SWING LIKE A PRO

THE BREAKTHROUGH METHOD OF PERFECTING YOUR GOLF SWING

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Broadway Books  New York
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If there is an aspect of the tour player's game that inspires a sense of awe and wonder, it is his ability to crush the ball 300 yards or more with such grace and seeming lack of effort. The distance these pros are able to achieve (with accuracy as well) can be unfathomable to the average golfer. It obviously is not a product of sheer size or strength since many pros are small physically yet capable of hitting the ball inordinate distances. The casual golfer can attribute this skill only to equal parts skill and magic.

In fact, there is skill involved and some magic too, though the "magic" is attainable by anyone possessing average strength and coordination. It all can be traced to the transition move, the critical series of events that occur as the backswing evolves into the downswing (fig. 4-1). If you're looking for the greatest source of power in golf, this is it, hands down.
FIG. 4-1. The transition in the golf swing occurs from the time the club is vertical (blue) and the top of the swing (gray).

Viewed from afar, the transition move is what gives a great golf swing its undeniable sense of rhythm, grace, and flow. And when you experience it for yourself, the effect is even more astonishing. You'll hit the ball farther than you ever thought possible, with less effort than you probably are applying now. And the accompanying rewards of improved accuracy and greater consistency aren't bad either.

YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE

Most of the fundamentals of a model swing are relatively easy to learn. The correct stance, posture, and grip, for example, are static, fairly uncomplicated positions that are readily assimilated into your preswing
routine. They require careful study at the outset, followed by periodic checking to ensure that you continue doing them correctly, but for the most part they are easy to repeat once you commit them to memory. Even when you set the swing into motion, the proper backswing movements, though precise and regimented, are well within the grasp of anyone with average motor coordination.

The transition move—the change of direction from the backswing to the downswing—is a bit more complicated. It also is the one movement in golf in which the world-class ball striker and the average golfer differ dramatically. If there is an aspect of the full swing that can be labeled the chief determinant of distance, accuracy, and consistency, the transition move is it.

Every athletic endeavor that involves striking, throwing, or kicking requires a transition move of some kind. The term “transition” is used to describe how an athlete uses the large segments of the body to generate great speeds in the smaller segments. This sequence can be seen in a wide variety of motions including baseball pitching and hitting, the tennis stroke and serve, the hockey slapshot, and, of course, the golf swing. In every case, the large muscles attached to the large segments exert tremendous power to stop the backswing movement of the smaller segments (along with the ball, bat, racquet, stick, or club) and propel them toward impact.

To receive maximum benefit from the transition, a number of things must be done. First, the large segments should be in contact with the ground for a firm base of support. Second, the entire body should be moving away from the intended target when transition begins so as to increase the stretching action. Third, the large muscles attached to the large segments should be stretched when transition begins for maximum power production. Finally, the transition must begin with the large segments moving toward impact, then sequentially bringing the smaller segments along with them.

Since everyone has thrown a ball, it is easy to sense the chain reaction of movements that occur as you prepare to release the ball toward the target. First, experience tells you that the throw must begin with the feet
planted firmly on the ground. Second, you shift your weight to the back foot as you move away from the target. Third, as your weight shifts back, you turn the hips and shoulders, winding up the large muscles of the lower body and trunk. As transition begins, your torso unwinds first, then your shoulders, and finally, the stage is set to move the arm and actually throw the ball. The act is simple, almost instinctive, and it is easy to sense the physical movements that transpire. The next time you go to the practice range, throw a ball down the range and you’ll see what we mean.

As you would expect, the elite athletes perform the transition best. The most impressive example of this came from a high-speed sequence we shot of the great fastball pitcher Nolan Ryan. During Ryan’s delivery, his entire body faced the batter, all of the major muscles stretched to the limit. The ball, however, remained stationary, if only for an instant. Another moment later, the ball left Ryan’s hand at over 100 miles per hour. This same progression, although not as dramatic, can be seen in any throwing sequence (fig. 4-2).

