

The Kent Golfer

January 2009

Improve Your Weight Shift & Balance

In this month's article I am going to continue my theme of discussing the six key basics of a good golf swing – Turning, Weight Shift, Rhythm, Balance and Relaxation. I believe that these six elements are inter-linked and, this time, I want to talk to you about Weight Shift and Balance as they are even more closely related to each other than the others.

Let's take the low handicap and professional players on the one hand and the average and high handicap club players on the other. If there is one area of the golf swing where the difference between these two groups can be easily seen it is in their ability to move freely and still keep a high level of balance. Outside of golf, however, can we identify these two groups of people by the way they perform normal everyday tasks? I doubt it very much.

Come with me for a moment and use your imagination. Let's watch some golfers as they arrive at their club. As they park their cars and take their clubs from their boots, can we spot the good players? Ah, the tall, athletic guy who's pulled up in a smart new silver grey Jaguar must play well. Just look at the cut of his clothes and the size of that bag. Looks like a new set of Mizuno blades. Yes, watch how relaxed he looks as he chats effortlessly with the people around him. He seems well coordinated, hasn't dropped anything, didn't hit another car as he parked and has managed to put his electric trolley together as if it was child's play. He walks to the clubhouse without a false step and hasn't lost his balance once.

Now, here comes a typical 28 handicapper. Look at his lack of dress sense and that old bag of 1980s clubs, rather matching the old and dirty car he drives. He's a little older than the first chap and certainly couldn't be classed as an athlete unless developing his paunch falls into the arena of regular exercise. Mind you, despite his portly girth and slightly stiff gait, he too seems well coordinated, hasn't dropped anything and walks to the clubhouse with good balance and rhythm in his step. He looks to be a confident type of person as he meets and greets his fellow members.

Can we tell who plays the best golf and who has the best handicap? No, we can't. It could be either of them. So, let's go to the first tee and see if we can get any more clues.

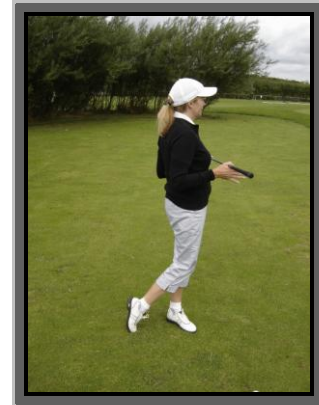
As luck would have it the two men are playing together. The tall, athletic guy has a reasonably good practice swing although he doesn't ooze the same level of confidence that we anticipated after seeing him in the car park. His tee shot is a minor disaster as his backswing only goes half way and his follow through is virtually non-existent as he ends up with his weight firmly stuck on his back foot. There are a few expletives that shroud the air as he hits a good three inches behind the ball. He protests that he had played so well yesterday before shyly retreating to put his latest jumbo-sized titanium all singing, all dancing driver back in the bag, his head held embarrassingly low.

Our second contestant now takes centre stage. As he walks onto the tee there seems to be a near-swagger of authority and his practice swing is amazingly simple and smooth. Giving the impression that golf is purely child's play, the ball is struck with a masterful 'crack' as he creams the most beautiful shot 280 yards straight down the middle. He is still holding a perfectly balanced and composed finish position as his playing partners congratulate him on a splendid drive. He looks a little abashed as he places his old faithful driver back in the tattered and worn bag that we had seen when he arrived.

In reality, we have all seen this at first hand. Unfortunately, the percentage of players who experience the first chap's disaster is extremely high whilst the number of golfers who play like the second fellow is disappointingly low. Why should this be so? Why do so many normal people have so much trouble swinging a golf club? Why does their natural sense of rhythm, balance and coordination, used so well in virtually all other daily tasks, evaporate into thin air as soon as they get a golf club in their hands?

Why has the average handicap not improved in the last 20 years, especially considering the huge improvement in equipment during the same period? Why do people who have been good at all other sports have so much difficulty with golf? Why do women who dance well have such inability to perform the golf swing with the same degree of balance, rhythm and elegance? It just isn't logical!

The above story is an excerpt from my book, 'Positive Impact Golf,' which comes out in March. You'll have to wait until then to get the full version of the 'La Danse du Golf' exercise and how it got its French name. Our coaches use this so successfully to help golfers develop good Weight Shift and Balance so, for now, here are 3 photos of Sheila which you can copy straight away. It is a simple drill you can do at home.



The two main obstacles preventing golfers from developing correct Weight Shift and Balance are absent from this drill. They are:

1. Trying to keep your head still
2. Trying to keep your front heel fixed to the ground on the backswing

Note how her head is moving freely and her left foot is turning fully. Yes, I know you've been told not to do either of these and, if you're young and supple, you don't need to move these very much. But, if you suffer limited joint mobility as I have done for most of my life, or you're 50+, you **MUST** move more than traditional thinking suggests.

If you've read my recent articles you'll know that I believe that golfer's heads must move. It is totally illogical to swing a golf club, which is a throwing action, whilst trying to stand still. You wouldn't throw a ball, or for that matter a stick for your dog, with your head and feet static.

The last part of this article is also very simple. Poor Balance shows itself particularly at the end of the swing. When you do the above drill, take time to feel steady and stable at the end of the forward movement. When you play golf, hold a balanced finish at least until the ball lands and stops rolling. It

might not be easy at first, but you'll soon feel the improvement and start to benefit from the confidence that a good finish brings.

I can assure you that the only difference between your golf now and a new level of consistent play is the confidence to move more fully. When you take away the encumbrances of a still head and start to let your feet move more in your backswing you will find your Weight Shift and Balance will improve out of all recognition.

Best wishes to you all for a great 2010 on the golf course,

Brian Sparks