

Chapter 19

Whacking the Snake

“Reverse every natural instinct and do the opposite of what you are inclined to do, and you will probably come very close to having a perfect golf swing.”

—Ben Hogan

Most of this book teaches you about the 99 percent of golf that has nothing to do with technique. On the other hand, a graceful swing can do wonders for your confidence. Understanding the swing will give you confidence. Build the right swing, and you’re ready to take on the world.

During the countless hours of hard work I’ve put into my own game, I’ve made some surprising discoveries. Although at first glance the golf swing seems very complex, its essentials are few and well within your reach.

Another note: I believe self-discovery is the most important component to understanding the swing and improving your game. Analyzing golf on TV and reading complicated self-help books will take you only so far. It’s up to you to do the rest.

“The answers are in the dirt.”

—Ben Hogan



STORY TIME

I was a terrible player at the beginning of my career. Frankly, no one was more surprised than me when I passed the PAT. I've come a long way since then, and I've been fortunate enough to celebrate some real successes. I even set the course record at Black Rock (65). It was subsequently broken by the unstoppable Troy, and then again by PGA Tour star Rich Beem, but my name was on the board for a few months—something I'm very proud of. It's nothing short of a miracle when you consider the first swing advice I ever got from my dad. He told me, "Imagine the ball is a snake sticking its head out of a hole, and whack it."

The Pre-Swing Basics

You don't need to understand every muscle contraction, sphincter squeeze, and anatomical micro-movement of the golf swing to build a proficient motion. What you do need is a grasp of the basic pre-swing principles. This is the stuff your teacher will be talking about when you go take a lesson. Knowing the vocabulary—or better yet, understanding the fundamentals—will help you communicate more clearly and quicken the pace of your improvement.

Control the Controllables

It's very helpful to realize that most of the things that go wrong during your golf swing actually happen before the swing. You can greatly improve the outcome of each attempt by understanding how to control your attitude, center of gravity, posture, stance alignment, and most importantly, grip.

Attitude It's good to have lofty goals—but get real. Keep your expectations realistic. Understand the length of the improvement process, enjoy the challenge, and learn to laugh at yourself—because you will make lots of mistakes.

Center of Gravity Imagine a 16-pound bowling ball cradled in your pelvis. Your lower body should remain as stable as possible, while your upper body rotates around that bowling ball at the waist. During the swing, the bowling ball shouldn't move.



PEARLS FROM THE PRO

Remember your eighth-grade gym teacher? Polyester shorts a size or two too small and that whistle spinning around his finger. If the golf club is that whistle, then your center of gravity is the finger that drives it. While your center of gravity remains still, the speed of the golf club increases. Move the finger left, right, up, or down, and the momentum is lost.



Posture When taking your stance, let gravity dictate where your arms hang—which should be straight down from your shoulder sockets. Most people tend to reach out and get their hands too far from their body. This causes many swing flaws and compensations. If your swing looks or feels like you're pulling a dead cat out of a rose bush, it might be a posture problem.



Correct arm hang, straight down.



Reaching . . . This leads to many mistakes.

Get a Grip The grip is the most important aspect of the pre-swing fundamentals. After all, your grip is the only thing that attaches you to the club. For a right-handed player, the two most common mistakes are right-hand grip strength and left-hand anchor position.

Very few amateur golfers position their hands “strong” enough on the club. For a right-handed player, this means the crease made between the right forefinger and thumb must point to the right shoulder, not to the chin. This is critical because it keeps the radius and ulna bones of your forearms—and hence your clubface—from immediately over-rotating as you begin your swing.

A strong grip. The bones can move smoothly into the backswing.



A weak grip. The bones must uncross in the backswing, which opens the clubface.