The transition move in the golf swing bears many similarities to throwing a ball, but in several respects it is more complicated and less natural to perform. That’s because the golf club is the longest implement with the smallest hitting area in sports. In addition, the body is not well suited to produce the unusual path that the swing must follow. Swinging a golf club properly is in itself not an intrinsic, instinctive act, and the correct transition move is more difficult to discern—at least at first. Yet if you are to reach your full potential, you must learn to perform it well.

ANATOMY OF THE TRANSITION MOVE

Golf would be simplified enormously if all you had to do was place your body and the club in a mechanically perfect, rock-steady position at the top of the backswing and then swing away from there. A back-
swing wouldn’t even be necessary. You could merely lift the club into place, check that your positions were sound, and then move all your body parts forward all at once, confident that a perfect swing was pre-programmed.

The golf swing doesn’t transpire that way, of course, nor does any truly athletic movement in any other sport. To again borrow the analogy of throwing a ball, imagine a baseball pitcher reaching the top of his windup and then, keeping his lower body stationary, flipping the ball forward with his arm alone. He’d throw a pretty feeble pitch. He needs a dynamic transition move, a cooperative movement between his upper and lower body that accumulates energy, stores it, then unleashes it with tremendous speed and force.

To set the stage for a correct, powerful downswing, it is necessary for the upper and lower body to move in opposite directions just before the downswing actually gets under way (fig. 4-3). That’s what the transition move is all about. A moment before your torso, shoulders, and arms complete their journey to the top of the backswing, the lower body, led by the hips, begins moving and rotating toward the target.

Performed the right way, the transition move accomplishes several objectives. First, it “loads” the swing dynamically. The large rotational muscles in your trunk are stretched like a series of powerful rubber bands. So, too, are all the muscles running from your torso to your arms. They become stretched and taut, ready to snap into action to provide great speed and strength.

Second, the accompanying weight shift from the right foot to the left foot that happens when the lower body moves forward provides a stable base of support for the unwinding of the upper body that occurs a moment later (fig. 4-4). It enables you to swing all-out with your shoulders, arms, and hands without risk of losing your balance or wasting energy.

FIG. 4-3. As the upper body (blue) continues to rotate to the top of the swing, the Pro begins rotating the lower body (black) toward the target.
FIG. 4-4. In addition to the hip turn, the Pro also begins to shift the lower body toward the target during the transition (blue to gray).

FIG. 4-5. From the end of the backswing (blue) to the point where the right elbow reaches hip height, the Pro uses transition to get the lower body out of the way so that the arms can follow an inside path.

Finally, the initial move forward with your feet, legs, and hips sets up a chain reaction of movements in the upper body that allow you to transport the club forward along the proper swing path.

Although the main purpose of transition is to produce power, it has the nice residual effect of allowing the correct swing path to occur. One of the major reasons most golfers fade or slice the ball is because they’re unable to move the lower body out of the way of the upper body and club. It is obvious that if the hips are in the way during the downswing, the arms and club cannot follow the inside path required to hit the ball straight. Instead, the lower body is an obstacle that forces the arms and club outside, producing the dreaded slice. The transition serves to remove this obstacle by initiating an early power body shift toward the target (fig. 4-5).
How the clubhead itself moves is important in generating the proper swing path. The transition helps to produce what we call the proper “fall of the club,” in which the clubhead actually moves away from the ball as it nears the top of the swing (fig. 4-6). This automatically moves the clubhead onto an inside path during the downswing. The fall of the club is so important that, if done properly, it single-handedly eliminates problems related to swing path.

**HOW TO LEARN THE TRANSITION MOVE**

The challenge of learning to uncoil your lower body while the upper body is still rotating to the top of the backswing is an awesome one to
most golfers. The concept of moving segments of your body in different directions simultaneously is difficult to grasp, let alone perform—at least at first. In a way it’s like asking a child to rub his stomach in a circular motion with one hand while patting the top of his head with the other. The child will appear confused initially and fail at first attempts, but will eventually learn to do it.

