

GOLFTEC Making Golfers Better One Half Hour at a Time

At GOLFTEC in Oak Brook, the coaching staff teaches more than 900 golf lessons every month, but when it comes to the most common issues they tend to see on a daily basis, it's hitting the ground first, slicing the ball, and lack of distance. Oftentimes, all three of these problem areas come from the same person where they tend to swing too far left, hitting the ground first with the face open, usually slicing the ball which is going to negatively affect how far they hit the shot.

Distance will increase simultaneously as their coaches solve either of those problems.

The goal is to identify each part of the problematic area, in separate pieces, and determine what does the player not want to do more than anything, hit the ground first or slice the ball? From there his or her coach can address drills for the problem to be solved.

You may then ask, "why don't you just fix everything during the same lesson?" The simple answer is that coaches don't want to overwhelm students with multiple swing thoughts, knowing that small improvements in various parts of the swing can make a huge difference.

Hitting the Ground First

GOLFTEC has conducted a big data study which measured the swings of thousands of amateurs, compiling millions of data points, and has found that there is a direct correlation with certain aspects of the swing. As handicap levels go down its coaches know what movement patterns correlate. There is a definitive correlation between where the hips and shoulders move during the backswing and skill level, which can help control and influence low point (a fancy word for divot).

In addition, GOLFTEC coaches also notice that the amount that the hips and shoulders move towards the target in the follow-through also influences low point.

Hip and shoulder sway is one of the key motion measurements used via GOLFTEC's exclusive Opti-Motion camera system when defining low point. The first and only motion capture and measurement system of its kind in golf, Opti-Motion sets a new standard for how golf swings

are measured and provides coaches with an incredibly powerful tool. The motion is captured by custom-built, high-speed, HD cameras that measure the golf swing in 3-D and leverages a proprietary artificial intelligence model to collect more than 4,000 data points in every swing.

The number one influence of hitting a heavy shot is when people don't move their bodies laterally towards the target enough through the backswing and the downswing, causing them to hit the ground before they hit the golf ball.

After first making students aware of their problem, a coach will provide information and let them understand the feel. That progresses to having the student execute simple drills like moving their body as much toward the target as they can in the backswing. A "door frame drill" or simply placing a pool noodle next to their head helps them get moving in the right direction (i.e. towards the target).

Students can also start with putting the bulk of their weight on the lead foot (left foot for right-handed golfers) to get the sensation of moving towards the target (not moving off that foot when they make their backswing). From there they can also be challenged to execute a walk-through drill during their follow-through where they physically walk towards the target after they finish their swing. This process may take several lessons or even weeks of practice to execute.

GOLFTEC challenges every student to not only hit one very solid shot but three or four in a row, hitting the ball first before the ground. They will hit the driver and then alternate between a full iron, hybrid, and a wedge to make sure that they can do this correctly.

The final stage is taking it outside to the golf course and executing it there. GOLFTEC coaches work with students both in its Oak Brook center as well as outdoors at a variety of local golf courses, where hour-long short game instruction as well as 9-hole playing lessons take place.

Slicing

The number one reason someone slices the ball is because they have the club face too

open at impact or their club path swings too far to the left (again for a right-handed golfer). Therefore, the first thing to check for is grip.

They would most likely need to take their top hand (left hand for right-handed players), and rotate it away from the target to where the lead thumb is more on the back of the club and the back of the hand is more on top. This would traditionally be called a "strong grip" or "three-knuckle grip". Standard terminology is a "closed face grip."

If someone does have a grip that looks good, then their fade or slice has more to do with the direction that the clubhead moves, thus their swing path is moving too far in the direction left of the target (in which case we would then have to try to move the club directionally more to the right).

Here are a few adjustments that can be made to solve the problem of swinging too many degrees to the left. One of those ways is to make sure that someone is turning enough with their hips and shoulders in the backswing. One drill is to drop the back foot back a little bit so they can turn as much as possible in the backswing. Then, if that still isn't getting the preferred results, coaches can add a club head cover on the ground to help the club head more to the right side of the target line.

