

BY DAVID ARMITAGE

# GET YOURSELF CONNECTED



WHAT IS MEANT BY 'CONNECTION', WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT  
IN THE GOLF SWING AND HOW TO HARNESS IT.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL DODDS

Look at the most consistent golf swings out on tour and you will see a common denominator: the arms and body work together, as a unit. This unity of movement is what we coaches like to call 'connection'. Connection is great for the golf swing because it means the bigger muscles in the shoulders and torso are controlling the smaller, ones in the hands and fingers. Using these bigger muscles to move the smaller ones allows us to create a more stable, more repeatable action – and so gain consistency in our play and results.

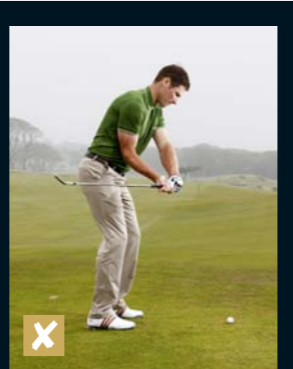
The youngest coach ever to achieve Class A coaching status on both sides of the Atlantic, David Armitage is director of golf at the Renaissance Club, Lothian. For more information call 01620 850903 or email [darmitage@trcaa.com](mailto:darmitage@trcaa.com)



## POSTURE – THE SECRET OF GOOD CONNECTION

Before we get into the drills that will help you develop a connected action, we must first take a look at one of golf's basics – posture. Good connection means arms and body moving as one: but the way you stand to the ball can make or break your ability to make that connection.

The muscles and joints in your back are at their most mobile when your spine is extended. A “long” back means your torso is awake and ready to rotate, a key for good connection. So to address your key feeling should be that your back is naturally extended, with your chin off your chest. Here, good posture has allowed me to establish good connection from the start of the swing, the body turning freely with the armswing.



In contrast, a slouching set-up puts your torso to sleep. Rounded back, hunched shoulders, dropped chin... all of these compress your vertebrae and render your torso immobile. From this stuck set-up, the only way you will get the club moving is with an independent arm yank. This unconnected start will cause you problems with path and plane as the swing progresses.

## WHY CONNECTION BREEDS CONSISTENCY

Take a look at these four pictures, showing the clubhead's position either side of impact. In the first two my big muscles are in charge, the hands quiet; in the second two the hands and arms are doing all the work. The most obvious difference is the

rotation of the clubface. With the big muscles in charge the rotation is more muted. This means the face will stay squarer for longer through impact, the key to consistency. With the busy hands the club whips from open to closed, meaning

the face is square for the blink-of-an-eye. A straight hit is much more reliant on timing, which is why this approach offers less consistency. As a second comparison, see how much more level the big-muscle move is through the ball than the handsy

action, where the clubhead moves rapidly down and up. This has implications for angle of attack; with the more flicky hands-dominated impact the club is only momentarily at an effective striking angle – again compromising consistency.

