

Playing Through

CHRISTIAN SMITH

TAKE IT AWAY. PART II: ARMS

In the last article, I addressed how wrist action can be a barrier to a fundamentally sound backswing and some things you can do to ensure you are using them correctly. In this installment, I want to address the arms, some common flaws, and some good thoughts and drills to make sure your arms are not getting in the way of a good golf swing for you.

The first thing I want to address is how the arms need to work in sync with the shoulders and core body rotation in the backswing. One of the biggest flaws I see is people starting the swing by moving their arms independently of the shoulders and core (core meaning stomach essentially). They either lift the club up with their arms, or they swing the arms to the inside so that the leading arm is touching or connected to the chest. If a player just lifts the arms in a vertical fashion, independent of their shoulders, this is going to take the club on a very steep and outside path. It also negates the power that can be created when the arms, shoulders and core move together. Most of the time, this player will strike down steeply on the ball and come across the swing path (outside to in), which typically results in a weak pull slice. If they happen to shut the clubface with the hands, it results in a dead pull. Conversely, the person who swings their arms independently and wraps them across their chest, the path will be far too inside on the backswing which will cause them to reroute to the outside in the downswing. A lot of times this action also causes the player to get 'stuck' (stuck meaning no space to swing through) as they come down so the body will come up and out of the swing early. Depending on the timing, this usually results in a fat or thin shot. This also causes loss of power because the shoulders have not maximized their rotation and results in a shorter swing radius.



So, what's the remedy you ask? A drill I have mentioned before is extremely beneficial in both of these scenarios. Take a club and put the butt (top of the grip) into your belly button area and grip down with your hands to the metal or graphite of the shaft. Now, for the first foot of the backswing (about to the outside of your trailing leg), keep the butt of the club touching your stomach. Make sure you are turning your arms, shoulders and core together! The angle of the butt of the club in your tummy should not be turning. For the ones that drag the arms inside across their chest, they could keep the butt of the club touching, but that butt-end would turn so that only the outside of that little circle (top of the club) would be touching. We want that entire little circle that makes up the butt of the club attached to your belly button as you turn for that first foot. After the first foot, the body will essentially have turned about as much as it can and the club starts to lift as the trailing elbow tucks under. This ensures that you keep everything in sync and maximizes your turn radius. Note: it would be impossible to keep the butt of the club connected throughout the entire backswing and if you tried, you would not be in a good position. That first foot or so is key. Another check point is when you get to the top of the swing, the leading arm

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should not be touching your chest; there should be about a 35-45 degree angle in the crevasse between your arm and chest at the shoulder.

The elbow tucking under as I mentioned above is the next thing I want to talk about. Another culprit of dragging the club inside the swing plane is the trailing elbow moving too far inside in the backswing (a lot of times this is called the 'chicken wing' or the 'flying elbow'). On our shirts/blouses, there is usually a seam that runs from the center of the armpit area down to the waist. In the backswing, you don't want that trailing elbow getting inside or behind that seam as you turn. A good drill to feel this is to take your leading arm and tuck it under your trailing armpit with the trailing hand extending just past the trailing shoulder. Now as you turn, your arm/hand being under that armpit will prevent that trailing elbow from coming inside. As you turn back in this drill, let the trailing elbow bend and come up and at the top of the swing you should be in a position almost like that of a waiter holding a tray. When the trailing elbow goes inside quickly by itself, you would notice that your trailing hand and forearm are pointing more towards the ground which is not a natural or functional position to be in. Unless the club is re-routed in the downswing which is .2 to .35 seconds (good luck!), about the only thing that can happen is to smother the ball with some sort of low hook shot.



Elbow gets behind, facing towards the ground - bad!



Drill to get the feel of preventing the elbow from moving behind you

So in this lesson, the key points for correct arm movement in the swing are to 1) swing in unison with your shoulders and core as you start the backswing and 2) keep that trailing elbow inside that center seam on the side of your shirt/blouse. This will put you in a position at the top that will allow you to swing naturally when you change direction without a lot of manipulation. It will also put you on a nice swing plane which will improve your contact and accuracy.

Give these a try and give me a shout when you see me!

-CS



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