

“The Golf Expert” The First Move

Peter Thompson

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To start the backswing some part of your body has to move. Peter will explain how to start the backswing, the sequence involved and how the sequence is based on the actual movements of thousands of great golfers. The one-piece takeaway is exposed as a myth.



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The First Move

Assuming the grip, aim, stance, posture and a proper club selection has taken place - by looking carefully at the lie, checking the wind, where the ball is going to land (pitch) and what you want the ball to do after it has landed - the next move is the first move. But, hold on a second, why do we assume that all of the above is as it should be?

I have always believed that the first move is of the utmost importance as within two seconds the ball is on its way (well, most of the time!). But there is little point in starting the swing in motion if the aim is incorrect, the club selection is poor and you do not know what you want the ball to do when it returns to the ground.

So do check the 75% - grip, aim, stance and posture.

Also ensure you have chosen the right club based on wind, distance, and height required and if you want the ball to stop on landing or run on.

The ball stopping or running on reminds me of a story involving Sam Snead.

Apparently an avid golf fan was watching Sam Snead winning one of his 82 P.G.A. tour wins (a record and currently 17 more than Tiger Woods) and on a long par three Sam hit a towering 3 iron on to the green and the ball-stopped stone dead. The watching fan was enthralled by the shot and was determined to find out how Slamming Sam had achieved it so after the round the fan searched for Sam. He eventually found him and plucked up the courage to ask his question. 'Tell me, Mr. Snead, how did you make your three iron on that long par three stop so quickly?'

'Well', said Sam in his Virginian drawl, 'how far do you hit your three iron?'

The fan excitedly replied, 'Oh I guess about 135 yards'.

And Sam replied, 'So why do you want it to stop then?'

I love that story.

Bernard Langer, a very meticulous golfer from Germany, was once asked how far it was to the front of a green from a fairway popup sprinkler head. The answer was 'Do you mean from the front of the sprinkler or the back?' (A distance of 12".) Bernard knew both the distance from the front and the back of the sprinkler head so whenever he played a shot the distance factor had been calculated leaving him free to concentrate on other aspects.

Most golf courses have a course planner and the new G.P.S. systems use satellites so you know exactly how far you are from the flag from anywhere on the course, therefore it is possible for you to know exactly how far you need to hit the ball so there is no point in guessing.

If you know the distance you should know what club to use and once you have chosen the club the distance becomes irrelevant. So with the correct club in your hands and a good stance you are in position to start your back swing.

So how do we start the backswing?

If you were to ask a dozen teaching professionals and read a myriad of golf books you would undoubtedly be given a multitude of answers and quite possibly they would all be different.

What a complicated game.

One thing is guaranteed; we have to move one or more parts of our body to take the club back into a hitting position/ backswing.

I certainly do not know the definitive way to start the backswing and nor does anyone else, however forcibly they may instruct you with their 'secret.'

Having taught for 45 years, however, I do know certain ways of starting back that will produce results, and several ways that tend not to produce results. One popular way of starting back that can create problems is to take the club head back low to the ground.

The club head on a full shot will be moved approximately 10 feet above the ground at its highest point. (If you wish to check this indoors please ensure your ceiling is at least 10 feet high.) As the club head will move so far above the ground I cannot see the point of keeping it artificially low as you start back.

Another way of starting back is to move the club head back in a straight line. This is fraught with danger as the only way to move the club head back in a straight line is by swaying the entire body to the right. The first move back should be a turn and the turn will move your arms round and the club is on the end of your arms so the club head will also be moved on an arc.

Yet another way of starting back is to shift the weight to the right and this also leads to a sway. At address your right hand is below the left so the right side of your body is below the left creating a slight tilt (approximately 10 degrees) to your right. A body turn will then automatically move the weight to your right so there is no point in moving it consciously.

I have explained three ways how not to start back so I will now explain how I instruct my pupils to initiate the backswing based quite simply on how good golfers, on average, actually start back.

The first move back is a combination of:

1. A hip and shoulder turn.
2. A continuation of the wrist hinge that has been established at address.
3. A rotation of the left forearm.
4. A slight lift of the arms.

