was perfect. Felt like a beautiful swing. But your shot floats like a feather and does not sting like a bee. If you checked yourself out, and you're convinced you did everything right, then you have lazy wrists. If your ball looks like a wounded duck, think wrists. Anytime you think you had perfect swing and the ball does nothing, you should check first for lazy wrists, because snapping those wrists is the one, big key for hitting a successful full-power shot. The opposite scenario can prove this. You can have a bad address, a sloppy arc, or even lift your head too quickly, but if you snap those wrists into the ball, you will hit a ball for distance. It may land two fairways to the right, but that sucker will fly. Good wrist action is king of golf and of baseball. Think wrists.

## 6.5 DOING THE WRIST TWIST

For some of you, the act of reverse twisting your wrists as a downswing trigger may inadvertently kick out your right elbow into the "flying" position (refer to Subchapter 4.6). If you discover you have this bad habit, you may opt for reverse twisting your wrists and pulling your elbows together in one, unified triggering motion. The little extra effort required for training yourself will pay off in good, consistent straight hits.

## 6.6 STAY WITHIN YOURSELF

Baseball wisdom says, “Swing for the fences.” Golf says, “Let out the shaft.” *Baseballgolf* says, “Don’t.” Contrary to popular opinion, golf pros do not swing as hard as they can. LPGA touring pro Natalie Gulbis says, “Guys, please—quit trying to kill the ball. With a smoother swing you’ll shoot lower scores, even without that one monster drive per round.”<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion, baseball’s power hitters do not swing as hard as they can. Mickey Mantle, one of the greatest power hitters of all time, says, “Don’t try to kill the ball. All well-hit balls, especially the long ones, come from balanced, well-timed swings. It’s the same with the swing of a champion golfer. The theory is absolutely the same. The good ones don’t press.”<sup>5</sup>

Sparky Anderson, one of the greatest baseball managers ever, says, “If you want to cut down on your strikeouts, quit trying to hit the ball so hard.”<sup>6</sup>

Pushing the “pedal to the metal” is a low percentage swing, because forcing body parts to the max causes extraneous movements, and the body parts must all be brought back into proper alignment at impact. Good luck! Always stay within yourself. If you are returning to the game at retirement or just beginning, consider swinging less than normal until you feel comfortable and confident with your swing. Once this confidence fills your being, bring your game up to the next level by swinging normally. But do not move up to the extreme next level of “Kill the Pill,” because you’ll need pills to kill your golfing depression.

## 6.7 MISS ALIGNMENT

Surprisingly overlooked during address is the club-face alignment. The best stance, the best grip, and the best swing cannot overcome a club face that is out of alignment with your target. Always give your club face a final check before you swing. Triple check it, if necessary. If an alignment adjustment is necessary, keep your hands straight and compensate by rotating the club shaft. Do not twist your hands to make alignment adjustments, or your next problem will be compensating for a slice or hook.

## 6.8 RELAX, YOU ARE FEELING SLEEPY

You have chosen your target, finished your planning, and are preparing for your swing. Now is an ideal time to relax. Ease your mind, clear it out, take some deep breaths, forget the bad shot you made on the last hole. Scream, wiggle your body, close your eyes, visualize the shot, do whatever suits you, but relax. Forget everything downfield and concentrate on the business at hand—hitting the ball. Forget the pin, forget the green, forget the score. Relax and focus your tunnel vision on your swing. Stare at it, swear at it, but don't leave the tunnel.

Many pros relax by developing highly disciplined pre-swing or pre-putt routines, by doing exactly the same thing every time right down to the split second. If this fits your pistol, you gain benefits, because formal routines for making shots helps blot out negative waves, helps settle you, promotes concentration, and builds confidence. "Mental rehearsal combined with physical practice produces a large edge in your favor," says Bernardo Leonard. "Breathing is a key element in relaxation. You must inhale and exhale to the full capacity of your lungs. Step out of the batter's box, take a deep breath, and come back in relaxed and fit."<sup>7</sup>

## 6.9 WHOA IS ME

In your lifetime, you've probably heard someone say, "You must crawl before you can walk," or, "You must walk before you can run." If you're a golfing beginner, you can simplify your life by starting slowly. If you shoot over a hundred, don't even think about using your woods. Start crawling with a five, nine, and a putter. The 9-iron is also used as your pitching club. You'll be amazed how well you can score with only those three clubs. The one disadvantage is on par four and par five holes; you will have a longer second shot off the fairway onto the green. This is a minor dilemma when compared with a beginner's inability to handle a full set of clubs. Beginners sometimes quit the game in frustration. After feeling comfortable with those first three "crawling" clubs, start walking by adding your long irons. Later, you can amp up by running with woods and specialty clubs. In this manner, you will reduce the frustration of learning the game and may stay with it longer.

## 6.10 WHIFFLE PARK

Many of you hate practice and consider playing time as practice time. For those of you who do practice, practice, practice, make the most effective use of your time. This means practicing on grass. Driving ranges that use stiff rubber mats and Astroturf blobs can ruin a golfer. You'll break your wrists hitting iron shots off the rubber mats. Then come game time, you will subconsciously not swing low into the ball, adversely affecting your iron shots off the grass fairways. Use the stiff rubber mats only for hitting with a driver off the raised tees. If you practice iron shots off the raised tees at the ranges, then when you play a round, you will swing too high with your fairway iron shots and cuff the top of the ball.

Practice on grass. If you do not have a driving range with grass practice areas, then the next best alternative is Whiffle Park. Grab some plastic whiffle balls and go to a local park or grassy knoll of your choice. I know, you want to see the ball launch into space, but whiffle practice is very effective, especially for iron shots. Generally, whiffle balls react like normal golf balls and will tell you if you had a good or bad hit. Believe me, you will know. It has that launch look!

## 6.11 MY SALVATION

Once I became convinced *Baseballgolf* would work, I concentrated on research and development. This caused problems while playing. First of all, if I were playing alone, I played too slowly, and you can imagine what the players behind me kept yelling. Second, if I were in a foursome (difficult to avoid on the crowded courses), I was the recipient of constant evaluation—"Tom, you have the worst swing I've ever seen." I absorbed it all in the helpful spirit their tips were intended, but I never explained my intentions. I had decided to write this book and wanted to keep it under wraps until the book was ready. I quit playing golf completely and moved to the driving ranges.

My R&D at the driving ranges drove me up the wall. I even waited for the last tee on the left, so the other practicing golfers would have their backs to me. That didn't work either—"Dude, I'm looking at some serious swing problems here." I think they were hiding behind the trees. Of course, they all meant well, but such a crick in the neck!

My salvation was Whiffle Park. I grabbed my bag of orange, whiffle balls and headed for a deserted corner of a city park. "Aaaaaah, now I can R&D in peace," I thought. The sessions were successful from an experimental point of view, but I



lost my playing edge. This is not a major problem, because my Type-A competitive juices are not flowing anymore. Today, I prefer the idea of writing and teaching over playing.

For this endeavor, I have some excellent role models, including Charlie Weis and Tommy Lasorda. Weis was a highly successful offensive coordinator in the National Football League, winning four Super Bowls, the last three with the New England Patriots. Weis is considered the best offensive mind in football and is a much sought-after NFL head coach. Weis changed course and accepted an offer to become head coach at the University of Notre Dame, where he graduated but never played football. That doesn't matter, because Irish eyes are smiling again.

Tommy Lasorda did play baseball, but he didn't make it in the Major Leagues, recording only twenty-six innings pitched. Lasorda bleeds Dodger Blue, and, after retiring, made it into the Baseball Hall of Fame as one of the best managers ever. Lasorda later managed the United States Baseball Team and won the gold medal in the 2000 Olympics. He also became an unofficial spokesperson for Major League Baseball. If you ask Lasorda what day it is, he will tell you the history of the Gregorian calendar.

I think my salvation is not being forced into winning tournaments or gold medals to prove the value of *Baseballgolf* techniques. I hope someone else will prove that for me, and I can continue writing and teaching.

Someone? Anyone?



# 7

## *Pitching With No Windup*

Does this sound familiar? You are sixty yards from the pin—or is it fifty yards? You're not really sure. You take a few practice swings and become convinced the last practice swing will land the ball one foot from the pin. But you're not really sure. You address the ball with the feel of the last practice shot still tingling in your body. Hurry! The pros say every eight seconds you lose thirty percent of the feel you derived from your practice swings. Quickly, you swing. Damn! Over the green and into a sand trap on the other side. You arrive at the trap knowing you are fifteen yards from the pin—or is it twenty yards? You're not sure. The only real certainty is you are not alone.