We believe there are only three sound and lasting ways to learn the transition move. The first is to simply observe the best players in action, using the visuo-motor rehearsal program outlined in the Timing and Tempo chapter. Although all players on the major tours perform the transition move well, we recommend you select a few whose swings are noted for their powerful moves toward the ball. You’ll also find it helpful to videotape your favorite players as they perform on television, so you can play the tape back at a quiet time, when the learning environment is ideal.

Next, practice the drills that follow. Of all the drills we have experimented with in teaching, these are by far the most effective in teaching the correct transition move. They are designed to ingrain both proper feel and mechanics.

Finally, practice. We’ve discussed the importance of practice already, but it can’t be overemphasized here. Some aspects of the swing “take” faster than others, and perfecting the transition move probably will take longer than most. Be patient, and persevere.

THE TRANSITION DRILLS

These drills are designed to give you the feeling of getting the lower body to begin the downswing while the upper body continues to complete the backswing. It is a movement that will feel very unusual if it is not already a part of your swing. Once you master it, however, your game will be transformed.
1. **Bump, Hug, and Go**

This drill is a continuation of the “Bump the Shaft” and “Hug the Shaft” drills presented in the Backswing chapter. As in those drills, place the teaching shaft firmly into the ground, straight up and down, so that it is approximately 2 inches from your right hip when you take your setup (fig. 4-7). This position is easiest to find with the driver, since the shaft will be placed just outside of your right foot. For the shorter clubs, some experimenting will be required to achieve the proper distance.

As you begin the backswing and shift your weight to your right side, allow your right hip to move laterally far enough to give the shaft a light bump as the club becomes horizontal to the ground. At this point, your right hip should move no farther to the right. It
FIG. 4-9. During the transition, move and turn your hips away from the shaft while continuing to rotate your upper body away from the ball.

FIG. 4-10. Through impact, the full extension of your arms and the powerful lateral movement of your lower body produces a stretching sensation in your torso.

should simply hug the shaft until the club reaches a vertical position in your backswing (fig. 4-8).

At the moment the club becomes vertical to the ground, move and rotate your hips smoothly away from the shaft, directly toward the target (fig. 4-9). Your goal is to create as wide a gap as possible between your hips and the shaft while the upper body continues rotating to the top of the backswing.

Swing down and through the ball, noting all the while the sensation of the transition move. If done properly, you will feel stretching in the muscles in your trunk and those connecting your trunk and arms (fig. 4-10). More important, you will begin to feel the power flow from the large leg and trunk segments to the arms and club.
As with all of our drills, you can actually strike the golf ball. At the beginning, however, you may want to eliminate the ball so that you can concentrate on the transition. Then, when you feel comfortable with the move, add the ball and prepare yourself for an improvement in distance.

Because you are partially preoccupied with trying to hit the ball, and your hips are out of view, it may be difficult at first to tell whether your hips are moving a sufficient distance laterally away from the shaft and whether they begin moving back toward the target at the right time. We strongly recommend having a friend stand opposite you to monitor your performance.

2. **Step and Go**

If you have any baseball experience, you will like this drill. On the practice range, place a ball on a low tee, then follow this procedure:

**Step 1**
Using any club (short irons are easier), set up to the ball in a normal manner (fig. 4-11).

**Step 2**
As you begin the backswing by moving your entire body onto your right side, pick up your left foot and slide it toward your right (fig. 4-12). Make sure that you turn your shoulders so that your left shoulder is over your right foot.

**Step 3**
As the club reaches the vertical position, click your left heel on your right heel. Without touching the ground, drive the left leg and hip toward the target.
as the shoulders and arms complete their backswing motion. You will feel the powerful trunk muscles stop the shoulder rotation, and pull the arms and club into the downswing (fig. 4-13).

