

PLAYING THROUGH

GRIP TIPS - PART 2

In the last article, we touched briefly on the types of grips; Overlap (Vardon), Interlocking, and 10-finger (baseball), but mostly addressed hand position on the club as it relates to weak, neutral, and strong and the impact it has relative to the position of the club to your hands at the top of the backswing and at impact. This

another variable right off the get-go. Also, children don't possess the strength yet where the dominant lower hand becomes a liability and takes over in the swing. I have also seen this grip used for people who just lack strength in general and could use the extra leverage; again children, maybe senior citizens, and



Photos: Editor

month, we'll dive into those three types of grips and which one might be most beneficial to you. We'll also discuss a few other nuances of the grip which are more circumstantial when facing certain shots on the course.

10-Finger ('Baseball') – This grip is when all 10 fingers are on the club, but most notably, the fingers on the lower hand are all on the club. This grip is rarely if ever used by professional golfers and top level amateurs. Moe Norman, and Bob Estes dabbled with this at points in their careers, and I believe Scott Piercy is the only one that has used it for any lengthy period of time on Tour. The main reason for this is that it puts the bottom hand (right hand for right-handers) in a very strong or dominant position. While it does create a lot of leverage, it also takes away from the unity of the hands working together in the swing and tends to produce more erratic results. There are some scenarios where it is useful. One is with children (and potentially others) who are just beginning to learn the game. The golf swing feels odd enough when people are first starting and sometimes it is better not to introduce

people who are just built more slightly. It can also be beneficial for people with arthritis in their hands. In these cases, the benefits of the grip and comfort can outweigh any performance detriments.

Overlap (Vardon) – This grip is where the pinky on the bottom hand is placed on top of the bottom fingers of the upper hand; typically between the index finger and middle finger gap. It is sometimes called the Vardon grip because Harry Vardon made this grip popular at the turn of the 20th century. I usually recommend this grip for players with larger and stronger hands, and to some extent longer fingers. With shorter, stubbier fingers, the overlap can feel uncomfortable and not create the control you feel like you might need. The advantage of this grip is that it creates a very unified feel of the hands working as one. It also negates the dominance of the lower hand which for stronger players is very likely to take over during the swing. As the club swings faster, it requires more force to fight its natural tendencies. If the bottom hand takes over, this usually results in hooks (sometimes

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quite wild hooks) that usually end up with the ball out of play. This grip helps negate that and lets the player swing naturally with less fear of the bottom hand taking over. Players you might know that used the overlap; Hogan, Palmer, Els, Watson, Mickelson, to name a few.

Interlock – The interlock grip is similar to the Overlap/Vardon grip in that the pinky on the lower hand is used in harmony with the bottom fingers of the upper hand, but in this case the pinky actually goes through (interlocks) with the index and middle fingers of the upper hand. Think of this as a hybrid between the 10-finger and overlap grip; more leverage than overlap, more control than 10-finger. I typically recommend this grip for player with smaller hands and shorter fingers just from a comfort perspective. This grip still negates some of the dominance of the lower hand, but allows the hands to work as one. Players of note who use the interlock grip; Tiger, Jack Nicklaus, McIlroy, Spieth.

Grip Pressure – There are varied thoughts on how hard you should hold the club. Sam Snead said to hold the club like you were holding a baby bird, firm enough that it wouldn't fly away, but not so firm that you would injure it. Others like Nick Faldo advocate a little more

pressure in the grip. For standard shots, I recommend a lighter grip pressure so that you are truly swinging the club and allowing the hands and wrists to react naturally (more like what Snead advocates). A firmer grip restricts the natural movement and makes the hit more rigid and forced. That said, there are times you want to grip the club more firmly. If you are in heavy rough, the grass will typically grab the club and specifically the area where the shaft meets the clubhead which in turn flips the toe (farthest outside portion of the club) over and will send the ball left (for a right hander). When in heavier rough, I grip the club tighter with my upper hand specifically as to not allow the grass to turn it over. Gripping harder with one hand than the other is useful in this situation, but in general you want the grip pressure to be consistent with both hands. This goes for full shots and pitch shots around the green. You will notice this grabbing of the club in our thick Bermuda rough, especially if it is the slightest bit wet.

Extra Nugget – There is one other application of the grip that I would suggest you try. This applies to pitch and chip shots. We discussed the overlap grip, but in this grip I do the reverse of the bottom hand pinky being positioned in the slot between the index and middle finger of the upper hand. In this case, I actually put the index finger of the top hand between the pinky and ring finger of the bottom hand! Why, you say?!! Your bottom hand is the power hand, and in pitch and chip shots we are not looking for power. When you employ this 'reverse overlap' grip, the ball comes out softer and lands softer. This allows you to take a little more swing without the fear of the ball shooting off on you. It also puts your upper hand, which is the lead/direction hand in a more dominant position which helps with direction as well.

There is no written rule on which grip type you should use, only guidelines and what feels comfortable for you and allows you to achieve the best results. I do find that a person's strength, hand size and finger length play into what tends to be comfortable for a player. Give these a try and you might find that a change makes you feel more at ease and helps you to play better. You may already have that grip that works for you, but it's good to know the options.

Until next time, enjoy some cooler weather, and I'll see you on the course!

- CHRISTIAN SMITH

