

COMING TO GRIPS



EXCLUSIVE
by Mark Gibson
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V 8 Supercars champion Marcos Ambrose dreams of slashing his handicap from 18 to single figures, so he can tee up in the Tasmanian Amateur Championship and show Golf Australia readers it is a possible leap in ability.

As a coach who works with a wide cross-section of players, the one thing I know golfers find really difficult to change is their grip.

Now, though, it has come to the point in Marcos' program where it is absolutely necessary to correct his "strong" grip that has been evident from day one (pic 1).

A good grip (pic 2) is one that has a neutral effect on the clubface and ball flight. To achieve this, you should have the back of the lead hand and the palm of the trailing

hand facing the intended line of flight, or perpendicular to the clubface. The club should rest across both hands where the palm and fingers meet.

A "strong" grip is where the hands are placed on the club and turned away from the target so the left thumb is right of centre of the shaft (for a right-handed player).

This grip can cause excessive use of the hands during the backswing, often making the club look too far inside what is considered a good position. It is also likely that

the clubface will be closed on the downswing, and a pull or hooked shot will result.

Then we have to factor in the human reaction, which in most cases is an over-compensation, resulting in a weaker ball flight, push or slice.

To help Marcos identify his neutral grip I started off with a new white glove and a marking pen, in order to show Marcos where he needed to have the club in his left hand (pic 3). This ensures his right hand will also sit in a more neutral position.

I was keen to correct this immediately, so Marcos could develop a backswing that was more "on line" and would stop him getting the club so far behind him at the top of the backswing. (On line is when the club is parallel with the toes as the club reaches horizontal on the backswing. That is normally about hip high.)

There is a fair amount of discomfort involved with correcting a strong grip that has been in place for some time, and this was the case with Marcos.

To ensure a fast transition, I had Marcos hit a lot of shots on the range. The real help is to check the student is making a smooth opening of the clubface on the backswing and just as smooth in closing, or releasing, on the through swing (pic 4). This is exactly how we went about it in Marcos' case.

It is important to make sure you are comfortable and well-practiced with a grip change before adding any new thoughts. This can be tough on a coach when you are working with an impatient perfectionist ... as Marcos is.

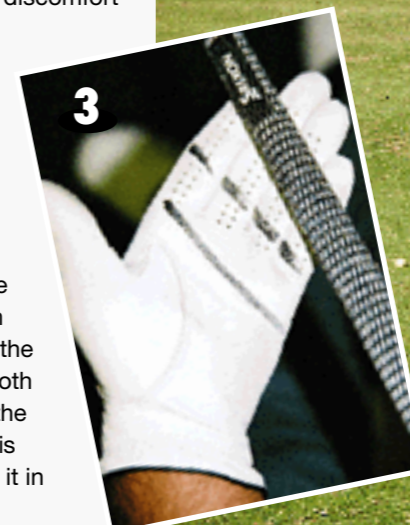
By changing Marcos' grip, the club started moving back in a much better position. Now we can work on improving his position at the top of the backswing.

The correct position for the arms during

the backswing is in front of the body. The arms are positioned in front of the torso at address and should depend on body rotation for their start in the swing.

The sequence of motion goes like this: as the body is coming to the end of its range of turn, the arms hinge upwards, thus maintaining their appearance in front of the chest in the completed backswing.

The reasoning behind this relationship between arms and body is that from the top of the swing to impact is





by 2003 V8 Supercars Champion Marcos Ambrose

I'm right on track

The V8 Supercars season is quickly moving towards the business end; there's me and team-mate Russell Ingall in contention, as well as a few other guys.

The coming rounds will be very interesting – the awesome atmosphere of the Indy carnival at home on the Gold Coast and the return of V8 Supercars to my *real* home, Launceston in Tassie.

The beauty of working toward my goal for a single-figure golf handicap is it gives me the release from racing I need to put things into perspective.

"Gibbo's" lessons are definitely now starting to pay dividends. The change from just hitting balls on the range to spending time with Mark in playing situations certainly opened my eyes in the art of course management.

My game is feeling the best it's been since we started, and all the changes are now coming a lot more naturally.

I have been playing a lot of different courses; I played to a 14 handicap at The Willows in Townsville – the Queensland Masters venue. And at Camden Lakeside in Sydney I was seven over after 14 holes, but then the double bogeys crept in and I shot 83. Still, it was a score I was happy with.

I've also managed a few more rounds at home at Sanctuary Cove on The Pines course, The Grand and at Lakelands with Gibbo. They're not easy courses by any standard but my scoring is now mid- to low-80s; my confidence is up and I feel like I'm closing in on my goal.

0.2 of a second. The arms are in front of the body at address and at impact; therefore, the further the arms are away from that position at the start of the downswing, the more catch-up they have to do. This tends to be a real timing feat, and one that is even more difficult to achieve under the pressure of competition.

For a player like Marcos, who has had a swing that has been reliant on arms for power, it is sometimes difficult to get them to lessen the arm swing and achieve the correct arm-and-body connection. I have given Marcos two swing drills that will help him make that correct transition.

The first is to place a small ball between the arms, just below the elbow, and then swing. The idea here is to give Marcos the feeling he will have when the arms are in front of the body throughout the swing.

The alternative is to place the grip on your belt buckle and grip down the shaft so as to have a normal arm-to-body relationship. From this set-up, you can see the club dissect the arm/torso triangle. Make a body rotation for the backswing and

next the arms hinge upwards; this should leave the club dissecting the triangle.

In Marcos' case once he had the concept it was pretty smooth sailing.

He had some swings with both drills and found a likening for the ball drill. I had him hit a couple of shots, then put the ball back in place for a couple of swings (pics 5, 6 & 7). This assisted Marcos to make the smoothest possible transition from his old swing to the new, improved position.

I am confident this better positioning of the arms throughout the swing will improve Marcos' accuracy and consistency.



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