

THE ON PLANE GOLF SWING

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What is the ‘Modern Day’ golf swing? Why is it better? Why did the swing of ‘yesteryear’ change to what it is now? Is it the swing of the future or will it change in time as well?

The modern day swing is also referred to as the ‘On Plane’ golf swing. The golf swing of yesteryear has ‘evolved’ to what you see today from the many young golf professionals. It is *much* less stressful on the lower back than the swing of yesteryear. This in itself is enough reason to incorporate the fundamentals of the On Plane golf swing into your game. This ‘on plane’ swing will improve dramatically your club head path during impact. The club head stays on the target line for a much longer time during the most critical part of the swing... *impact!* In simple terms.... you will hit straighter golf shots with less effort.

Why has the change occurred? For starters, the golf equipment has expedited this evolution. Thirty years ago club head (roll and bulge) and golf ball technology (3 piece wound) greatly increased ‘spin’ on the golf ball. Nowadays, with oversized club heads (less roll and bulge), perimeter weighting, and low spinning golf balls, golf shots don’t curve as much. So, naturally, a more ‘direct’ and ‘down the line’ impact path is needed to hit the golf ball straighter. Hence... the On Plane Golf Swing.

Now, the first thing one must realize when referring to this new swing as ‘on plane’ it actually isn’t ‘on plane’. The club head path during impact is *still* from the inside but at a *much less* inside path than from the swing of yesteryear. One must try to achieve the *similar* planes for the backswing and the forward swing. A good check to see if the club shaft is on the ‘similar plane’ is to check your ‘parallel’ points during the backswing and forward swings.

The first checkpoint I refer to as checkpoint 1. It occurs during the backswing. In order to achieve the ‘correct position’ the golfer must incorporate an ‘early’ wrist set during the backswing. The sooner the wrist set the better. This early wrist set is a must (I will explain why later). A good drill to perform to achieve this position is to incorporate the ‘big’ waggle during the pre shot routine. This waggle involves only a ‘hinging’ of the wrists to begin the backswing. The shoulders for all intensive purposes almost remain stationary during this waggle. When performing the pre shot routine ‘waggle’, the golfer must hinge the wrists such that the golf club shaft reaches a point ‘parallel’ to the ground and simultaneously ‘parallel’ to the target line. When checkpoint 1 is performed properly 3 things will occur: the club shaft will be parallel to the ground, the club shaft will be parallel to the target line, and the ‘toe’ of the club will be pointing directly towards the sky (this will require a pronation of the wrists).

Now, why an early wrist set? This is best answered by explaining the negatives of a late wrist set or a ‘one piece takeaway’, ala the swings of yesteryear. When a golfer incorporates a one piece takeaway during the backswing he/she will encourage a very late ‘release’ in the downswing. Although the club head speed gained by this is extremely enviable, the negatives outweigh the positives. For instance, the golfer’s downswing clubhead arc will be too narrow. This results in the angle of approach becoming too steep which leads to ‘thin’ and ‘fat’ golf shots. Plus, a host of other problems will be implemented. For instance the hands will be too far ahead of the golf club at impact which delofts the club head during impact. In order to compensate for this the golfer must ‘spin’ the hips’ and ‘flip’ the wrists to the square the club face at impact. Now, unless you have extremely good hand/eye coordination and perfect timing you will not be able to compensate for this during the downswing.

You have seen now for years Nick Faldo incorporate this early wrist set. It made him the best player in the game for many years. Now, you are seeing a host of touring professionals incorporate this into their golf swing: Chris Dimarco, Tiger Woods, Hank Keuhne, and Mike Weir to name a few.

Secondly, an early wrist set is *natural!* Your hands are attached to your arms by hinges (wrists) so let them hinge! Let me explain this by an example. Pick up a hammer and drive a nail into a piece of wood. What happens??? Immediately, as you raise your arm your wrist sets. It is very UNNATURAL to hammer a nail into the piece wood with a late wrist set or worse yet... no wrist set (sorry, Mr. Moe Normon, Natural Golf is very *unnatural*).

Now, let's look at checkpoint 2. Checkpoint 2 occurs at the top of the backswing. At the conclusion of the backswing, three things must be checked. One, the club shaft must be parallel to the ground and not beyond. If the club shaft goes beyond parallel to the ground then a reverse weight pivot (very undesirable) is encouraged. Two, the club shaft must be parallel to the target line and three; the clubface (with a driver) must be parallel to the swing plane. This imaginary swing plane (during the address position) starts at the golf ball and advances upward to the shoulders and into the sky. At the top of the backswing the golfers left arm (for right handed golfers) should be an extension of this imaginary plane.

The lower body (from the waist down) is almost passive during the start of the forward swing which is completely different than the swing of yesteryear. If the hips and legs get anxious and start the downswing prematurely of the upper body then it is almost inevitable that the club head path will be too much from the inside. Likewise, when the hips get fast and in a hurry during the start of the down swing the golfer will have to compensate for the 'spinning' hips by 'flipping' his hands at impact (to catch up). Again, this compensatory move is very difficult to time well.