This is **NOT** a one-piece takeaway but a subtle combination of the four separate movements. The one-piece takeaway is a misguided attempt to simplify what is essentially a complicated movement but once mastered will certainly improve the entire swing.

The grip, aim, stance and posture represent 75% of the swing and the entire backswing a further 20%.

The halfway back position therefore represents 10% and combined with the address position this becomes 85% of the swing.

Little wonder that many brilliant golfers spend a huge amount of their time practicing the 85%.

Mirrors and cameras are the easiest way to practice the first move because seeing really believes.

Photograph No. 1

This shows the address position and in my hand is one of the few training aids that I use (most training aids are based on a theoretical swing and take no account of body shapes and flexibility).

This particular device has two wings to represent the clubface and allows the user to see clearly where the face is throughout the first part of the backswing.



Photograph No. 2

This shows how the clubface has been rotated through 90 degrees as the shaft becomes parallel to the ground.

This is a result of the body turning, the left forearm rotating, the wrists continuing to hinge and a slight arm lift.

You will also see the slight tilt to the right increasing from the address position as the weight is automatically moved to the right.



Photograph No. 3

This photograph clearly shows how the wrists are hinged at address by approximately 30 degrees.

The wrists will then continue to hinge to approximately 90 degrees at the top of the backswing so one third of the hinge is in place before you start to move.

Most of my pupils are initially unaware of this and find it very beneficial to understand that the wrists are hinged at address and merely continue to hinge.

This photograph also shows the upper body is leaning forward at address and because of this as you turn the left side will turn down and the right side turn upwards.



Photograph No. 4

From this angle it possible to see again how the clubface has been rotated through 90 degrees and the shaft is now parallel to the target line as well as the ground.

You will have noticed that I am looking at the clubface. This is done deliberately as I need to know where the clubface is so I can feel this position. I urge you to also look at what you are doing as you need to see where the club head is at this stage of the backswing. Do not just hope you are in position – look.



Many good golfers rehearse this halfway back position during tournament play to give them the feel of where they need to be and then re-focus on the ball prior to the shot.

A good address position and a correct choice of club followed by a good first move will improve your chances of success dramatically and you can practice all of that indoors or outdoors and without hitting any shots. So what are you waiting for?

All the movements you have used in the first part of the backswing are continued to the end of your backswing as there is no point whatsoever in changing direction.

There are several practice moves you can use to practice the individual parts of the takeaway.

Hip and shoulder turn

Use a mirror and position the outside of your right shoulder on the edge of the mirror and then turn your shoulders so your right shoulder moves AWAY from the edge of the mirror. Repeat the exercise with the outside of your right hip on the edge of the mirror so as your hips turn your right hip also moves away from the edge of the mirror.

Another way to practice the hip turn is to position your right hip on the edge of a table (ensure there are no glasses of Margaux on the table) and then turn your hip away from the table.

Wrist hinge

Address the ball as in Photograph No.3 and then without moving your arms hinge the club upwards as far as you comfortably can so the clubface is still pointing at the target. I encourage right-handed golfers to literally pick the club up with the right hand but you can use the left hand or both hands, as the result will be the same.

Left forearm rotation

This is always a misunderstood movement but none the less it is important.

Address the ball as in Photograph Nos 1 and 3.

The left forearm then needs to be rotated clockwise until the shaft is parallel to the target line. This rotation will slightly bend the right arm.

Arm lift

Again address the ball as in Photograph Nos 1 and 3 and keeping your body still lift your arms until your hands are approximately level with you head.

This practice can also be used in conjunction with the wrist hinge exercise.

One of the world's greatest teachers, John Jacobs, (he also was a great golfer with a superb impact position) said, 'in its simplest form a golf swing is a mixture of a body turn and an arm lift.' I agree 100% with John Jacobs.

I say to all of my pupils that golf is not only the hardest game in the world but also the best and unless you are blessed with a supreme natural talent (which some of my pupils are) then you have to practice just a little bit harder.

Happy golfing and, as my wonderful wife says, you WILL enjoy it.