**Step 4**

Finish the swing by allowing the trunk and arm muscles to stretch and then unwind into the downswing (fig. 4-14). Don’t rush the transition. Allow the power to build during this portion of the swing and continue through impact.

If performed properly, you should hear the clubhead “whoosh” at the bottom of the swing. Like cracking a whip, the big muscles
FIG. 4-15. Hold the club horizontal to the ground. When swinging a weighted club, begin the motion slowly.

transfer all their power to the end of the club, creating enormous velocity.

As with the "Bump, Hug, and Go" drill, you may want to begin without a ball until you are comfortable with the new power you are creating in your swing.

3. Weighted Club Transition

Using the weighted club described in the Teaching Introduction, begin from the setup position. Start the swing, then stop when the club is horizontal to the ground (fig. 4-15).

Slowly resume the swing, using the entire body to begin the move to the top.

When the club is vertical to the ground (fig. 4-16), prepare to
reverse the club movement by rotating the hips, then the shoulders, then the arms in the opposite direction (fig. 4-17). Once the transition has been completed, keep swinging and allow the momentum of the club to carry you into a full follow-through.

If your goal is to increase flexibility, go slowly and allow your muscles to stretch and pull the club around. If strength is your goal, pick up the pace and make an effort to move the club faster as you bring it around.

After several swings, take an unweighted club and hit balls trying to produce these same swing feelings.
Some transition problems are caused by poor preparation, some by poor execution, and some by external reasons. Regardless of the causes, it must be addressed if you are to reach your potential in your game. The good news is that the cures are easy to assimilate into your swing.

COMMON TRANSITION PROBLEMS

If learning the transition move proves problematic over a long period of time, you probably are committing one of five mistakes. Two of the errors are rooted in poor preswing fundamentals and can be detected and cured by yourself. The third and fourth result from poor execution of the transition move itself and will require observation from a friend. The final problem—lack of body strength or flexibility—is inherent and can be improved upon with an exercise or flexibility program.

Problem 1. Ball Too Far Back in Stance
In the Setup chapter we discussed ball position and how it influences ball flight and quality of club-ball contact. But we’ve saved another aspect of ball position for now, for it has a special meaning related to the transition move. Simply put, if your ball is positioned too far back in your stance, you will instinctively perform the transition move poorly.

When the ball is stationed too far to the right in your stance, you’ll be discouraged from shifting your hips toward the target as you attempt to make the transition move. That’s be-
cause moving your hips laterally to the left effectively moves the center of your swing forward, toward the target. The clubhead will reach the lowest point of its arc more toward your left foot than your right. In fact, if you played the ball back in your stance and made a perfect swing, you would miss the ball entirely (fig. 4-18).

When the ball is positioned toward your right foot at address, it becomes necessary to hang back on your right side on the downswing in order to hit the ball solidly (fig. 4-19). Hanging back is a sure sign the transition move hasn’t taken place.

Review your ball position and make sure it is far enough forward to accommodate the transition move.
FIG. 4-20. Because the student assumes a weak grip at address (left), it eliminates his ability to get the hands in front of the ball as impact approaches (right). It’s almost a sure bet he’ll return the clubface back to the ball in an open-face, slice-producing mode.

**Problem 2. Grip Is Too Weak**

It is crucial that your hands be placed on the club in a manner that allows you to rotate the clubface to a square position at impact. If your grip is too weak—your left or right hand rotated too far counterclockwise on the shaft—your hands won’t be in position to naturally square the clubface late in the downswing (fig. 4-20).

The consequences of a weak grip are well known to the experienced player, but its disastrous relationship with an aggressive transition move are not. When you shift your hips toward the target late in the backswing, it places a strong onus on the hands to play catch-up on the downswing. If your grip is weak, the hands
FIG. 4-21. The Pro uses the transition to move most of the body weight to the left side at impact (left). The chief consequence of a poor transition move is hanging back on the right side (right). The end result is a weak, glancing blow at impact.

will never properly join in with the arms, shoulders, and lower body. The clubface will be open at impact, and a push and/or slice will result.