The pros consider the eight- to eighty-eight-yard pitch shot as the most difficult in golf. Peter Jacobsen has always believed that the short game is generally the area that separates the very good amateur and a tour professional. Touring pro Phil Mickelson hones his short game by practicing six to eight hours a day hitting wedge shots to precise distances. He fine-tunes his feel for the differences between a fifty-yard shot and a forty-eight yard shot. Welcome to the PGA.

Pitch shots are difficult, because no appropriate clubs exist for distances under ninety yards. They don't make thirty-yard clubs. In full-power shots, you crank up that sucker and let 'er rip. For distances that are less than full-power for the club, you must control your personal power. Without the ability to use a full-power swing with a specific club for a short distance, you must choose a nine-iron, or lob wedge, or sand wedge, or whatever, then control your swing. Therein lies the big problem—control your swing. How hard do you hit the ball for the short distance to the pin? The power variable is the core problem in the short game.

One way of solving the problem is the Hogan/Mickelson Method. Practice all the varying short distances until you are competent. Pros advise practicing a 20 mph swing for grass, a 50 mph swing for hardpan, a 70 mph swing for sand, and all 10 mph increments in between. Other pros advise moving your feet all around

the ball to alter the loft of the club for differing trajectories. But why? Wedges now come with lofts ranging from forty-five degrees to sixty plus degrees and every micro-degree in between. Since we have plenty of time on our hands, we will practice all those swing-speed increments with all those different wedge lofts. Yea, sure. We've all been down that fairway before. Baseball shows us a second way—pitch with no windup.

## 7.1 ZERO TOLERANCE

Decades ago, baseball pitchers used a full windup, with their noses making furrows in the dirt mound, and their throwing arms sticking up in the air like empty flagpoles. Today, a pitcher's windup eliminates this baseball version of the backswing with all its unnecessary and ineffective motion. Baseball's wise men have learned that eliminating the full windup makes it easier for a pitcher to stay within himself, resulting in better control and accuracy with no loss of velocity. The king of the full windup was "Bullet" Bob Feller, clocked at 100 mph. King of the new, standing version is Nolan Ryan clocked at 104 mph. (I dare you to hit one of those pitches!) NFL quarterbacks don't use a windup, either. They just cock the ball behind their ear and "hum" it sixty yards. These players do not use a windup, because they want control and accuracy.

In golf, the pitch shot is a control shot. The control shot is the opposite of a full-power shot. You must adjust your full-power swing to make your control shots work. You must control the variables. We know that distance varies according to clubhead speed and not body strength. The variables of clubhead speed are the club length (leverage), and how fast your body mechanics can crank up that sucker. Now add the clubhead's loft angle. The same swing with the same club length, but with different loft angles, will produce different distances. The final factor is accelerating through the ball. All pros recommend moving through the ball. Don't slow or stop your swing at the ball to control distance. That is a sure shank method with no redemption. Dr. Gary Wiren, golf instructor, teaches, "Decelerating on the downswing leads to fat pitches, so make sure you keep the club moving...accelerate through the ball for crisp contact."<sup>1</sup>

Four factors comprise a good short game: club leverage, clubhead speed (power), the club face's loft angle, and acceleration through the ball at contact. For consistent and confident control shots, you must reduce the variables within these factors to a minimum, preferably to zero. To achieve this goal, first choose one club for your entire short game (except sand—refer to Subchapter 7.5).

Whether your one club is a 9-iron or chosen from the wedge bunch, choose one that is the most comfortable for you. Hey, ya gotta love this club or you won't do well! By using only one club for your short game, you have quickly eliminated two variables—club length (leverage) and loft angle. Don't worry, you can add clubs later. For now, stay with one club until you're comfortable with this new method.

The third factor, the power variable, causes many of the problems. This can be controlled by using the same methods as full-power shots, except one. You use the same stance, the same line of sweet spots, the same no-backswing backswing, the same stop before downswing, and the same checkout process, but the exception is, you do not pre-coil your body or trigger your wrists for a full-power generating downswing. Gola and Monteleone write: "Imagine trying to hit from a complete standstill—no movement of the hands, no coiling action, no stride, no separation—just swinging the bat from an inert position. Your hits would come sparingly and be devoid of power. You must have some preliminary movement to generate fluidity and power."<sup>2</sup>

In full-power shots, you utilize back-coiling, loading the body, and other tricks to downswing with full power. In the short game, you take advantage of the basic laws of physics and body mechanics. Control your power by starting your downswing from a standstill. You control the shot distance by the length of your downswing. You no longer need to control your arm speed or to take practice swings to feel the shot and then wonder if that feel will drop the ball in the cup. The location of your club on the downswing arc will pre-set the shot distance. From a pre-set, top-start position, you downswing as hard as you can. This method will feel awkward at first, but it works. Do not snap your wrists into the ball. This is not a power stroke. If you turn your hands or wrists during your backswing, yes, of course, you must return them to their original position at address. But do not return them as part of the swing power, or you defeat the intent of the downswing as a control shot.

Swinging down as hard as you can from a top-start position without a back-coiling, power trigger, accomplishes two things: (1) it eliminates the difficult and error-prone problem of how fast to swing your arms for the control shot, and (2) it automatically forces you to accelerate through the ball. By using the same club, making the same swing for all control shots, no matter what the distance to the pin, and automatically accelerating through the ball, you reduce pitching variables to zero.

## 7.2 ZERO TO SIXTY

Let's use an analogy to explain this concept. You're a 600-horsepower, rear-engine dragster rumbling at the starting line. You're a mean machine at the lights. The light quickly drops from red to green. You roar off belching fire and brimstone. At 330 feet, you hit 27 mph. At 660 feet, you hit 90 mph. At 1,320 feet (quarter mile), you're clocked at 250 mph and still accelerating—all under six seconds!

Now back to golf. Like the accelerating dragster hitting higher speeds the farther it travels, your accelerating clubhead will achieve higher speeds the farther it travels on the downswing arc. Remember, clubhead speed determines distance. Maybe the clubhead travel distance from the halfway point on your downswing arc will generate forty-seven yards of distance. Maybe the clubhead travel distance from the three-quarter point will generate seventy-five yards, and so forth (Figure 7a). The clubhead travel distance in feet equals the shot distance in yards.

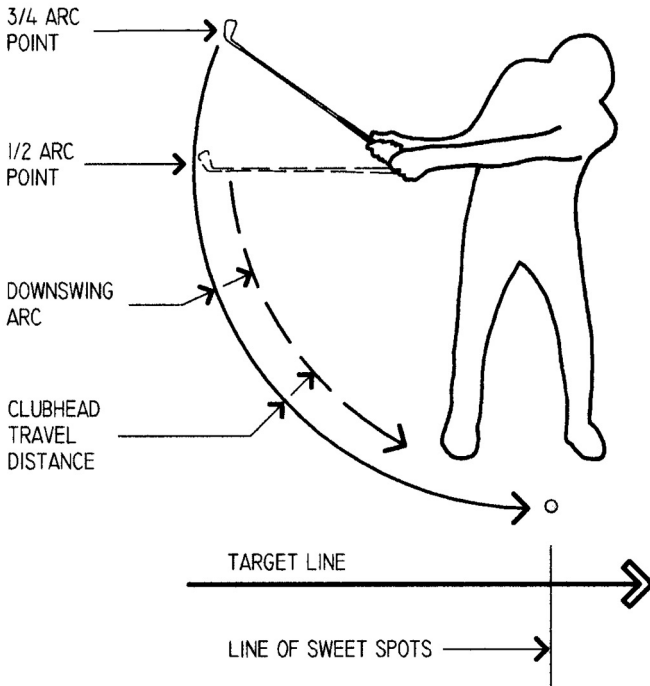


Figure 7a. Downswing Distance

As a playing routine, you grab your one, short-game club, set up for the shot, then no-backswing backswing to a chosen point on the downswing arc, and stop. If you choose the halfway arc point, the club is usually parallel with the ground. So far, you have done everything exactly the same as a full-power shot. What you have learned and practiced thus far is not modified. You do not have to change your setup and swing for the short game. This type of consistency can only improve your game. The big difference is how you downswing from a specific point on the downswing arc. You downswing as hard as you can from a dead standstill—no back-coil, no triggers! Your only involvement is learning what distance you achieve from each arc point. Practice, practice, practice, is unnecessary. Once you finish your research and learn your distances from each arc point, you're in fat city!

