

Playing Through

- CHRISTIAN SMITH

Photos: Editor

TAKE IT AWAY. PART III.

This is the last in the series I started on the takeaway. The first two (last two editions of Playing Through if you haven't checked them out) were on how the wrists and arms should work in the backswing to set you up for a more seamless transition into the downswing. Keep in mind, the downswing is almost instantaneous and is largely predicated on how you drew the club back, so these principles help ensure you are making your effort the most streamlined and efficient as you can. This last article will focus on hip turn and how you can set yourself up for success by learning to turn correctly.



There are different schools of thought on hip turn and it seems to have changed a lot over time. Old school teaching, the likes of Percy Boomer talked about swinging in a barrel. The sides of your hips would be touching the inside of the barrel rim and they never went laterally in either direction. Percy and teachers like him advocated starting the backswing with the turn of the hips and preferred a larger hip turn (more than 45 degrees in most cases). Modern teaching has shifted to restricting the hip turn as you rotate the upper body as a means to create torque and keep you stabilized over the ball. Both can be effective and I prefer a mixture of the two. Turning in a barrel and leading the body's rotation by turning the hips can be a good trigger and allows more freedom of movement. The downside is that by trying to swing in a barrel often translates to a player reverse pivoting (weight moving backwards in the downswing) as they try to stay in the barrel. Restricting the hips can create torque, but it can also lead to injury.

It puts an enormous amount of pressure on your lower back and has ended the careers of some promising professionals, much less recreational golfers who have tried this method.

I recommend turning your shoulders, core, and hips together to start the backswing (one piece as they say). In doing this, there are a couple of key points to follow and I'll explain why. One, you want to maintain some flex in your trailing knee as you turn. You don't want to straighten the trailing leg because that alters your plane, allows you to turn too far back, and can cause you to tilt your upper body forward in the backswing. Two, you don't want your weight to get 'outside/behind' your trailing leg. You never want your trailing hip joint to get behind your femur bone in the backswing, or moving that trailing hip so that it is over the outside of your trailing foot. When you do



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"The average time for a downswing in the golf swing for amateurs is .25-.35 seconds...you do not have time to correct mistakes in your backswing."

that, you are swaying or drifting off of the ball. This disrupts any coil you could have created and also demands that you reshift back to the center which is very hard to time and usually results in inconsistency in where the club is going to bottom out. This causes fat and thin shots because you lose control of where the club is going

to return when you transition into the downswing. If you ever see photos of Ben Hogan's setup, his trailing leg was at a bit of an angle with the trailing foot set 3-4" or so behind his trailing hip. His legs at setup were kind of like an inverted V. When he turned back, that hip joint would never get behind the middle of his foot. These two things are really important because 1) the slight flex kept in the knee does restrict the hips from turning too far, and 2) by not swaying (moving the hips laterally) you stay centered over the ball better. The golf swing is fluid, so there may be some slight lateral movement of the hips in either direction just from momentum, and I don't discourage that. You just don't want the hips getting outside of your feet in either direction.



Knee Flexed, Good!



Knee Locked, Bad!

The last thing I want to talk about is where the weight transfers when you turn your hips. The main topic of this series was a common thread of players getting stuck or having the club get too far behind them in the backswing. One thing that can cause this in the backswing is getting the weight too far into your trailing heel. When this happens, the opposite occurs in the downswing and the weight will counterbalance and throw your weight out to the toes in your lead foot. This becomes a 'weeble-wobble' effect and gets your balance thrown off. When you take it back, feel like you are moving your weight to the inside and middle of your trailing foot. For me, the front of my trailing

ankle is my balance point. I don't want my weight behind the ankle, or too far out towards my toes. As you turn the other direction, it's a similar feeling: your front foot will plant and you want to feel as if you are turning around your front ankle. The weight will go slightly in front of it, and then as you rotate through it will go around the heel and back into the heel.

The approach I outlined above mixes a bit of the modern and historical thoughts on how the hips work in the swing. I feel it provides stability and balance, but also freedom of movement. Knock on wood, I have played for 45 years and I have never had a golf related injury (other than a little tendonitis). Most injuries in golf occur from a lack of balance and too much restriction in the swing. Those same principles also cause a lot of bad shots. I hope you find this helpful and can put it to use. If you get the backswing right, it makes the downswing almost effortless.

- CS