Now, let's look at the last checkpoint. It is without doubt the most important of the three. There are many successful and unorthodox golf swings on tour but *all* golf pros achieve the correct position at checkpoint 3. It occurs on the down swing before impact. When the club shaft reaches a point of parallel to the ground during the down swing this will signify the last checkpoint. During this checkpoint, two things must be checked again (you will need a high speed video camera). One, the club shaft must be parallel to the ground and two; the club shaft must also be parallel to the target line (or very close to it). This last

checkpoint is the most crucial. It signifies the path your club head will travel into the ball. If the club shaft is pointing to the right of the target at this checkpoint you will be too far ‘inside’ the target line. The result will lead to the golf ball starting right of your target (for right handed golfers). If the club shaft is pointing to far left of the target at this checkpoint then the golfer will be too far ‘outside’ the target line. The result will lead in this case to the opposite: the golf ball starting left of the target (for right handed golfers).

The fact of the matter is ... there are a many ways to swing a golf club but some swings are more efficient than others (less compensatory moves). These 3 checkpoints are just that... checkpoints. If you can achieve these checkpoints then you will decrease substantially the number of compensatory moves in your golf swing. Reaching checkpoint one successfully will aid in reaching checkpoint two. If checkpoint two is achieved then checkpoint three will be reached with less effort. If a golfer can reach checkpoint three successfully then and only then will he/she realize the difference between powerless effort and effortless power.

The proper pre swing fundamentals: posture (encourages proper swing plane), grip (encourages proper club face position), alignment (encourages proper swing path), and ball position (encourages proper angle of attack) will encourage these checkpoints to happen naturally. Unfortunately, most golfers don’t have sound pre swing fundamentals and therefore years of compensatory moves take place and are ingrained into the golfer’s swing. If you fall into this group of golfers (don’t be ashamed, many golf pros fall into this as well) then a ‘retraining’ of the golf muscles must occur. This only happens with swing specific golf drills. Golf swing drills train the body to make the correct moves. This doesn’t happen over night, unfortunately. Think about it for a second. A golfer plays for 10 years. For 10 years the golfer has trained their body to perform improperly. Repeating the correct drill/drills will ‘train’ the golf muscles to perform the correct actions but only after *many* repetitions and sometimes months or even years of practice.

What are the other key ‘traits’ of the On Plane swing? For starters, at impact the shoulders will be much more level or parallel to the

ground. The swings of yesteryear had more tilt to the shoulders at impact (the right shoulder for the right handed golfer was considerably lower than the left at impact). Another key trait to the modern day golf swing is the upper body (waistline and up) shifts towards the target during the forward swing. Conversely, the yesteryear golf swing had golfers 'behind' the ball at impact (which resulted in the infamous 'Reverse C' finish position). During the On Plane golf swing, the golfer must try to feel from the waist up moving towards the target during the forward swing. In essence, the golfer will 'cover' the golf ball with their upper body during the forward swing (visualize your sternum moving towards the target during and after impact). The final trait of the On Plane golf swing occurs at the conclusion of the golf swing. The golfer's upper body is *completely* over the front foot for a vertical finish position and *no* lower back pain!

Is this the swing of the future? Technology will answer this question. The golf swing has adapted to technology advances and will continue to do so. If golf's governing bodies (USGA and the R&A of Scotland) scale back technology then you may see a change with golf technique. I did some very interesting research for my thesis during my last PGAPGM School (back in 2004). Long story short: technology has 'driven out' the short and straight hitter on the tour (the Nick Prices, Curtis Stranges, and Corey Pavins) or will eventually and replaced him with the long and 'fairly' straight hitter. Technology (large club head design and low spinning golf balls) have made the long hitters that much straighter of the tee. Therefore, you have what you have today on tour (power hitters). Of top 20 players on tour (I did the study in 2004), only 2 were under 5'10" (Paul Casey and Mike Weir). Of these 2, only 1 was considered not 'long' off the tee (Mike Weir ranked 70th on tour in distance). All the players in the top 20 ranking were in the top 1/3 in driving distance (except for Jim Furyk and Mike Weir).

Now, at the same time, only 1 player ranked in the top 20 of the golf rankings was considered a straight hitter off the tee. Jim Furyk cracked the top 20 in fairways hit (2004). Compare this data to the year 1979. In 1979, all the players in the top 20 of the world, only 1 player was bigger than 6' tall (Andy Bean) and accurate players dominated the

top 20. The lack of ‘restraint’ on technology has changed the demographics of professional golf (unfortunately, in my opinion). In conclusion, you need to hit the golf ball a long way in today’s professional golf game. The taller you are the easier it is to hit the golf ball that ‘long’ distance. Unless technology is ‘scaled’ back you will see the ‘On Plane’ swing thrive in today’s golfing environment.

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