### 7.3 PERSONAL PITCHING POINTS

Planning your shot becomes more important as you approach the pin. Know exactly where you want the ball to land, if it will roll, and how far. Systematically plan your pitch shots and leave a little room for error. Planning eliminates insecurities, confusion, throat-clutching, and dreaded shanks. In *Baseballgolf*, the no-windup pitch has the bonus of improving your pitch shot ability as you play. You are no longer pressured with guessing each time you have a short shot and never really improving. As you play, you are logically learning and improving each shot. If there are any changes or revisions, then you record them for future use. The planning factors for determining your exact shot distance are: (1) where you place your clubhead on your downswing arc, and (2) your hand location on the club shaft.

The first step is choosing top-start points on your downswing arc. You can choose as many points as you like and give them any name you prefer. Your nomenclature can be numbers on a clock, fractions of the arc, standard golf names, or anything you invent. You could call the halfway point on the downswing arc “half,” “nine o'clock,” or “my mojo workin' point.” Choose whether you will mentally picture your hands or your clubhead on the downswing arc points. Use whatever suits your personality and playing style. These will be your own Personal Pitching Points (Figure 7b).

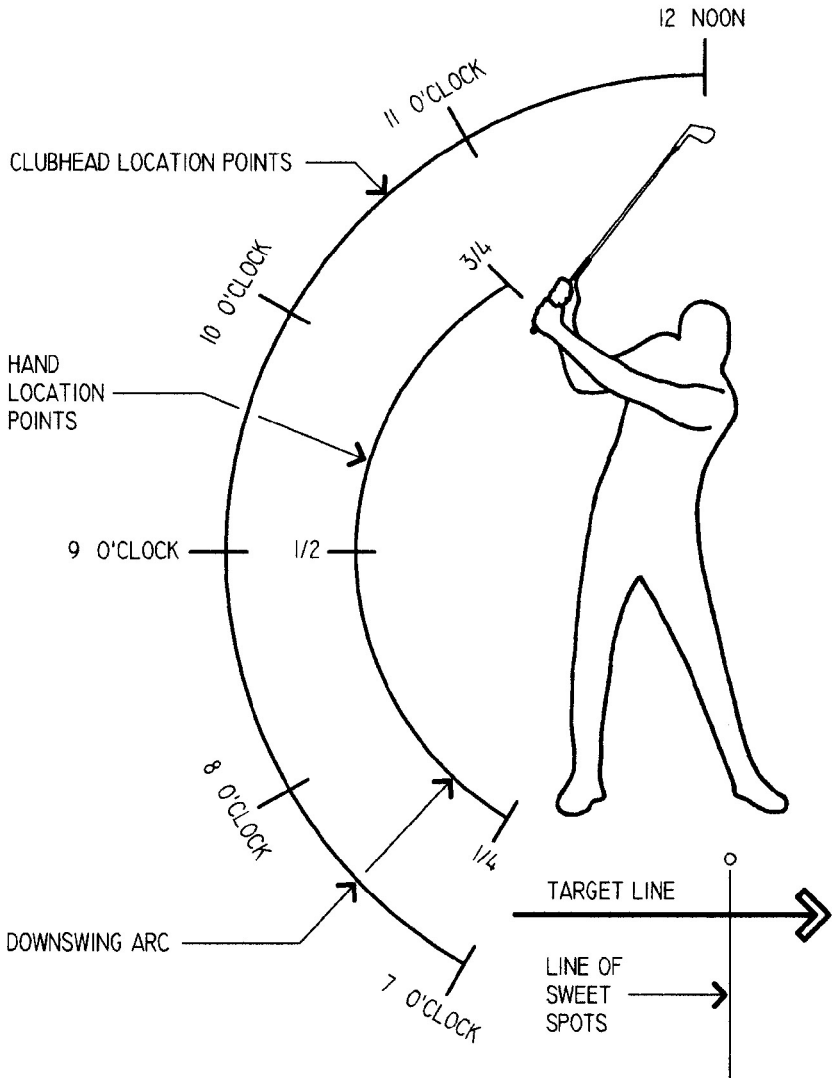


Figure 7b. Personal Pitching Points

The second step is going to your favorite driving range or grassy field and determining your exact distance. When positioning your club for the pitch shot, bring your club back exactly as you would for the full-power shots. Don't get cute and do extra hand and wrist movements, like so many pros use. Do not break your wrists. Do not use a back-coil or any "loading" trigger. Start your down-

swing from a dead standstill. Do not snap your wrists for extra distance. Remember, these are control shots, not full-power shots. To fill out your short game repertoire, use two hand locations from each of your chosen downswing arc points. Use a normal grip at the end of the club shaft and a choke grip.

In baseball, spray hitters or slap hitters always choke up on the bat. When the manager asks a batter to make contact and hit behind the runner at first so he can get over to third, most batters, though certainly not all, will choke up on the bat. Believe me, it is the rare home-run hitter who is asked to hit behind a runner. Most home-run hitters don't choke up on their bats. But when you want a line drive out of the infield to bring in the base runner from a scoring position and win the game, then you want bat control and a quicker swing to increase your chances for making solid contact. Baseball players do this by choking up on the bat. Bernardo Leonard explains, "In the *modified choke* the bottom hand grips the bat approximately two inches above the knob. With the *complete choke* the bottom hand grips the bat a good six inches above the knob."<sup>3</sup> Golfers can do the same but for different reasons.

If you adjust your hand location on the club shaft, you alter the swing leverage and create the advantage of having two shot distances from the same starting point on the downswing arc. If you chose five starting points, you might have eight to ten distances, depending on whether you achieve the same distance with one of your normal and one of your choke grips. Choose your own choke point but keep your hands within the grip area of the club shaft. Depending on your style, you can be very precise in your pitch shots or have a "hit a zone" approach. A word of caution: when you choke up on the club, you must bend over more to get the club face on the ball. Remember, do not lift your body during your backswing setup. Once you're confident of consistent shot distances, record them for posterity.

## 7.4 RANGE RULER

Make your own personal pitching guide. You can call it whatever you want, because it is your own guide for playing the short game. Here in *Baseballgolf*, we'll call it a Range Ruler (Figure 7c). Copy it for your use. Choose any style. Whether you use quarter points, clock points, or description of hand location, choose whatever is best for your mental picture. Pick your control club and record the distance from each point on your downswing arc using both hand locations. When finished, you should have an entire range of distances from eight



to eighty-eight yards. If your driving range does not have a breakdown of distances under a hundred yards or practice greens nearby, here are a couple of suggestions. Go to a grassy field and step off five- or ten-yard increments and mark them with small orange cones or flag markers from a sporting goods store. While determining your pitching distances, use a different brand, color, or number of ball from each personal pitching point of your downswing arc. When you go check for distance, you'll know which ball is the result of which pitching point. Another suggestion is to use a football field. Hit your balls off one of the goal lines. Another possibility is to use the pin distances engraved on the golf course sprinkler head covers (assuming your course has them). If your course is never empty enough for this research, try it during off-hours.

If you cannot learn short distances around the green, then hit between two sprinkler head distances out on the fairway. If one sprinkler head is 120 yards from the pin and another one is 80 yards, learn what personal pitching point will give you a 40-yard shot from the one sprinkler head to the other one. Another possibility is to use a laser rangefinder. A problem here is the PGA prohibits their use, and so many golf pro shops won't sell them. Another option is having a friend mark your balls after you shoot. However you accomplish the task, write your results on your Range Ruler. Then carry it with you during the round, and if available, cross-check it with the pin distance on the fairway sprinkler heads, or with your illegal, laser range finder, or make a gut check. With your Range Ruler in hand, you will always be sure of your pitch shot distance.

<b>RANGE RULER</b>		
<b>CLUB :</b> _____		
GRIP	ARC POINT	DISTANCE
NORMAL		
CHOKE		
NOTES		

Figure 7c. Range Ruler

## 7.5 GAME ADJUSTMENTS

No game plays perfectly. If it did, you'd be a PGA champion. During a round, you may have pitch shots to hit under a low-hanging tree branch, out of a sand trap, from a heavy rough, on an uphill or downhill lie, from a grass bunker, over trees or over water. We're talking golf here, my friend. If your chosen club cannot do the job as described here, then of course, add other ones for the exceptional situation. Don't forget, USPGA rules allow a maximum of fourteen clubs in your bag.

What about sand traps? Oh, yeah, those %&@\$@ things. The no-windup pitch shot methods still apply, but your distances are completely different from your normal pitch shots. For sand trap shots, the rule of thumb is double the power of your grass pitch for the same distance. Maybe this rule doesn't work for you. The simple solution for all of these game adjustments is to establish a "set it and forget it" routine for any club(s) you believe are necessary for your game. Grab a sand wedge, head for the hated traps, and learn what distances you achieve from the various points on the downswing arc. Do this for any club but wait until you are completely comfortable with the routine using only one club for your short game.

