



Instruction by Tom F. Stickney II

Free Up Your Backswing Turn

Making adjustments to your game as you get older

Sadly, we are all getting older and our flexibility isn't what it used to be, which means our distance off the tee typically diminishes as time goes on. It's easy to see this phenomenon in the difference between players on the PGA Tour and those on the Senior Tour.

While the kids on the PGA Tour have tight, controlled backswings, the players on the Senior Tour are a different story. Examine them and you will see longer and freer turns to the top. This is due to the flexibility difference we all experience from 25 years of age to where we

are now. In this article, we help you understand how to free up your backswing for more distance.

For the PGA Tour Professional, the key is consistency over four days week after week, with less regard for distance because most players on this Tour have no distance issues. However, if you look at the Senior Tour, it is just the opposite. As these players have aged and their bodies have changed, they must amend their golfswing—and equipment—in order to hit the ball as far as they can most of the time



PGA TOUR PROFESSIONAL AT THE TOP

On left you see the look of the average PGA Tour Professional at the top of the swing, a player who is not concerned with distance production off the tee. The major points to notice are:

Wider stance: Promotes more balance and more controlled foot and leg action

Flexed rear knee: Keeps the hips from over-rotating en route to the top

Minimal hip rotation to the top: Helps create the X factor, or torque, between the upper and lower body turns to the top

Extreme width of the arms: Helps widen the arc of the swing and keeps the arm-swing shorter for more accuracy

Big shoulder turn at the top: Coupled with a restricted hip turn, this creates the torque between the upper and lower body, which creates distance through resistance

It is these five points that help the PGA Tour player maximize control and produce the necessary distance to compete with long hitters like Bubba and Phil. Thus, if distance isn't a concern for you, then you should strive to tighten your backswing motion in some or all of the manners listed above.

However, if you're aging and your distance production isn't what it used to be, I suggest modifying the points above. One thing to keep in mind: Whenever you allow your swing to become longer and more flowing to the top (think of the swing of the late Payne Stewart), you will find that though you can indeed produce more distance, your accuracy will be slightly compromised. But if you are a shorter hitter and can't reach the par 4s and 5s in regulation anyway, then who cares? In my opinion it's much more fun to be putting for birdie, even if you hit offline sometimes.

FREE BACKSWING TURN TO THE TOP

The player who wants more distance, but has lost the ability to turn to the top, should study the photo above and make note of the following fundamental changes that can be adopted:

Moderate stance width at address: Unlike a wide stance, which restricts motion to the top, a moderate stance makes turning easier. You'll have to experiment. The more narrow the stance, the easier and fuller the backswing turn will become; however, you can lose your balance if you overdo it.

Rear foot rotated slightly outward at address: Rotate your rear foot outward a few inches and it will free up your hips on the way back.

Rear knee and hip action to the top: Look at the photo. With your stance and rear foot in this position, you will be able to rotate your hips to the top—and it will feel more like it used to when swinging. You might even feel a slight straightening of the rear knee to the top; this is OK, as long as you don't overdo it. Having this lower-body freedom on the way back allows your shoulders to rotate fully.

Softer arms at the top: Notice I said "softer" not "collapsing" arms at the top. As flexibility wanes, you must get the club to the top further than before so you have time to produce distance on the way down. If you have a short, wide swing that keeps the clubhead vastly short of parallel at the top, then you will not have time to produce clubhead speed on the way down. Softer arms at the top will help.

Full-shoulder turn: Now that your stance, feet, hips and arms have been modified, you should feel like your back is to the target, just like you see on TV. This full-shoulder turn keeps the engine of the swing (your core) moving like a boat slinging a water skier (your arms) through the turn on the way down.

Change is inevitable as you get older, and in golf that means losing distance. Golf is no fun if you cannot reach the fairways or greens from the same tees as your usual playing partners. This loss of distance places too much pressure on your short game and putting in order to shoot a reasonable score, which means making a change is necessary. Try the changes I listed above, and I'm sure you will recover a few yards of that lost distance.



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