Inspect your grip periodically to make sure it is consistent with the grip we described in chapter 1.

**Problem 3. Hanging Back on Your Right Side**
The transition move requires a shifting of the weight to your right side early in the backswing, marked by the lateral move with your hips. If you allow the hips to shift *too far* to the right, however, the transition move becomes impossible to execute (fig. 4-21). This over shift can be caused by too much lateral move at the beginning of the backswing, but it is usually due to contin-
uing to shift the hips to the right during the second half of the backswing (when they should only be turning). Regardless of the cause, you simply cannot recover in time to shift the hips back to the left. When it comes time for the upper body to uncoil on the downswing, your lower body won’t be in position to support that movement. Moreover, the dynamic resistance between the upper and lower body created by the transition move won’t be created at all. You’ll lose power, accuracy, and consistency.

If you fall in this category, have someone watch as you perform the “Bump, Hug, and Go” drill. Make sure your hips are moving laterally to the right the correct distance on the backswing and that they move aggressively away from the shaft when you perform the transition move.

**Problem 4. Upper-Body Dive**

There are many movements golfers make to compensate for poor swing mechanics. One of the worst, and most frequent, is what we call the “upper-body dive.” If the lower body isn’t used at all during the swing, a player tends to move away from the target with the upper body during the backswing, then dive forward and down with the upper body during the downswing (fig. 4-22). This move can actually be very effective in getting the hands ahead of the ball at impact, resulting in solid ball contact. In fact, some band-aid teachers actually use this move to make rapid improvements in ball striking.

Unfortunately, the upper-body dive will always produce a downswing that is outside the desired swing path, resulting in a shot that starts left and slices back to the middle. It is also characterized by deep divots that are pointed to the left of target.

We have seen relatively decent players survive with an upper-body dive because it can produce solid ball contact as well as acceptable distance. Eventually, however, they seek professional help due to the limitations caused by the poor ball flight characteristics.
FIG. 4-22. The transition allows the Pro to lead the downswing with the lower body (left). Poor use of the lower body transfers the onus to the upper body (right). The result is an ungainly "dive" and deep divots aimed to the left.

If the dive is part of your game, work on the transition with the "Step and Go" drill. Make sure that you move your hips to the right at the beginning of the backswing. If you still have difficulty, simply begin the drill with your feet together until you get the feel of leading the transition with the hips.

Problem 5. Lack of Strength or Flexibility
Sometimes in golf the player is asked to execute a movement he simply isn’t capable of performing. For instance, a short, barrel-chested golfer who weighs in the vicinity of 250 pounds will find it impossible to perform a 90-degree shoulder turn. Likewise, a tall, spindly built golfer who weighs less than 100 pounds will find it impossible to control the clubhead during the swing.
The final problem we commonly experience in teaching the transition move resembles this inherent dilemma. Executing the transition move requires some degree of strength and flexibility. To shift your hips vigorously to the left while continuing to turn your upper body in the opposite direction requires suppleness in your trunk region. And to make the transition move really dynamic, you need enough strength in your shoulders, arms, and hands to swing the club down with all the speed and power that the legs and trunk have produced.

If you find yourself having a great deal of difficulty performing the three transition drills, it may be that lack of strength or suppleness is a glaring problem. The good news is that, regardless of the problem, it can be improved or eliminated entirely. Unlike many sports, golf does not take a great deal of strength or flexibility. The bad news is that if you lack the necessary amount of either, it will affect your game dramatically.

The key to success in overcoming strength or flexibility problems lies in the “Weighted Club Transition” drill. If used properly, and often, it will improve both your strength and suppleness.

**EVALUATE YOUR PROGRESS**

The transition move ends when you have reached the top of the swing. As you’ll see in the next chapter, the correct position at the top gives you the opportunity to easily evaluate how well you have prepared for the all-important move to impact.
Acknowledgments

Supporting Staff

We would like to give special thanks to Phil Rodgers, Chuck Cook, and the late Davis Love Jr. for their inspiration and support in our efforts to understand the great game of golf.