The very short, edge-of-the-green putch shot may not fit within your no-windup distances. The shortest distance obtainable with your Chosen One may irritatingly run the ball off the green on the other side for another pitch shot back (been there, done that, eh?). For these micro-mini shots, you must make more adjustments. You could try a pitch-and-roll shot by choosing a low point on your arc and downswinging with only half speed. Maybe you prefer using a punch-and-roll shot with a Texas wedge (putter) or a middle iron. Be careful, there are different rules of thumb for lob distance versus running distance for the type of club you use. Whatever your preference, use the principles of the no-windup method to establish your own pitching distances. Don't let the game dump on you. Make adjustments and beat it.

## 7.6 TOM & JERRY

The golden age of cartoons produced *Bugs Bunny*, *Woody Woodpecker*, *Donald Duck*, *Mighty Mouse*, the *Road Runner*, Mel Blanc, and of course, *Tom and Jerry*. Maybe these cartoons are the golden age because, quite simply, they're old. Whatever the reason, they are so entertaining that I'd watch one anytime. Do you

remember the Tom and Jerry episode called “Jerry and Jumbo”? A baby elephant falls off a passing zoo train, rolls downhill into Tom and Jerry’s house, and Jerry disguises the baby elephant as a giant mouse. Then the mother elephant arrives to retrieve her baby. I’ll bet Tom cat is still screaming and running away.

In Major League Baseball, the pitcher and the hitter are always playing a cat and mouse game. The pitcher and the catcher study a hitter’s tendencies and call a sequence of pitches, which, they believe, will get the batter out. The hitter, on the other hand, studies the pitcher’s tendencies, logs what he threw at him the last time, and makes adjustments accordingly. A hitter moves forward in the batter’s box, because he believes the next pitch is a slider, and the batter is positioning himself to swing at the pitch before it breaks. The catcher might spot the batter’s adjustment and quickly call for a fastball. The unsuspecting batter will never hit it. The pitcher hopes it’s in the strike zone.

The manager is also part of this Tom & Jerry game. Knowing where a batter likely will hit the sequence of pitches being called for, the manager will adjust the fielders’ positions to increase the odds for getting an out. The old axiom is correct. Baseball is a game of adjustments. Golf is a game of adjustments. Ergo, *Baseballgolf* is a game of adjustments. But you have less to worry about!



# 8

## *Face Putting Head-On*

Putting is half the game. It's true. Go figure. A golf course is designed allowing two strokes per green in regulation. At eighteen holes, that's thirty-six strokes, or fifty percent of the standard seventy-two stroke golf course. That sounds like half to me, which means, "putting for dough" has validity. LPGA champion Hilary Lunke says: "Who says golf is a power game? In winning the 2003 U.S. Women's Open, I averaged just 230 yards off the tee. But I holed nearly all of my putts inside ten feet."<sup>1</sup> A three-foot putt scores exactly the same as a 300-yard drive. Of course, if you three-putted all the way down a 300-yard fairway, no one would invite you to play in their foursome. Golf is still a game of all-out blasts for distance, pitching finesse around the greens, and precise putting on the greens. Successful putting is defined as stroking the ball with the exact force and direction necessary to follow every green-meanie break, arrive at the little cup, dead on and ready to drop. From this definition alone, putting doesn't even sound easy. You set up by the book, concentrate, stroke smoothly, then watch the ball do strange and puzzling things as it misses the cup. You can never figure out what you're doing wrong. Your putter is either your trusty friend or your rusty traitor. How come?

### **8.1 CROSS-EYED OPTIMIST**

*South Pacific* is a World War II musical about a mature plantation owner who wants to marry a young Navy nurse stationed on his island. The chorus sings a song called "A Cockeyed Optimist." In golf, if you believe the best putting stance is the traditional sideways position, then you too can be a plantation owner in the South Pacific. Follow along with me here. When it's your turn to putt, the first thing you do is go behind your ball, face the pin, and study the green. Some of you squat down with your putter extended in front of you as an aiming device. By facing the pin, your eyes see in their normal alignment. If you wear glasses,

you see through their optics as designed. From this natural, face-the-pin position, you “read” the green. Where’s the break? Which is the green’s high side? Which way is the grass facing? Once you get a feel for the putting line into the cup, you walk to your ball.

But notice what you do next. You turn your body sideways, tilt your head down, and swivel your head sideways. That’s a lot of sideways. The result is a complete change in your position, and you lose your feel for the putt that you had while looking from straight-on behind the ball. Your sideways head swivel results in your eyes being in an awkward vertical line perpendicular to the ground. In this position, one eye is on top of your other eye and they are usually stuffed in their own corners. Your eyes cannot function properly from this position, and your nose partially obstructs the right eye’s vision. If you wear glasses, the rims and possibly the optics will obstruct and distort your vision. Your right eye could be completely blocked. This obstructs the three-dimensional aspect of your vision and makes you a cross-eyed optimist.

Golf’s teaching professionals explain that you have a dominant eye and a “groupie.” The groupie eye provides the third dimension. These same teaching pros tell you that when you sight the putt out the corners of your eyes, you compensate for the error of parallax by keeping your dominant eye on the putting line. If you learn your dominant eye is on the wrong side of your head, your eyes will have to be retrained. Then if you have trouble retraining your eyes, the pros further advise that you use your left elbow as your sighting elbow. It should aim along the target line and be away from your body. But not too far away, because you must beware of opening or closing your shoulders too much.

OK, OK, enough already! In *South Pacific*, the “cockeyed optimist” eventually wins the young nurse, but cockeyed vision may not be the best approach to putting. If you have problems putting, you may want to consider a new baseball vision.

## 8.2 LAY ONE DOWN

Baseball players hit for full power over the fences. Baseball players slap control hits through holes in the infield or open spots in the outfield. Baseball does not have a hole in the outfield ground for the ball to drop in for a score. Baseball players do not read greens. But, when a baseball team is not winning and cannot get hits, the manager attempts to manufacture runs. At some point in the lineup, this usually means a bunt. When a batter is given the bunt signal, he turns his

body ninety degrees, squares off, and faces the pitcher (unless it's a drag bunt which is rare in today's game). The player adjusts his hands on the bat for better control. Nellie Fox, considered one of the best bunters in the history of baseball, told Ted Williams: "The top hand on the bat moves up to the trademark, the fingers holding the bat there as gingerly as possible. The thumb should be on the trademark."

"The top hand acts as a fulcrum; the bottom hand guides the direction of the bunt. The looseness of the top hand helps deaden the action of the ball."<sup>2</sup> A baseball player bunts to a specific infield area, forcing a specific fielder to make the play. This is similar to a golfer who must putt to a specific area of the green. You know—that area called a cup!

With a ninety-degree rotation from his power stance, the batter clearly follows the path of the pitch to the ball's contact on the bat. From the bunt stance, a batter cannot hit for power, because hitting a good fastball would knock him on his butt. When hitting for power, a batter's feet must be in the same direction as the pitch so his rear leg can brace him against the pitch. By facing the pitcher, the batter's eyes are viewing side-by-side in their three-dimensional design. If he's wearing contacts or prescription glasses, he's looking through their optics as they were designed with no distortion. The batter has a complete picture of the situation and has bat control. Sounds good to me.

Applying baseball's bunt techniques to putting has produced some knee-jerk reactions: "It's not professional;" "Hey, dude, ya ain't gonna make me look stupid;" and "Stuff it where the sun don't shine." I understand such reactions, but this technique originated with PGA champion Sammy Snead, who was one of the best golfers ever. Many decades ago, Snead stood facing the cup, with the ball in front of him and the putting line extending between his legs (Figure 8a). To him, it was the most logical and best putting technique. Snead would have perfected his astride technique, but PGA tour officials invoked USGA Rule 16-1e, which reads:

"The player shall not make a *stroke* on the *putting green* from a *stance* astride, or with either foot touching, the *line of the putt* or an extension of that line behind the ball."

