

PLAYING THROUGH

LESSONS IN THE TAKEAWAY AND BACKSWING...

In the golf swing, the downswing is mostly reactionary to what you did in the backswing. As a result, a faulty takeaway makes it very difficult for your body to adjust in the downswing to make solid contact. Solid contact is the name of the game and the key to shooting better scores, enjoying the game more, and avoiding injury.

There are a few keys that will enable you to set the swing off in the correct manner that will allow your body to react naturally as you start the downswing and move through the shot.

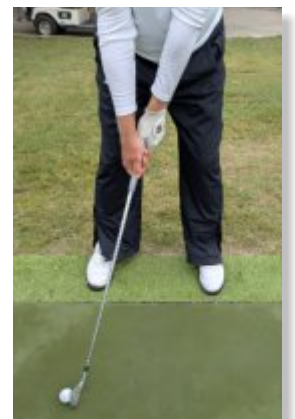
Width vs. Length - Everyone has heard that you want to get the club parallel to the ground at the top of your backswing on full shots. This is true for the most part, but there is a proper way of doing that. You can achieve reaching parallel by simply lifting your arms upward in the backswing and wrapping the club behind your head. This is the 'lift' and 'length' methodology, but too often it results in your shoulders not turning properly. This might look OK at the top (not really), but it serves little purpose as it relates to properly setting the club at the top of the swing and setting you up for a powerful delivery into the shot. A great drill to get the proper feeling is to take your club (say a 6-iron) and grip down on it to the metal and position the top end (grip) so that it touches



your rib cage. For the first foot of the backswing, as you turn, the grip should NOT break contact with your rib cage (again, this is a drill, you are not hitting the ball). This ensures that you are not lifting your arms, but turning with the club connected and gathering 'width'. Once the clubhead gets to about equal height to your waist, the grip will break away from your rib cage and continue to lift as you finish your shoulder turn. This ensures that you are making a full shoulder turn and the club is going along with that shoulder turn.

Another way to get this feeling is to put a golf ball behind your clubface at address (again, not hitting a shot), and roll it back just past your lead toe on your back foot. If you lift, the club will lift up over the ball. *No-no!*

Spine Angle – I've harped on this in other articles but is worth mentioning again when it comes to turning properly in the backswing. When you set up to the ball, your spine should be at an angle (roughly 25 degrees) perpendicular to the ground. This is



Continued

PLAYING THROUGH

where you are bending over from your hips and creating space for your arms to fall directly down from your shoulders and the club shaft as it a bit of an angle (wrist angle) as it extends down to the ball. When you turn back, that spine angle should be maintained such that it is not getting more vertical (standing up) or more horizontal to the ground (hunching over). So, with the width you create in step 1 above, along with maintaining



that spine angle as you turn back, the club should be on a plane that will allow the club to return to the ball properly. If you stand up in the backswing (spine angle gets more vertical), in the downswing, your body will have to crouch down to get back down to the ball. Conversely, if you hunch over in the backswing, you will have to stand up in the downswing. Both alter the club's path in the downswing and there is very little you can do about that when the club is in full motion. As the swing gets into full speed, the club gets extremely heavy and there is very little you can do to alter what you created in the backswing/takeaway.

A great drill for this is to put your butt up against the edge of your couch. Fold your arms across your chest and turn so that in the backswing your butt doesn't come off the sofa (your lead glute may come off, but your trail glute should stay in touch). As you turn the other way, you should find that your derriere will also stay on the edge of the couch with your trail glute coming off, but your lead glute will stay on the edge until you come into your follow through position.

Balance – the last piece to this is how your body is balanced in the takeaway and backswing. You want your weight to be evenly distributed in the middle of your feet throughout the swing. The death knell in the swing is moving toes to heels and vice versa. If you are too far forward towards your toes in the backswing, then you will have to fall back to your heels in the downswing, causing you to lift up. Conversely, if you are too far towards your heels in the backswing, you will have to compensate with the weight moving to your toes in the downswing and you end up getting stuck because you cannot rotate through the swing. Maintain balance between the arches of your feet, and your upper body will stay in a centered position as you change directions. The golf swing works from the ground up. Your upper body reacts to what your feet, legs, and hips do. If you stay centered with the lower body, your upper body won't wobble and neither will the path of the club. This is also important as it relates to the stress it puts on your body. A lot of people I have encountered with back and knee problems from playing golf are typically swinging out of balance and putting stress on parts of their body where there shouldn't be any.

Happy Thanksgiving everyone! Enjoy the cooler weather and let's avoid the goblins of the backswing!

- CHRISTIAN SMITH