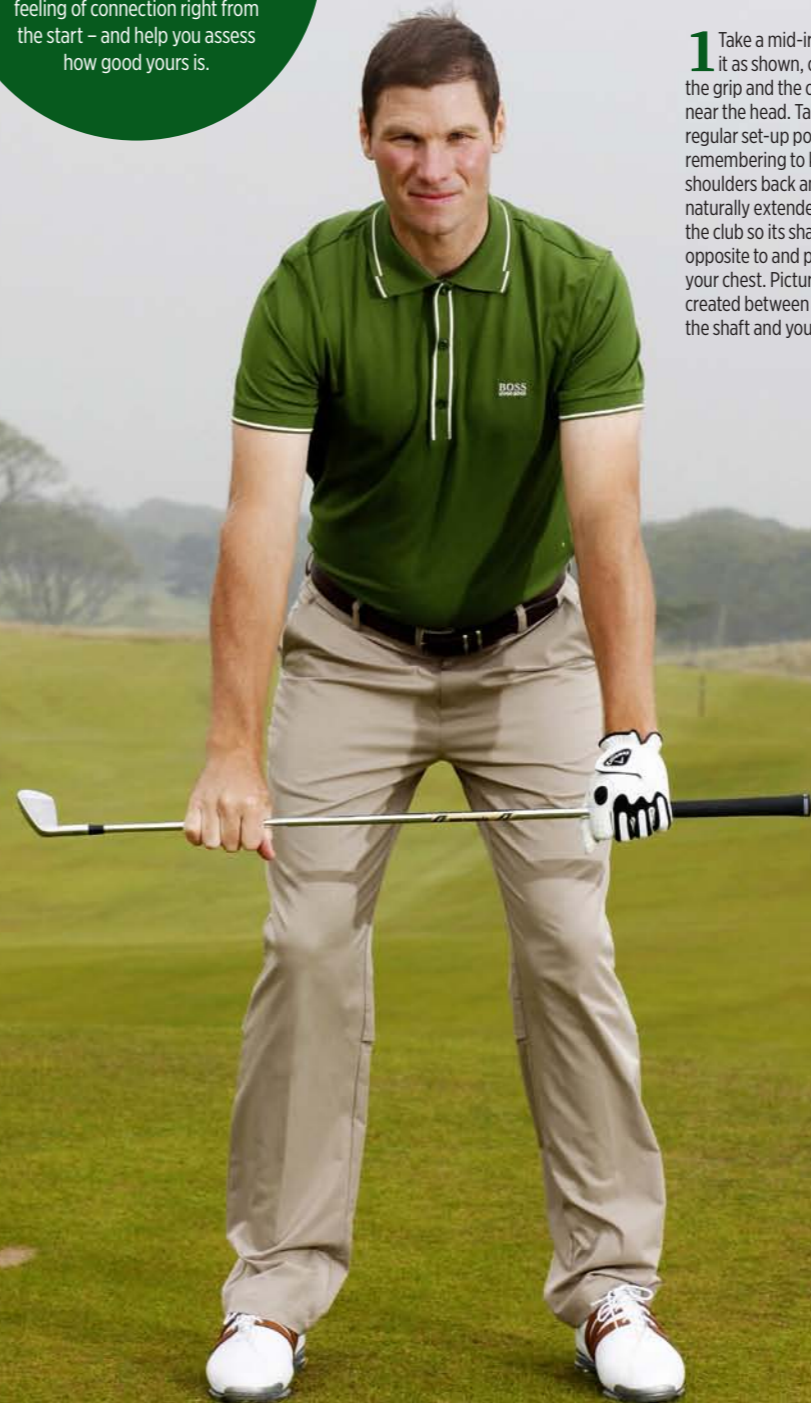


## DEVELOP YOUR CONNECTION

HERE ARE FIVE SIMPLE DRILLS THAT WILL HELP YOU SYNCHRONISE YOUR ARM SWING AND BODY TURN.

### DRILL #1 SHAFT BOX DRILL

Let us start with a straightforward exercise that will give you the feeling of connection right from the start – and help you assess how good yours is.



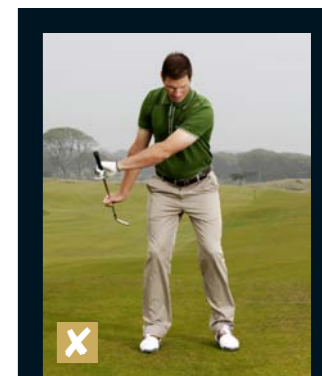
**1** Take a mid-iron and hold it as shown, one hand on the grip and the other down near the head. Take up your regular set-up posture, remembering to keep your shoulders back and spine naturally extended. Position the club so its shaft feels opposite to and parallel with your chest. Picture a box created between your chest, the shaft and your two arms.



**2** Make your takeaway move. The primary feeling you're looking for is to retain the shape of the box, the shaft echoing the turn of the body – it should remain facing your chest during this first part of the backswing. See how, when I do this, both arms remain extended, giving my action natural width.



**3** Move through to the corresponding throughswing position. Once more, keep your attention on the shaft remaining in front of your rotating torso, and keeping that box shape. Again, your arms will remain extended throughout. Try to develop the sensation that it is the motion of the big muscles – the turning of your chest – that is driving this rotation.