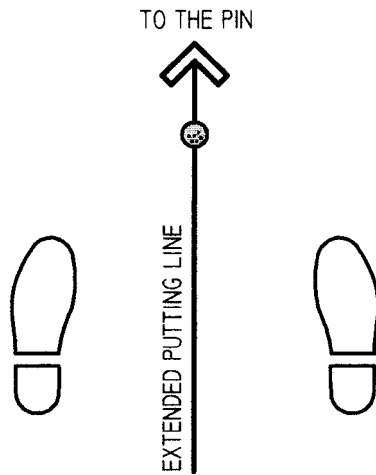


Figure 8a. Illegal Astride Putting

Snead still believed he had invented the better mousetrap and altered his face-up style to conform to the USGA Rules. By placing both feet left of the putting line extension, facing the cup, and putting the ball off his right foot, Snead's style was accepted by PGA/USGA officials. He had solved the rules problem but still had another major one—traditional putters are not designed for this style. To compensate, Snead gripped the shaft with his left hand at the top and his right hand a couple of feet above the putter blade (Figure 8b). For his putt, he held his left hand stationary and pushed the ball toward the hole with his right hand. You can argue about his putting style, but you cannot argue about Snead's success on the golf course. The sidesaddle style may be second best to Snead's original astride method, but it is unquestionably superior to the traditional putting stance.



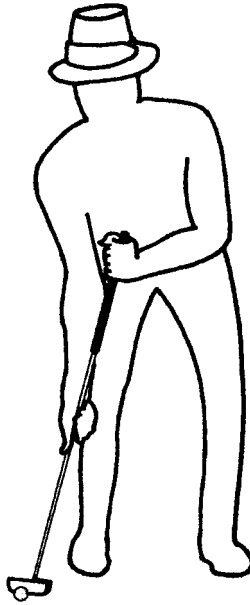


Figure 8b. Puttin' Sammy Snead

For golfers, an upright, face-the-hole putting stance eliminates these traditional problems:

- Inside-to-inside stroke plane
- Outside-to-outside stroke plane
- Closely coordinating your bent elbows
- Excessive head lifting
- Inward or outward knee angles
- Opening or closing shoulders
- Elbow tucking

That's a lot of eliminated problems! In addition, the legs are apart and stable. Your body prevents an excessive backswing and forces you to accelerate through the ball. This is the ideal situation. Because your arms swing free and easy, a good follow-through is more readily accomplished. Your hands and your wrists remain more rigid for better control. Sounds wonderful, but where's the putter?

## 8.3 JAWS

A putter is like modern art. You either like it or you don't. In this love/hate relationship, if your good ol' buddy putter misses a couple of gimmies, you throw the bastard out, and buy a new one. And why not? There's a supermarket of putter goodies at your pro shop featuring high-tech bends and crooks, exotic metals, black-magic finishes, and leveling and aiming bubbles. But, alas, there is no putter available for a head-on, sidesaddle style of putting. So we must design one from scratch.

The grip shaft should be as long as possible so you can hold it in any manner you wish from top to bottom. A long grip shaft allows the club to be held low to the ground for better control on short putts or higher in normal locations for more power without the error-prone, big swing on long putts. It should be thicker than the standard putters, at least one and one-eighth-inch diameter for the entire length of the shaft. The extra thickness allows a firmer, more substantial hold, similar to the reasons for using the Ouchless Grip (refer to Section 3.3). And, of course, it must conform to the *USGA Rules of Golf*.

*Appendix II, Design of Clubs, Section 2a, Club Straightness:* "The shaft shall be straight from the top of the grip to a point not more than 5 inches (127 mm) above the sole, measured from the point where the shaft ceases to be straight along the axis of the bent part of the shaft and the neck and/or socket."

*Appendix II, Design of Clubs, Section 3, Grip:* "The grip consists of material added to the shaft to enable the player to obtain a firm hold. The grip shall be straight and plain in form, shall extend to the end of the shaft and shall not be molded for any part of the hands...*(i)* For clubs other than putters the grip must be circular in cross-section...*(ii)* A putter grip may have a non-circular cross-section, provided the cross-section has no concavity, is symmetrical and remains generally similar throughout the length of the grip."

So far, so good.

Between the grip shaft and the club face is the neck. The neck connects the club shaft to the clubhead, but the sidesaddle style needs for the neck to be angled away from the club shaft, allowing a clear, unobstructed view of the clubhead while putting. This clear view promotes better sighting while standing over the ball and aligning your putt. Again, we must be legal here.

*Appendix II, Design of Clubs, Section 2c, Attachment to Clubhead:* "The shaft shall be attached to the clubhead at the heel either directly or through a sin-

gle plain neck and/or socket. The length from the top of the neck and/or socket to the sole of the club shall not exceed 5 inches (127 mm), measuring along the axis of, and following any bend in, the neck and/or socket.

**“Exception for Putters:** The shaft or neck or socket of a putter may be fixed at any point in the head.”

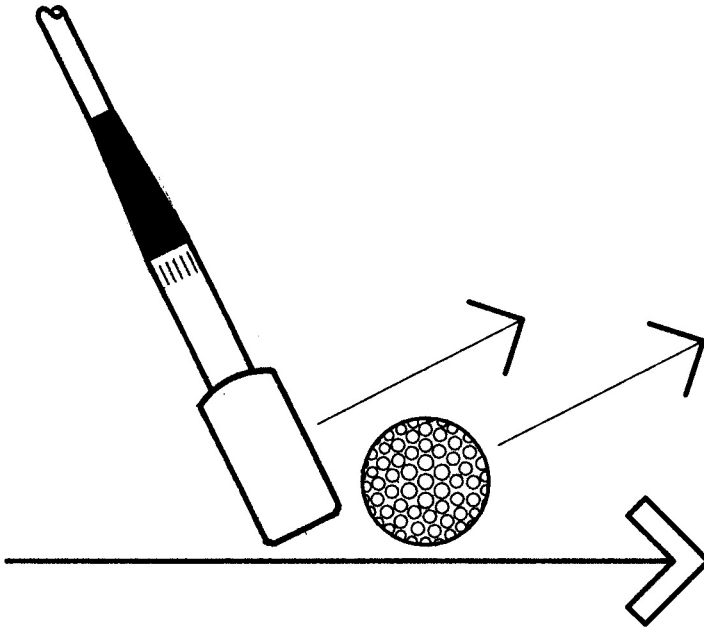


Figure 8c. We Have Lift-off

Moving right along.

With the head-on, sidesaddle style, the preferred clubhead design breaks with tradition. The reason is the traditional flat, putter face causes problems. During your putting stroke, the flat putter blade gives you no wiggle room for error. For example, Figure 8c shows an exaggerated view of the putter face hitting the ball on the upstroke. This error lifts the ball, may cause it to bounce and greatly reduces your chances of getting the ball in the hole. The opposite problem is pounding the ball into the green. If your putter had a circular cross-section, you would eliminate both problems. The circular cross-section borrows its advantages from billiards. Two spheres of equal diameter have a single point of contact at

their exact center. Some call it the “ball’s equator,” while others are more visceral and call it the “belly.”

Whatever you call it, place two equal-size balls on a flat surface and nothing but a single point of contact is possible (Figure 8d). A circular, cross-section putter face automatically imparts the ideal, true end-over-end, upstroke on the golf ball. This pure, forward motion has no sidewinder characteristics and causes the ball to roll straighter and more accurately than any other type of hit. This upstroke is the same as “high English” in billiards or the forehand power stroke in tennis and is very desirable in putting. The ball will always be hit parallel to the green. Only extremely poor technique would cause any other result.

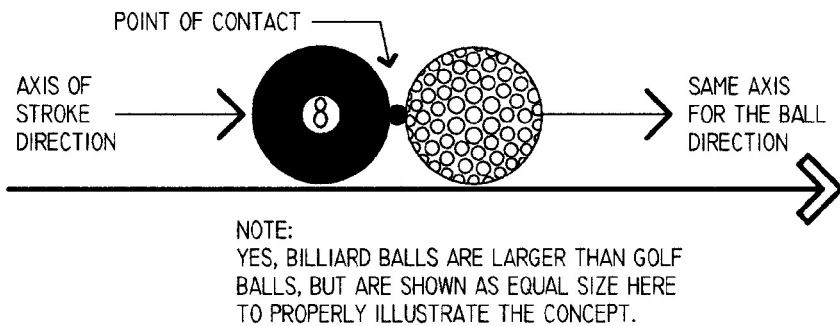


Figure 8d. Parallel Point of Contact

However, a putter face should not be another sphere because it is an impractical aiming device, and your stroke would have to be machine perfect for any success. A tube is best, similar to a bat in baseball. When you hit a pitch with a round bat at exactly the same points of contact as the billiard balls, you’ll get a solid hit and many times it’ll be a homerun. The result of this design looks like one of the sea’s deadliest creatures—the Hammerhead Shark (Figure 8e). You will prowl the knee-knocker zone with confidence, because this putter is deadly! But is it legal?

