



STRONGER FOR LONGER

Five distance drills for 'back nine' golfers

Unless your name is Bernhard Langer, age will inevitably catch up with you. There will come a point – and it may be sooner than you think – when your golf swing is no longer as flexible, nor powerful, as it once was, when your range and ease of movement reduces and your strength wanes.

This is sad but inevitable and it often has a negative knock-on effect. Lacking distance, it's common for a player to seek yards in other ways, often snatching the club away in the misguided belief that a faster and harder backswing generates speed.

Nothing you can do will stop the passing of time entirely, but there are ways you can slow things down and even turn back the clock. "You just need to be smart about how you do it," says Peter Dawson, who played on the European Tour in the 1970s.

Now a PGA master professional,

Dawson understands the challenges that advancing years bring and believes that most instructional books are a little too taxing for senior golfers with a less agile frame. He recalls a conversation he had with Don January, a former US PGA champion, after beating him 5&4 in the singles of the 1977 Ryder Cup.

"He was 48 at the time and he told me that as he got older and his physique and body changed, it required him to adjust his swing every two or three years," says Dawson, now 70. "Considering the trend had always been to work hard to create your swing and then

maintain it, this idea seemed very radical at the time. But as I entered the back nine of my golfing career and tried to regain those lost yards while nursing a bad back, arthritis and two titanium knees,

I realised Don was speaking good old common sense..."

The epiphany convinced Dawson to write his own instruction book, *Now For The Back Nine*, in which he draws on his own experiences to help the more mature golfer adapt to their new-found

limitations and stay competitive into their 40s, 50s, 60s – and beyond. Here, in an excerpt from the book, he offers five essential lessons...

And yes, this means you!

After you hit the age of 30, your 7-iron loses about four yards every 10 years.

Source: *Arbore*



#1

Great balls of power

A better posture brings more explosive power

The problem

There's a saying that for every action there's a reaction. Golf is a game of chain reactions. Start wrong and the whole swing will be wrong. Get the basics right and there's a good chance of recovering lost yards and playing to a very respectable standard. At address and throughout the backswing, it's essential that your weight remains on the balls of your feet, never on the heels. When throwing a ball, you always have your weight forward because you get no leverage from your heels. The same rules apply in golf because the power from your swing starts from the ground up.

The fix

Your posture relies on five key pillars. You have to tick all five.

- ❶ Keep your knees flexed throughout the swing.
- ❷ Keep your height.
- ❸ Maintain your spine angle.
- ❹ Keep your weight evenly balanced and on the balls of your feet.
- ❺ Let your eyes follow the ball on your follow-through.

#2

Less is more

Set up soundly for greater distance

The fix

When driving, if you place the ball two or three inches further forward in your stance, your follow-through will naturally be wider and fuller as more weight has to transfer onto your front foot. This weight shift gives greater forward momentum, leading to more power. Indeed, by also opening your front foot by up to 30 percent, you'll achieve the wider, fuller follow-through you need to really maximise your distance.



The problem

Over the years I've seen so many players whose poor follow-throughs are a consequence of what has gone before. Their backswings are usually based on the misguided belief that a bigger shoulder turn on the way back means they'll get generate distance. In reality, it usually means more chance of something going wrong. Here are two ways in which you can influence and improve your follow-through, simply by altering your stance and ball position.

#3

Hippy power

Create greater power with your hips



The problem

The modern golf swing is far more physical than it was when I was playing the Tour in the '70s and '80s. Nowadays it requires a 90-degree shoulder-turn on the backswing, turning hard against the resistance of hips that only turn about 20 degrees. The tension this creates causes the lower half to coil and uncoil like a giant spring generating enormous amounts of energy through the hitting area - many refer to this as 'the coil'. For most senior golfers, this is simply too physically challenging so we need to find other ways of creating the coil.

The fix

There are three different options to think about here, but please don't try them all at once.

- ❶ Point your rear foot slightly outwards at address. This will help your hips turn back more freely, though be careful not to overdo it as it will restrict your follow through.
- ❷ Close the hips slightly at address, which will facilitate an easier shoulder turn on the backswing.
- ❸ In taking your normal stance, withdraw your back foot approximately six inches. This will give you a better hip turn, which will make the coil easier. Remember to keep the back knee flexed.

The problem

I like to think of the golf swing as a circle where the chest acts as the hub that everything rotates around. For us back-niners, such full movement is now beyond most of us physically and this causes a loss of turn and power. To help overcome this and take the stress off our lower backs, you need to shift virtually all of your weight onto your back foot on your backswing, then reverse that shift down and through the ball on your follow-through. I like to refer to this as creating an extended circle of power, and there's a simple practice drill that will help you work on this.

The fix

Set yourself up with a pair of alignment sticks stuck in the ground, either side of your stance. Make sure that your weight is on the balls of your feet and that your back knee is flexed. On your backswing, turn back, transferring your weight on to your back leg, making sure that it doesn't move on to the outside of your back foot. Your hips should virtually touch the sticks as these images show, and you need to make sure that you turn and don't sway.

#4

The circle of power

Take a load off your back with this simple move



Get yourself on a roll

#5

How copying tennis players can recover lost yards

The problem

To hit the golf ball a long way we need fast clubhead speed at impact to compress the ball. It's also a fact of life that as we get older, we lose the muscles and rotation required to hit the ball a long way. But what we lose in carry can be made up for with extra roll.

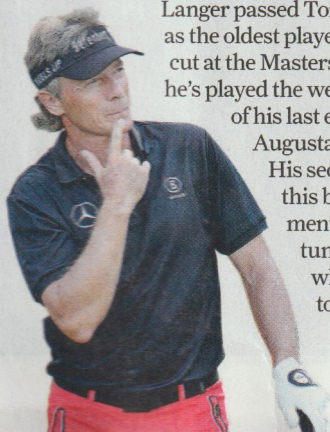
The fix

One technique used successfully by a number of senior golfers on Tour is based on the way that tennis players achieve more topspin on their forehand shots. They tee the ball a little higher than usual, move the ball position forward so it's opposite the front big toe and withdraw the back foot some six inches. Having done these three things, the result will be to hit the ball on the up with an in-to-out swing, thus creating topspin from a slight draw.



AN INSPIRATION TO US ALL

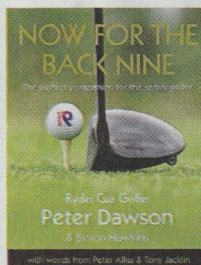
Bernhard Langer is living proof that age is just a number in golf. Just a few weeks ago at Augusta National, the 63-year-old beat his Sunday partner Bryson DeChambeau by two (71 to DeChambeau's 73), despite hitting six hybrids and two



3-woods into par 4s. Langer passed Tommy Aaron as the oldest player to make the cut at the Masters, meaning he's played the weekend in six of his last eight visits to Augusta National. His secret? "He has this beautiful mentality and tunnel-vision of what he wants to do," said

Butch Harmon. "He's so focused and regimented, and I mean that as a compliment."

He also knows when enough is enough. "A lot of people have shin splint problems and their feet are hurting, their knees, even their hips and their backs sometimes going out," Langer said. "I need to pay attention to that. After my round my wife said to me, 'you're not going to hit balls, are you?' I said, no, no chance. I'm done."



Now For The Back Nine by Peter Dawson is out now, RRP £20