This drill is also useful in identifying overuse of the smaller muscles. If the hands and arms start the swing with no connection to the body you will end up in this rolled-away position, the left hand rising above the right. You can also see here how, in this unconnected position, the shaft is at right angles to the unturned chest instead of facing it.



**DRILL #2  
LEFT SHOULDER  
FOCUS**

Grip the club with your left hand only; place your right hand on your left shoulder as shown. Now move the club back – but feel this movement being led by the left shoulder. As the left shoulder begins to turn, so the club moves back. Controlling this first move with the left shoulder establishes arm/body connection right from the very start of the swing.

Your shoulders are your physical link between your arms and your torso: as you might expect, they have a key role to play in creating connection. This drill will help you feel that role.

In establishing a feeling, it can help to experience the opposite of what you want to do. So repeat the drill, but this time deliberately leave your left shoulder static. Instead make all the movement with your left hand and arm only. Note how the club lifts and rolls, your glove badge facing the sky. With this much motion in the clubface, no wonder this is such an inconsistent way to swing!

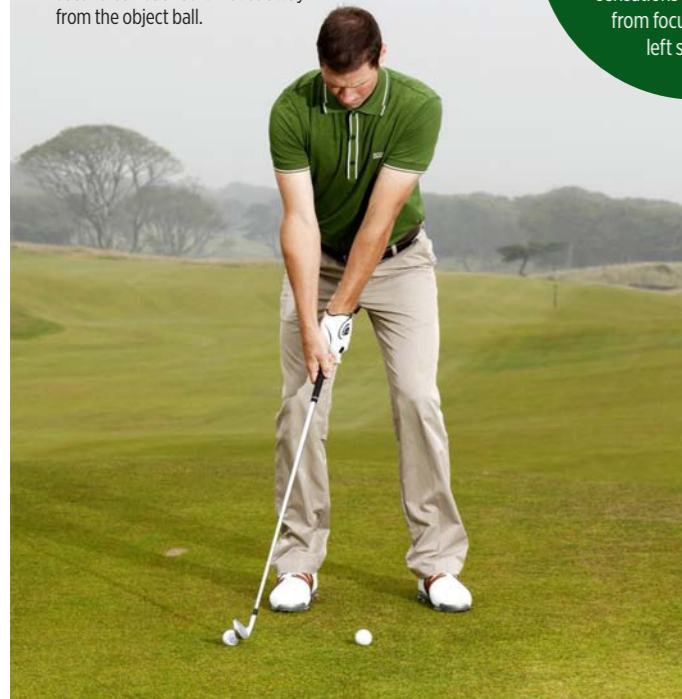


**DRILL #3  
TWO-BALL  
SWEEPAWAY**

Take a 6-iron and two balls. Address the first one normally, but place the second just outside your back foot on a line extending back from the target through the first ball. A good, connected start to the swing will see the clubhead sweep this second ball back as it moves away from the object ball.

Here is a good way to groove the sensations you developed from focusing on your left shoulder.

If you find your clubhead swinging back over the top of the second ball, that's a clear indication you are still using your hands independently to start the swing. Go back to the left shoulder drill and spend some more time grooving those feelings.



**DRILL #4  
BUTT/  
NAVEL DRILL**

When it comes to establishing connection, the start of the swing is crucial. If you begin with arms and body out of sync, it's almost impossible to find it during the swing itself. This drill helps establish instant connection.



Hold the club halfway along its shaft, with your right hand only. Feed its butt into your navel. Now take up your normal stance and posture, gripping the club halfway along its shaft. You have set up a relationship now where the clubshaft is at right angles to your torso, forming a T shape.



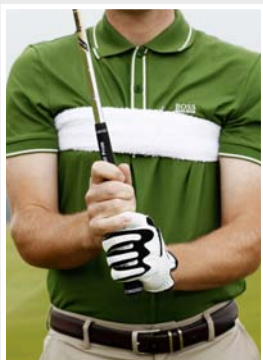
Make a short backswing and followthrough from this position, the club going no further than knee height. Your goal is simply to retain that T shape, keeping the shaft out in front of you and at 90 degrees to your chest. You will soon discover the only way to do this effectively is through body rotation; the moment your hands and arms move independently, that right-angle relationship is lost.