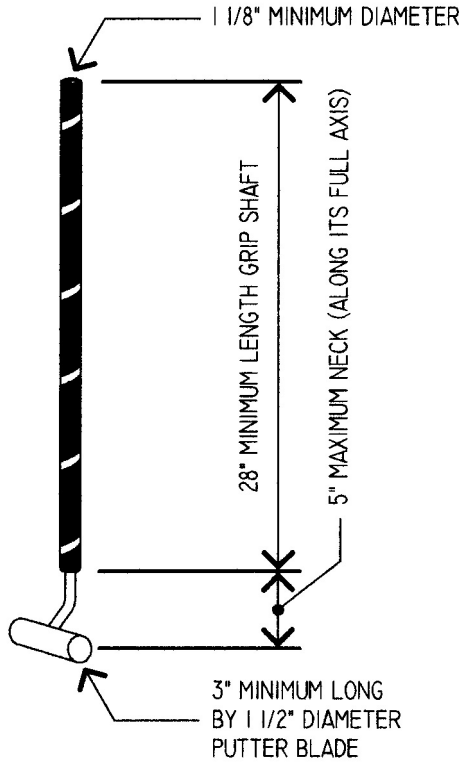


Figure 8e. Hammerhead Putter  
(Note: the author has a patent on this putter design.)

*USGA Rules of Golf, Appendix II, Design of Clubs:*

*Section 4a, Clubhead, Plain Shape:* "The clubhead shall be generally plain in shape. All parts shall be rigid, structural in nature and functional."

*Section 4c, Clubhead, Striking Faces:* "The clubhead shall have only one striking face, except that a putter may have two such faces if their characteristics are the same, and they are opposite each other."

*Section 5a, Club Face, General:* "The material and construction of, or any treatment to, the face or clubhead shall not have the effect at impact of a spring (test on file), or impart significantly more spin to the ball than a stan-

hard steel face, or have any other effect which would unduly influence the movement of the ball.

“The face of the club shall be hard and rigid (some exceptions may be made for putters) and, except for such markings listed below, shall be smooth and shall not have any degree of concavity.”

In the last excerpt above, the “markings listed below” pertain to roughness, material, sharp edges, raised lips, grooves, and decorative markings. “Concavity” is an inner curvature like a bowl, not outer as in convex like a ball or tube. The bottom line is nothing in the USGA rules prohibits a putter clubhead/face being circular or tubular in shape. Fill in the tube with solid material, such as a child’s play dough or an artist’s plasticum, and you’re all set.

The final piece of this putter design puzzle is a launch pad—an impact-deadening putter surface. A metal wood is one of golfdom’s favorite clubs. Though most golfers hate the sound, metal wood users are popeyed over the “up to twenty-five extra yards.” In college and sandlot baseball, the aluminum bat is everywhere. In professional baseball, the aluminum bat is nowhere. It’s banned. Besides Louisville Slugger’s special interest, when an Incredible Hulk pro batter hits a rock-hard baseball, it rockets off an aluminum bat and could kill an Incredible Hulk infielder. Wood is the bat of choice in Major League Baseball.

When you putt in golf, the wound-up, dimpled, little ball gets a rocket assist from the metal putter blade. This is exactly what the Big Blast Ball does not need—a jet-assisted takeoff. The metal putter blade contributes to the erratic nature of the berserk little ball, deflecting off at an angle to the stroke line, or getting a jump-start bounce or a sidewinder start like a desert rattler. The solution is to deaden the impact of the putter blade. All of today’s putter blades are metal, but you can apply an impact-deadening material. There are many products available that can be used. Office supply stores have self-adhesive felt for furniture or desk items. Drug stores have self-adhesive pads for your feet and other parts. Another option is to grab some double-faced tape or rubber cement and use them with carpet underlayment or rubber mat. All these products can be cut to fit for easy application on the putter face. When you try it, you will learn firsthand how much more ball control you have. You will also learn such applications are illegal.

*USGA Rules of Golf, Rule 4–2, Playing Characteristics Changed and Foreign Material, Section b, Foreign Material:* “Foreign material may not be applied to the club face for the purpose of influencing the movement of the ball.”

PENALTY FOR BREACH OF RULE 4–1 or–2:

Disqualification.

Anyway, if your fellow players agree or you simply want to experiment, apply a deadening, foreign material to your putter face and check the results. You'll hear a deep thud instead of the high-pitched, metallic sound that signals another ball rocket taking off. For those of you with a penchant for rules, there is a loophole. As shown in the USGA rules quoted above, rules for putters are quite loose, with many exceptions being made for them.

*USGA Rules of Golf, Appendix II, Design of Clubs, Section 5f, Club Face, Putter Face:* "The specifications above with regard to roughness, material and markings in the impact area do not apply to putters."

Former USGA technical director, Frank Thomas, once offered the opinion that the Rule Book allows you to make a putter out of anything, including plastic. All of this means, if you apply a foreign material to an already manufactured putter, the club is illegal. But, if you manufacture the putter out of the exact same "foreign material," the putter is perfectly legal. This, my friends, is a loophole. Do with it what you wish.

## 8.4 GOOSEY THE LOOSEY

The human hands are engineering marvels. They can spiral a football, meticulously fashion a watch, prune flowers, drive a Formula One race car, and hand a kid-proof bottle cap over to a kid to open. Their versatility stems from their flexible wrists. For golfers, this is a good news/bad news situation. Over the decades, the putting motion has evolved from a wristy, jabbing stroke to an arm/shoulder stroke with almost no wrist action. On the tour, Jack Nicklaus pioneered the no-wrist-movement putting stroke. If you use a loosey-goosey wrist movement in your putting stroke, you'll miss. During your putt, twisting the putter face a mere quarter of an inch off-line results in a missed four-foot or longer putt.

Accurate putting demands tough tolerances with fixed, disciplined wrists. One sure method for reducing or eliminating floppy wrists is moving your hands apart on the club shaft. When your hands are close together gripping the club shaft, your wrists tend to act as one flexible joint, becoming soft and moveable. When bunting in baseball, Gola and Monteleone instruct: "Move your hands up on the bat to improve your control. Do not leave both hands down on the handle. This reduces your control of the bat and allows the barrel to dip easily. Slide your bot-

tom hand (left hand for right-handed hitters) up to the top of the handle (or grip). Slide your top hand just above the trademark. Holding the bat in these spots will give you excellent control of the bat.”<sup>3</sup> Holding your hands apart, even a couple of inches, reduces wrist flexibility and increases firmness of the grip (Figure 8f).

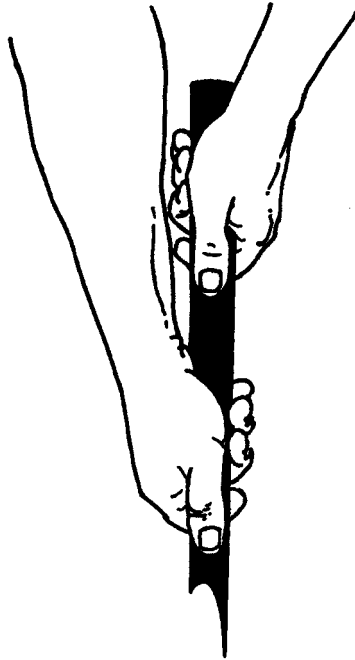


Figure 8f. Wrist Control

Because putting is so personal, there is no hard-and-fast rule for distance between hands. To avoid a misaligned putter face, the only rule is to keep your wrists stiff. You may prefer adjusting your hand location for various distances. Place your hands higher up the putter shaft for better leverage on long putts and reposition them farther down the shaft for control on short putts. This is your personal preference. The choice of hand locations for putting distances cannot be applied effectively to traditional putting techniques. This, then, is another inherent advantage of the head-on, bunt-a-putt style and technique. Apply it well.



## 8.5 HAMMERHEAD-ON PUTTING

With the design of the ideal putter and a functional grip, we can now work on technique. Head-on putting needs a hammerhead putter for the best hands-on experimenting. If you have not searched a pro shop for an existing putter that will fit your pistol, then make a mock-up. Borrow a croquet mallet or cut off an old broom handle (minimum thirty-two inches long) and super-glue it to a short piece of thick-wall, PVC pipe (minimum size: one-and-a-half-inch outside diameter and three inches long). If you choose to use the side of a croquet mallet, you'll learn that the diameter of most croquet mallet tubes is perfect for hitting a golf ball at its center tangent point, but you'll also learn that the mallet handle is too short and skinny.

