

Articles and Tips - The Elusive Secret - Achieving perfect pace and shaft lag

As I watched the final round of the Walt Disney World FUNAI Classic in late October, I saw my student, Ryan Palmer, was 8-under-par after 13 holes and 21-under for the tournament. He actually finished tied for third place behind Tom Pernice Jr. and Lucas Glover, the eventual winner who holed a bunker shot on 18 to get to 23-under.

While I watched, I thought: There are two things that Ryan does in his golf swing that he has done all his life with grace and power. First, he has what I call "Freddie Couples tempo." He also has an incredible "shaft lag."

When Ryan was 15 years old, Freddie won the Master's in 1992. I believe that Ryan's tempo was formed from watching Freddie. Last year at the Shell Houston Open, I was with Ryan on the range, and low and behold Freddie Couples starts to practice right next to Ryan. I stood and watched Ryan from his chest with Freddie in the close background, and it was uncanny how their tempo and pace matched exactly.

Two words spring to my mind: effortless power. They both have effortless power. Ryan grew up in Amarillo, where the wind tends to blow all day, every day. Thus, he often needed to hit the ball low to cut through (and under) the winds. Because of that, he learned about shaft lag and impact. Have you ever heard the opposite of effortless power is powerless effort? Probably not ... read on to learn more.

There is an elusive secret to the game of golf. It's called "lag." What is lag? Technically speaking, it's a conservation of angular momentum on the downswing. It is the ability to lean the club shaft forward at the moment of impact with the hands winning the race. When I was younger, I had a teacher who told me two things about my downswing, and they have stayed in my head forever.

1. The club-head will follow the handle of the club everywhere it goes.
2. Figure out how to get the hands/handle to win the race, meaning you need to get your hands in front of the club face.

The only way to compress the ball is to have lag in the downswing and the hands in front of your club head at impact. Once the club head is thrown, lag will never be recovered.

Ben Hogan said, "It feels as if I have a pistol in my left hand shooting the ground behind the ball at impact."

Claude Harmon said, "You want your wrists like stainless steel through impact, not like linguini."

Harvey Penick taught impact first with short chip shots and little pitch shots around the green, and then he blended the golf swing to the developed impact. He was brilliant!

The average player arrives at impact with the hands behind the ball at impact and club shaft leaning backward. This will add more loft to the club making a 7-iron into an 8-iron or an 8 into a 9-iron. The dreaded dropkick and/or scoop at impact are evident when the club head is ahead of the hands at impact. When the bottom of the swing is behind the ball, you'll hit fat shots. When the club head is on its way up at impact, you'll hit thin shots.

Neither are very fun, but there is a way to improve your shaft lag. Try these drills, and over time you can come closer to achieving the effortless power display every weekend by guys like Ryan Palmer and Freddie Couples.

Great players have the ability to square and de-loft the clubface through impact and control the launch of the ball, turning their 9 iron into an 8- or 7-iron. These great players have the ability to lead the handle of the club with the club-head trailing the hands with steady acceleration through the impact. They have better distance control and launch angle through all their clubs.



The average player over-accelerates their hands reaching maximum speed before impact and losing their lag. This over-acceleration of the hands is usually caused from a need to "catch up" to the body on the downswing. It can also be caused from too open of a clubface and the necessity to throw the club to square the face prior to impact. These two drills will help you.

Practice short backswings with Ryan Palmer-like pace. Feel what it's like to get the hands in front of the ball creating knockdown, punch shots. Use a pitching wedge and develop an awareness at impact with the hands ahead of the club head. The two things to look for when you are hitting shots are the lower launch of the ball and the bottom of the swing, is there a divot in front of the ball? (There should be one.)



Then practice full swings with Ryan Palmer-like pace and hit an impact bag to develop the feel of lag and impact