Repeat this drill a few times and you will begin to develop a feel for how the plane of the swing is around the body, not up and down. Building this more rotational sensation is a big part of developing connection. The opposite – and hands/arms-only action – moves the club straighter back and through – a plane that does not fit at all with the fact you are standing well to the side of the ball.

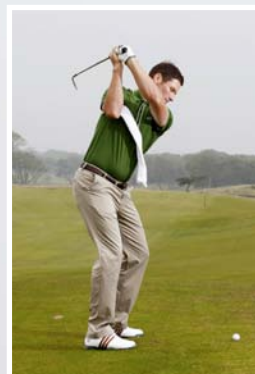


**DRILL #5  
TOWEL HOLD**

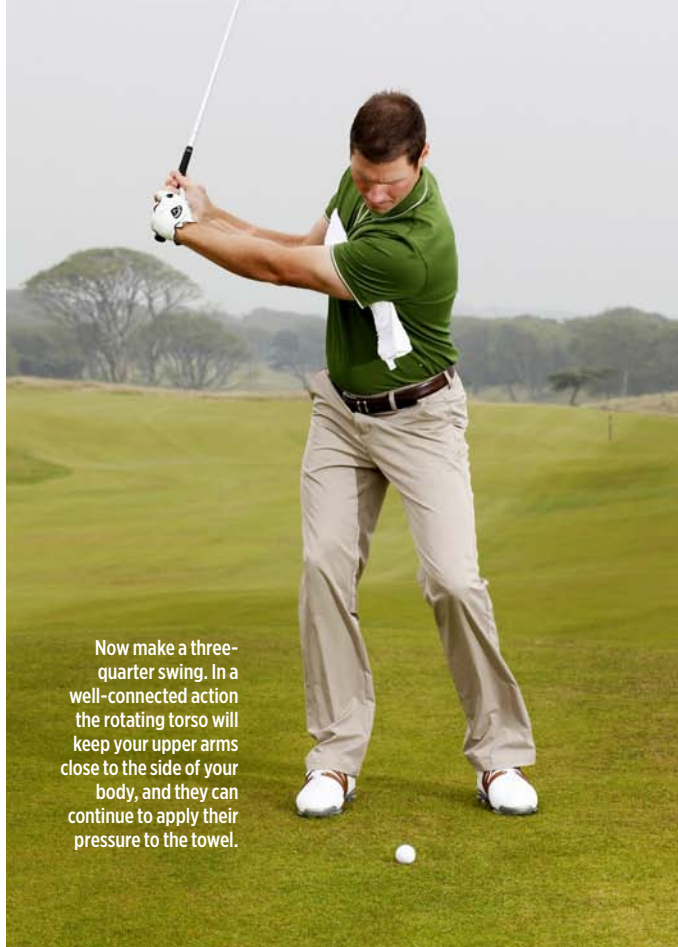
Find a bag towel. Fold it up and position it across your chest as shown. Apply a little pressure from the upper arms to hold the towel in place, under your armpits. Do not overdo this pressure – have it just enough to keep the towel from slipping.



This simple drill moves connection on from the takeaway, and helps you experience the correct feelings through the swing itself.



Loss of connection during the swing happens when the body stops rotating – leaving the hands and arms to carry on by themselves. When this happens the upper arms move away from the side of the body. The pressure on the towel is lost, and it falls.



Now make a three-quarter swing. In a well-connected action the rotating torso will keep your upper arms close to the side of your body, and they can continue to apply their pressure to the towel.



**ROLE MODELS**



**JIM FURYK  
2002 US OPEN  
CHAMPION**

I am not sure how Jim would get on with the towel-under-armpits drill, but looking at this image I'd suggest not very well! Jim is a rare example of a golfer who swings back with no arm-body connection, but manages to gather them before impact. OK, it proves it can be done; but Jim is both extremely talented and very hard-working; without those attributes, he'd struggle for consistency.

**ALEX NOREN  
SAAB WALES OPEN  
CHAMPION**

The athleticism and fitness of modern golfers is second to none. This has a bearing on posture, and therefore connection. For a really good example of this look at Swede Alex Noren. His body and arms work as a unit throughout his swing – but don't forget the role played by his perfect posture in helping him create this neat action.