If you're serious about using a croquet mallet as a practice putter, then lengthen and fatten the handle by gluing a piece of PVC pipe to it. The PVC should be thick-wall, minimum of twenty-eight inches long, and glue it starting at four inches from the top of the mallet tube. The easiest method is choose a PVC pipe with an inside diameter that slips over the mallet handle. The croquet mallet as a makeshift hammerhead will not have a bent neck that projects the putter blade beyond shaft. This will make sighting your putting line a bit more difficult, but it is still better than the traditional putters available.

If you're not a Mr. Fix-It type, standard putters are awkward, but find one that's usable for you. If you choose the head-on, sidesaddle style of putting, you'll be forced to use an available putter until a hammerhead putter is manufactured and approved by the USGA (have a nice wait). But try learning with a hammerhead mock-up before switching to a traditional putter.

At first, you'll learn there are head-on putting basics that hold for any technique or position you choose. Rules of thumb for any head-on technique include your head and your arms. Remember from your full-power days, your head is the linchpin. This is also true for putting. Once you start your swing, concentrate on the ball and don't move your head during your stroke. If you move your head too soon, your shoulders will move and you'll miss your putt. SLIMASH your arms and wrists as much as possible within the position you choose. Keep your loosey-goosey wrists firm and straight. The traditional putting motion has bent arms and hunched shoulders swinging sideways, ideally in unison. All that upper-body movement means more muscles must be returned to their original position at impact. Again, this technique is error-prone. For head-on putting, use a minimum of muscles in your putting stroke.

The hammerhead putter has a subtle advantage. Whether you stand or squat while lining up your putt, if you sight behind the ball with the putter stretched out in front of you (Figure 8g), hammerhead will “hinge” into putting position (Figure 8h) without the traditional lifting of the putter, walking around the ball, or other conventional repositioning, which destroy your mind’s eye. This subtle feature promotes an unbroken concentration and feel for the putt. Once you’ve “hinged” yourself into your head-on setup, your stance is correct if your eyes are directly over the ball. From this setup, you align your putter using only up and down eye movement, with minimal or, preferably, no head movement. Your backswing may be any speed, or one continuous motion, or stop at the top as with full-power shots. The reverse trigger is not necessary. Because the head-on backswing does not generate any power by winding up the muscles, power must be generated by the forward stroke. This forces acceleration through the ball, an automatic advantage for good putting.

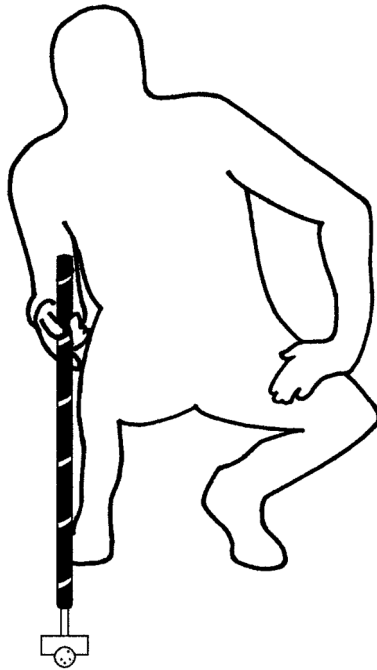


Figure 8g. Squat Lining

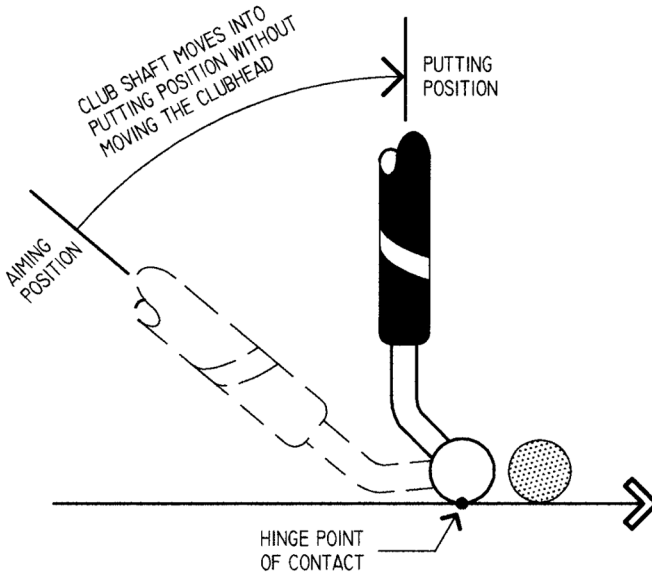


Figure 8h. Hammerhead Hinge

Another advantage to head-on putting is that it inhibits a long backswing, a major misalignment factor in putting. By forcing a short backswing, the clubhead stays close to the ground and increases your chances of a good stroke on the ball. Your follow-through should be a smooth extension of your forward stroke. Acting as one unit, extend your arms and the club as much as possible. The final, head-on putting stroke should be smooth, using the fewest muscles possible. Accelerate softly through the ball and finish with a full-arm extension follow-through. This is good, basic stuff.

Here's more. There are four, basic sidesaddle styles:

1. Push Putt
2. One-Armed Bandit
3. Seesaw
4. Your Own Thing

The Push Putt was Snead's favorite (refer back to Figure 8b). Your left hand holds the putter near the top, while your right hand grips the putter as close to the blade as you choose. You can bend over, squat, or almost kneel, whatever is most comfortable for you and gives you the best view of your putting line. Stroke

the ball as much as possible using only your right arm, and keep your left hand stationary during the stroke. Remember to maintain stiff, straight wrists.

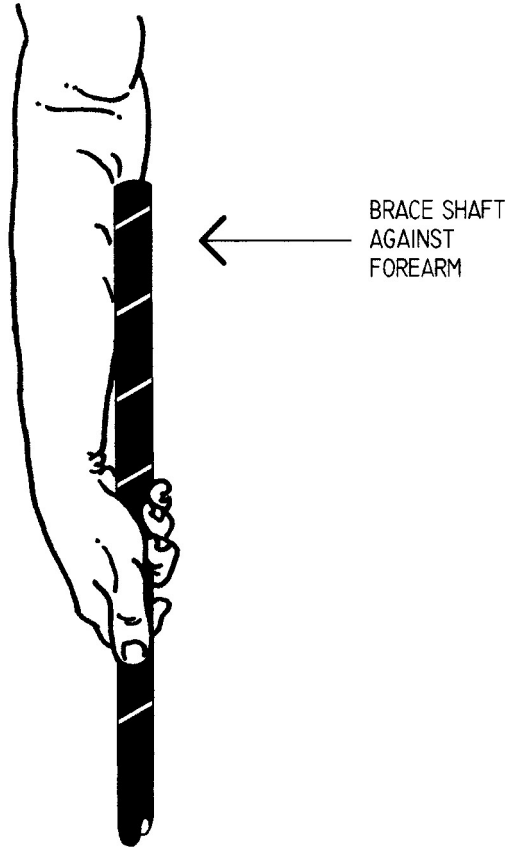


Figure 8i. One-Armed Bandit Forearm

The One-Armed Bandit is my favorite on the golf course, but not in the casinos. With this technique, your feet can be in a great variety of positions. Whatever makes you comfortable and feels good. You can even use your right foot as a rough aiming device to start getting a feel for the putt. After you place your feet and stand facing the cup, let your right arm hang down, grasping the club shaft at your right hand's comfort point, thumb pointing down the shaft (refer to Figure 8f). Brace the top of

the club shaft against your right forearm (Figure 8i). Your left arm comes over to help brace the club shaft against your right forearm (Figure 8j).



Figure 8j. One-Armed Bandit Stance

Your left arm does not add strength to the stroke movement but merely follows the right arm's motion. The club shaft, right hand and right arm form a unified straight-line pendulum (SLIMASH is always with us). Your putting stroke is a simple pendulum arc with your right shoulder as the hinge point. Do not move your shoulder. Implementing a firmly braced pendulum with a natural swing arc, generated from the shoulder sockets only, will produce a dependable putting stroke.

The Seesaw is a variation on Snead's Push Putt. Use the same stance but reverse hand locations. Your left hand holds the club shaft somewhere in the middle like a seesaw fulcrum. Your right hand holds the top of the club shaft and moves the putter face in a seesaw motion (Figure 8k). The advantages are a short stroke movement and a perfect upstroke that imparts better ball control and for-

ward spin. Producing erratic, sidewinder spins is impossible unless you do it intentionally. The disadvantages are that you use more arm muscles than the first two positions, and you don't have a smooth, pendulum arc.