Thanks also to the core group of teaching professionals that have helped us understand how to apply this information to our students. They include Lee Houtteman, Todd Meena, Kevin McKinney, Eric Eshleman, Joey Hidock, Gary Smith, Lars Hagglund, Carl Alexander, Harry Zimmerman, Adrian Stills, and Gus Holbrook. Added thanks to Doug Lowen, whose ability to mimic the swing errors common to all golfers was essential to this effort.
Without the behind-the-scenes efforts of the researchers, this work would be little more than educated guesswork. They include Curtis Cowan, Jimmy Vespe, Sid Sachs, Ron Linares, Bob Hilts, Amber Murphy, John Kotmel, John Herman, Charles Fisher, Charlie Schultz, and Paul Sprague.

Finally, we thank our wives, Angela and Jackie, for their encouragement and understanding that our passion for studying the game always took more time than we estimated.

Players

We want to thank the following tour players for volunteering their swings for our research efforts. A model swing is only as good as its components, and we think this group is tough to beat.

Tommy Aaron  Brandel Chamblee  Ray Floyd
Kristi Albers  Bobby Clampett  David Frost
Helen Alfredsson  Keith Clearwater  Jim Furyk
Fulton Allem  Dawn Coe-Jones  Buddy Gardner
Buddy Allen  Charles Coody  Jane Geddes
Donna Andrews  John Cook  Al Geiberger
Stuart Appleby  Ben Crenshaw  Gail Graham
Wally Armstrong  Joe Daley  Lou Graham
Paul Azinger  Bruce Devlin  Hubert Green
Seve Ballesteros  Dana Dormann  Tammie Green
Chip Beck  Bob Eastwood  Gary Hallberg
Woody Blackburn  Danny Edwards  Phil Hancock
Brandie Burton  Bob Estes  Morris Hatalsky
Joanne Carner  Brad Faxon  Mark Hayes
Vance Heafner
Tim Herron
Lon Hinkle
Scott Hoch
Mike Hulbert
Hale Irwin
Betsy King
Tom Kite
Gary Koch
Ralph Landrum
Bernhard Langer
Franklin Langham
Bob Lohr
Davis Love III
Scott McCarron
Gary McCord
John Mahaffey
Meg Mallon
Roger Maltbie
Doug Martin
Len Mattiace
Barb Mucha
Jodie Mudd
Bob Murphy
Jack Nicklaus
Greg Norman
David Ogrin
Mark O’Meara
Arnold Palmer
Jesper Parnevik
Mark Pfeil
Don Pooley
Dicky Pride
Tom Purtzer
Nancy Ramsbottom
Loren Roberts
Hugh Royer
Charlie Rymer
Nancy Scranton
Scott Simpson
Tim Simpson
Val Skinner
J. C. Snead
Ed Sneed
Mic Soli
Craig Stadler
Sherri Steinhauer
Payne Stewart
Dave Stockton
Mike Sullivan
Bob Toski
Ted Tryba
Kris Tschetter
Bob Tway
Tommy Valentine
Lanny Wadkins
Grant Waite
Duffy Waldorf
Colleen Walker
Lisa Walters
Dennis Watson
D. A. Weibring
Jay Williamson
FINALLY, GOOD LUCK

Our greatest hope is that you’ve enjoyed your first trip through Swing Like a Pro. If that is the case, it’s a sure bet that even greater enjoyment lies in store. The greatest joy in golf lies in improving, and the findings of our research and proven methods of dispensing this information guarantees you will get better. We wish we could be there to see the results: the pride and feeling of accomplishment you will experience over the next few months, the astonished looks on your friends’ faces as you strike the ball like never before, and the low numbers on your scorecard that your rivals will find hard to believe.

It’s all yours for the taking. Congratulations in advance for a job well done.