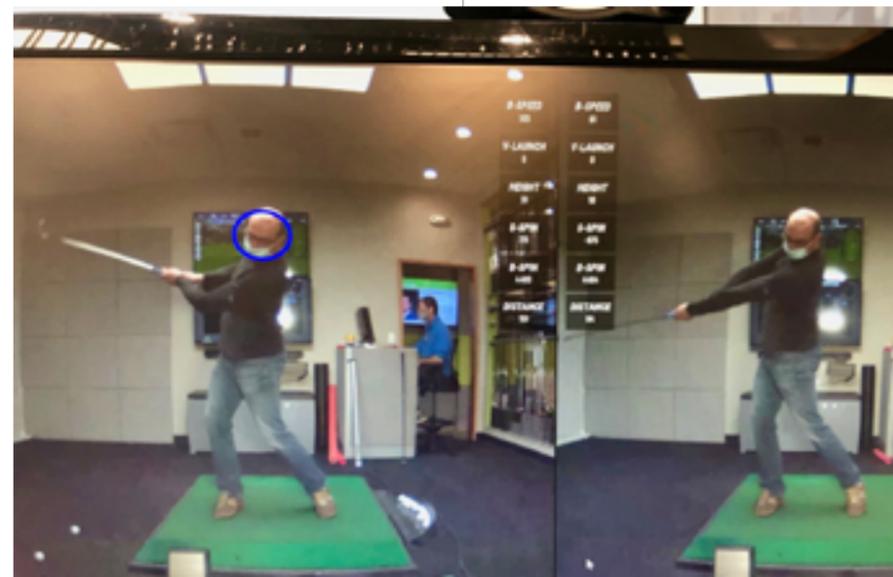
Again, this process may take several lessons or even weeks of practice to execute.

What will happen is that a stronger grip will close the club face relative to the direction of the swing and the ball will fly straighter, or maybe even curve slightly to the left.

Lack of Distance

Assuming that the student is making solid contact and not slicing the ball, the biggest thing our coaches tend to see is people not extending enough and not raising the handle of the club high enough in the backswing.

Think of Jon Rahm versus Dustin Johnson. When we're not hitting the ball as far as we'd like, we don't make a big enough hip and shoulder turn, therefore affecting the length of the backswing. We limit how high we can raise the club handle at the top of the backswing which then affects how fast we can make the downswing.



Another common swing flaw we see every day is the lack of extension of the arms at impact and follow-through, a sure distance zapper. Students are taught how to get their chest and belly button pointing up to the sky into the follow-through, straightening the arms and extending their legs and arching their back backwards. This, believe it or not, is the data point that has the highest correlation with skill. Meaning, better players do this the most, and higher handicaps do it the least amount. Unfortunately these are not causal, but it could certainly help you with your distance problem.

In addition, if someone is hitting the ball fairly straight with a slight draw, trying to get them to extend more in the backswing and in the follow-through with all other things constant would also increase the yardage.

GOLFTEC bases its teaching on motion measurements that correlate with skill. These motion measurements include: hip and shoulder turns, side bending, flexion and extension. Coaches also look for lateral movement in the swing. We know what the tour averages are during each part of the swing for these key measurements, and we also know where high and mid-to-high handicappers tend to be. With Opti-Motion, GOLFTEC students are work on drills that accentuate these turns, tilt, bends and sways to make improvements in their game.

About the Authors

TJ Sullivan is a Master PGA Professional in Teaching and Coaching and was recognized as a Golf Digest Best Teachers in the State of Illinois 2019-'20, 2022-'23, and also recognized as a Golf Digest Best Young Teachers 2020-'21.

Dave Silbar is Editor of GOLFChicago Magazine, a certified personal coach working at GOLFTEC Vernon Hills, and Boys Varsity Golf Coach at Carmel Catholic High School in Mundelein. A veteran public relations executive, Dave has been playing the game for 40+ years and has been working in the golf industry for nearly the same length of time.