Figure 8k. See-Saw Stroke

Finally, if you don't like any of these three positions but like the head-on style, then "do your own thing." Find what works best for you. Experiment and learn the advantages of the head-on, sidesaddle style of putting and thank baseball for the bunt. Switching away from the traditional stance is not necessary if you're not comfortable with it. Choose a combination style by playing traditional on long putts, converting to face-up style for short putts, or doing the reverse. The style and the distance at which you switch is your choice. Without the availability of a putter specifically designed for this style, you must improvise your technique to suit what's selling at your pro shop.

## 8.6 HEAVYBALL

When you arrive at the golf course, if you don't have a sparkling, virgin ball for putting, you buy one. You don't want to use any ol' clunker at the bottom of the bag. You want that baby to "have eyes," "run true," "give me some birds." Right? Did you ever consider you may be picking the wrong ball? Think about it. Read any golf ball ad and you realize the first priority is distance. "Our ball will travel thirty-five yards farther than brand XX, because it has forty-three more dimples than any other ball," or, "Our ball is a three-piece ball preferred by the pros," or, "Our ball is a one-piece, bonded ball preferred by the pros." The second priority of golf ball design is the tough, no-cut, last-your-lifetime cover, forged in exotic surlyn, polybutadiene, balata, and all dressed up in hot, optic colors. These balls will rocket over the fairway and are completely incompatible with the finesse of putting. Do you remember the last time you played miniature golf? The slightest stroke on those colorful, little "hand grenades" and they would ricochet around the wood-edged fairways like a bullet inside an Army tank. By imitating a pool player, you hoped to hole out after six caroms off the rails. Where was the putting finesse? Playing on Big Green, the slightest stroke causes the Big Blast Ball to roar off erratically out of control, run over an open cup, and continue on its merry way off the green. Squeaky-clean Sparkly is susceptible to every green-meanie break, lady bug, and worm hole. What you really need is that ol' clunker at the bottom of the bag, a ball that has lost some of its explosiveness. The ball that's good for show off the tee is not good for dough on the greens. But, of course, it's against the rules to change balls for putting.

USGA Rule 15-1: "A player must hole out with the ball played from the *teeing* ground, unless a Rule, herein, permits him to substitute another ball."

There is no other USGA Rule, "herein," period. If your fellow golfers agree, then go ahead and switch balls. It is all part of ball control in putting and improving your game.

## 8.7 READING GRASSES

Besides using your chosen stroke with your favorite putter, another important component of good putting is reading the greens. Analyzing and determining every green-meanie break so your ball runs true to the cup is difficult and frus-

trating. All my attempts at finding a baseball technique which will help improve this important facet of the golf game have been unsuccessful. From grabbing grounders on the big hop to cross-cutting the grass, nothing helps.

As a result, I cannot and will not present tips on how to read greens, putt with intense accuracy, or feel the putting line. Believe me, I am not qualified. I don't even know what type of grass is used in greens. I think it's Saint Pool Table grass, but I'm not sure. Definitely check with the pros on this.

## 8.8 PUTTER CLUTTER

They have names—lots of names. Mezza Monsa, Baby Ben (not a clock), King Cobra, White Hot, Blue Chip (not an athlete), Voodoo Daddy, Futura, Maranello, Bazooka Automatic, and Red X (no, not a drink). What are they? They are names of modern putters. They are all high-tech and look like NASA designed them. They are made from titanium, soft beryllium-copper, carbon steel, polymers, copper-tungsten, blue aluminum, stainless steel, urethane, and lightweight Titalium. What's Titalium? It's a seven-metal alloy. What are the seven metals? What's an alloy? Hmmm, this putter business could be never-ending.

Even *Golf Magazine* is puzzled. "Almost every month we feature a new one in *The Shop*, and each one seems to have a higher MOI (moment of inertia), lower CG (center of gravity), and bigger BOOYA (bite out of your assets) than the last."<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to clarify the dilemma, the magazine's editor, Kevin "Jabba the Putt" Cook, wrote an introduction to an article in the November 2004 issue that tested the top putters on the market. "We put the twenty leading putters though their paces in a carefully designed, minutely measured battle of the blades," Cook writes. "(We) ran the tests and crunched the numbers, we analyzed 240 putts per putter—4,800 attempts, each one measured down to the half-inch. They added up to 17.3 miles of putts, and we think we did a real service to our readers." Yes, they did, and their data proves it.

However, comments in the article by the testers reveal the true nature of the putters. "You gotta love that see-through silver and blue grip." "It's a little soft. I'd prefer a firmer insert." "I like how easily the club swings," and it has "a soft feel at contact." "A suave, cool look. Great show-off factor." "The two-tone seems to enlarge the sweet spot." "I don't know if I could pull that big thing out of my bag." "A gorgeous gunmetal finish and red insert." Like the shoes you wear, the putter you choose reflects you. You can read the specs, compare test results, test



the putter, clean it, do what you want with it, but if you do not like that putter, you're not going to use it. Go with your gut.



# 9

## *Sum of Its Parts*

“Parts is parts,” but we’re not talkin’ chickens here. This golf summary is primarily aimed at those of you who hate reading instructions or documentation of any kind. “Just do it,” the Nike ads say. This summary follows the book’s text in the same sequence. The subchapter numbers are listed in the left margin for easy cross-referencing to the full text for any desired follow-up.

### **Chapter 2 • Stance**

2.1 Plan your shot. Choose your target and know exactly where you want the ball to go.

2.1 If it helps, place an alignment club on the ground as your target line.

2.2 Use a closed stance by placing the tips of your feet (or your heels) parallel with the target line (or alignment club).

2.2 Temporarily align the ball with the inside of your left foot. Later, make any slight adjustments to the ball location per Subchapter 4.2 below.

2.3 Get into the athletic position.

- Place feet shoulder-width apart with your weight evenly balanced.
- Keep knees slightly bent and flexible.
- Bend a little at the waist.
- Lean forward slightly on the balls of your feet.

### **Chapter 3 • Grip**

3.1 Start your SLIMASH grip.

3.1 Lean over slightly and let your arms hang down with your palms parallel and facing each other.

- 3.1 Place the club shaft across the big knuckles of your left hand.
- 3.1 Close your left hand with your thumb straight down the shaft and your arm in a straight line relationship with the club—no twisting and turning.
- 3.1 The right hand fits over the shaft and the thumb in a close, snug relationship—no overlapping and no interlocking.
- 3.1 Keep the right hand in a straight line relationship with your forearm—no twisting and turning.
- 3.1 Check that your knuckles and finger joints are properly aligned.
- 3.2 Relax your grip. Do not hold the club too tight.
- 3.3 You may choose the “Ouchless Option,” (also called the “Triangular Grip”).

### **Chapter 4 • Top-Start**

- 4.1 Address the ball and don't have “hot feet.”
- 4.2 Align the ball along your personal straight line of sweet spots in relation to the center of your swing arc (left shoulder socket/armpit).
- 4.2 Set your club next to your ball maximizing your club's design.
- 4.3 Finalize your stance and address by ensuring your arms and club form a flat swing plane.
- 4.3 Slowly bring your club back in a full arc.
- 4.4 Stop at your favorite top-start position.
- 4.5 Do not move your head out of position.
- 4.6 Check for a flying right elbow by turning your head slightly sideways.
- 4.7 At the same time, check for square wrists at the top.

### **Chapter 5 • Swing**

- 5.1 Back-coil your body as the first move before the downswing.
- 5.1 Forget about your legs. They are not consciously involved in this process.
- 5.2 Before you unleash, make a final pre-flight check of your body positioning.
- 5.2 Make any necessary corrections.

5.3 Finalize your body's back-coil using any personal ritual you think works for you.

5.3 Back-twist your wrists as the trigger pull.

5.4 Instantly snap your wrists into the downswing—the one, big key to a good golf shot

5.5 Downswing your arms easily but get those wrists around.

5.6 Keep your clubhead moving out there and follow through to a complete finish.

Listen for the applause!

## 9.1 TOUR DE LANCE

As prefaced above, this chapter was written primarily for the “I don't need no stinkin' books” macho man. This attitude is OK for the casual player. But, at the other end of the spectrum, you have champion cyclist Lance Armstrong. In 1996, he was diagnosed with testicular cancer, and his doctors advised him that his competition cycling days were over. Less than three painful, recovery years later, Lance renewed his quest. He trained 365 days a year and cycled 450 miles per week. His seven-hour training rides added up to more time on a bike than any of his challengers. Armstrong's seven, consecutive victories in the Tour de France are heralded as one of the greatest athletic feats ever, if not the greatest.

Somewhere between Mr. Casual and the mind-numbing commitment of an exceptional, world champion athlete is you. The quest is now yours. Find your own niche. Do your own thing.

Good luck. Have fun. Live strong.





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