

PLAYING THROUGH

GRIP. THEN RIP.

Most people I play with have too weak of a grip. Why do I say that, and what does it mean? I will explain here. A weak grip causes players to manipulate the club with their hands to square the clubface which is not reliable. One day, you will have a great day and the next, you can't find the planet with your shots. I don't

weak grip with the left hand has the thumb typically pointing directly vertical down the shaft/grip. A weak right hand would be more in the fingers and less in the palm so your hand is more on top of the club.

Conversely, a strong grip will have the club more in the



Photos: Editor

know how many times I have heard that "I hit it great yesterday, but I couldn't do anything today". As we've seen, that is relying on the small muscles. The correct grip should minimize stress on your body and your game; it allows the rest of your rotation and swing to work.

While there are many facets to the swing that are important; stance, posture, pivot, plane, the one that you can rarely circumvent is the grip. Different grips work with different swings, so it is important to acknowledge that. There have been great players with weak grips, and there were great players with strong grips. It all depends on the orientation of your body and how that brings you into the impact position. For most players, there is a solid fundamental approach that will work, but we will explore.

What is a weak grip vs. a strong grip? Let's go by hand (left hand vs. right hand, assuming the person is right-handed). I would use forward hand vs. trail hand, but that's a lot of typing and we'll all get confused! So, a

fingers with the left hand so that the crease between your index finger and your thumb are pointing towards your right shoulder. The right hand would have the club more in the palm of your hand, so a bit more under or behind the club. So, which one is right for you?

Moe Norman, who was considered by many to be the best ball striker of all-time had a weak grip setup. (After 1994, he went to a 10-finger grip or 'baseball' grip), but that didn't change his hand position. Moe always placed the ball further up in his stance, towards his front foot (for all clubs). He could do this because he had more of a lateral turning shift through the ball than most players do. Why is that important? Because the ball was more forward, it gave the clubface more time to square. For a typical player and setup, with his grip, the clubface would almost always be OPEN at impact. Because Moe played the ball more forward, as he rotated into the shot the club would have time to square up. In his swing, the hands would rotate when it got to the closing point at impact and he was precise!

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In my opinion, he was more of a unicorn unless you adopt a lot more fundamentals of his swing and you hit 1000 golf balls a day. I loved Moe and knew him, but I could never do what he did.

Paul Azinger (and I worked with his teacher John Redman for a few years) had a very strong grip. When Paul gripped the club with his left hand, if you looked straight down the shaft, you could see *four* knuckles! His right hand was more under the club, in his palm. Paul also played the ball more back in his stance so in essence trapping the ball more. To make this work and square the club, it had to be “artificially” squared by his grip. In Paul’s swing, the hands were just along for the ride and the body squared the club with rotation, but he never flipped his hands over. Mr. Redman would say he held it down the line, and if you looked at his left hand waist high in the through swing, you could put a coffee cup on the top of his hand. Those are the extremes...

So, my recommendation. For the normal player that wants to square the club consistently, I would advocate a stronger left hand grip, and a more neutral right hand grip. What that means is with the left hand, you want the club more in your fingers (along the crease of your palm and the bottom knuckle of your fingers), so if you had the club held straight out from your waist and the club positioned squarely with the toe pointed to the sky, the underside of the grip would dissect that line between the crease at the tip of your palm and the bottom knuckle. When holding that with the club set squarely on the ground and looking straight down, you should see at least *two* knuckles. There are two reasons why this is critical:

If you look at the club in your setup position, the club will be perfectly square to your target line. If we swung in a vacuum, that might work, but your body, and the club, will ‘open up’ before impact compared to your setup position. So, there are two ways to square it: rotate your hands, which is not very reliable or consistent; or, using a stronger grip, the rotation of your body will close it automatically. That is what you want. With the stronger grip, you will almost feel like the clubhead is ‘closed’ to the target at address, but that is precisely what you need. This allows the bigger muscles to square the clubface as you rotate through the shot. Using the bigger muscles always makes you more consistent.

If you take the club to the top of your backswing with just your left arm, compare the left thumb being straight down the grip/shaft, to that of it being slightly to the right. In contrast, when the thumb is right down the shaft, there is no support from your hand underneath the club which makes it flimsy. With the stronger left hand grip, you will notice that the pad of your hand is *under* the club so that the club is stable.



With the pad of your hand under the club at the top (*right photo, above*), you should feel like you could hold it there comfortably, while with the thumb down the center of the shaft (‘weaker’), it will require a lot of effort to support the club.

Finally, now the right, or trail hand. I don’t focus on this as much, but the right hand is the ‘*feel*’ hand. You don’t want the club in the palm, because that reduces your feel. Also, when players grip the club with the right hand in the palm, it tends to make them take the club back more inside and flat like a baseball swing. This is one thing I have to work with baseball players on almost every single time. You want to feel like the right hand is on the side of the club/grip like you were using a paint brush, not *under* or *over* it.

So, for this more standard grip setup, you also would want to follow normal ball position rules. That would mean the irons are positioned more in the center/slightly front of center in your stance, and the driver off of your front armpit. Remember in prior articles I wrote, gauge your ball position off your chest/torso, *not* my feet. Some people like wide stances, and some like narrow stances, so the feet are not a great reference point. Also, consider if you tend to slide forward in your swing, or you rotate on more of an axis. For the sliders and those that play the ball more forward, which I don’t recommend, the weaker grip might work better for you. For those that swing more around an axis, I would definitely advocate the stronger grip. You want to have some lateral movement towards the ball before you turn, but not excessively.

Changing your grip can feel uncomfortable at first; it is our only contact with the club. Put in some practice time on the range (now that we will have some cooler weather) and you will quickly get the feel of it. Your shots will start to come out with a more piercing flight and you won’t feel as much reverberation at impact. This will also make you a lot more consistent and have your fellow playing partners asking “*What have YOU been working on!!!!?*”

- CHRISTIAN SMITH

