



# Fix the Face First

By **Cody Barden**, PGA instructor  
White Columns Country Club

**Early in my teaching career**, I recall Jack Lumpkin suggesting to always remember to "Fix the face first." The phrase was so simple I committed it to memory without appreciating its true value. Over the years I've discovered how significant those four words really are; and



not a day goes by on the lesson tee when I don't apply their meaning to help players improve their ball striking or gain a better understanding of their respective golf game. Perhaps the three most common faults I see players struggle with: a reverse pivot, an incorrect swing plane, and a poor impact position are most commonly caused by the open or closed clubface.

The athletic motion of the golf swing, in its most basic form, is really no different than throwing a football, skipping a rock across a lake, hitting a tennis ball, or swinging at a baseball. The body segments move in a specific sequence to execute the motion and this action is called the pivot. One of the more frustrating issues for golfers is the struggle with a reverse pivot. The reverse pivot is easy to spot and also easy to correct—many drills can be used to train a player to create the proper sequence of movement.

Unfortunately, when we introduce a golf club (or instrument as Jim Flick prefers to call it) the pivot motion can be complicated. If the clubface is too closed during the backswing golfers will tend to reverse pivot. Opening this player's clubface will enable the body to pivot athletically while helping the ball to fly higher, straighter, and farther. And with a square clubface the player can practice most any pivot drill

with the assurance that the sequence of motion won't break down or reverse.

Many instructors and students spend time working on the swing plane. Basically, if you can manage to keep the clubface square and swing the club within a defined space called the swing plane, you can expect consistent, solid shots. Now whether you prefer a one-plane swing, a two-plane

swing, or the seemingly popular multi-plane swings that I frequently see, the key component is the clubface.

For example, many players struggle with a club that travels too much to the inside during the backswing, resulting in a downswing that is too steep and a path that is outside to in relative to the target line. This player often has deep divots that aim left of the target line, and on occasion tops the ball in an attempt to pull up and out of the steep descent. Even worse, this player will hit the occasional foul ball as the result of shanking it off the hosel of the club.

If the instructor and/or player spends time solely focused on adjusting the plane to fix the problem, then there probably won't be much of a change in the swing shape or shot shape one week later. However, if some attention is paid to the open clubface (which is most frequently the cause of the above scenario) then both teacher and student will be pleased with the results a few days later. I once hosted an "Academy Live" show on The Golf Channel with R.E.M. bass guitarist Mike Mills on this very topic and the response was surprising. It was interesting to learn how many people "cured" their over-the-top golf swing with just a little attention to the clubface.

Many players are seeking a greater sense

of solid contact with their ball striking without addressing the clubface. Similar to a tennis racquet, the golf "instrument" has a flat face and if it isn't square at the moment of impact then the player's impact position will be contrived to make the ball go towards the target. In and of itself this isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it is difficult to repeat. And since most of us are seeking to find consistency and solid contact in our ball striking, it is wise to recognize when a poor impact position is the result of an open or closed clubface.

Specifically, I see a number of players who scoop the ball at the bottom of their swing as they try to help the ball get in the air. Invariably this same player has manipulated his clubface open in the attempt to try and get underneath the ball at impact and help get it airborne. Personally, I start to feel tired watching these players expend so much effort when the ball is already resting on the ground. With just a little attention paid to squaring the clubface, this same player will begin to strike down and through the point of impact and get the ball to fly higher, straighter and farther. He will also avoid compensating with his body throughout the swing and be able to find the proper impact position. And most importantly, it will be easier to repeat.

There are many ways to play this great game. One can admire the myriad of different golf swings on the PGA Tour and quickly realize there isn't just one way to swing a club. But if you look closely on your next trip to the practice tee at a Tour event, you might notice how similar the clubface looks for the majority of players. Hopefully, fixing the face first will help you enjoy the game more when you notice that reverse pivot, the clubshaft out of plane or an improper impact position. ■