

Lefties' lament, two-minute drills, games pros play—in "The Golf Course"

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HOUSE- HOLD HINTS

Tips & tools
for home
improvement
from TV guru
Wally Armstrong

EXCLUSIVE
"Buried Lies":
Peter Jacobsen's
look inside
the PGA Tour



Wally World



Fred Vitch

Golf's gadget-master creates his own brand of swing imagery by using everything except the kitchen sink. See who he is and on the following pages how his household hints can help your game

by GEORGE WHITE



So this is golf? A hockey stick. A hula hoop. A toilet float. A huge sponge. A football. Don't forget your sledgehammer, or—for goodness' sake—your coat hanger.

When Wally Armstrong arrives, he looks like a man who just finished spring-cleaning his attic. If you can thump it, bump it, push it, pull it, or throw it, hey, don't trash it! You've got something that Wally can apply to the golf swing.

If you've scanned the television channels at odd hours of the day or night, you might have bumped into Armstrong and his gadgets, along with buddies Pat Summerall and Kenny Rogers. Armstrong's 30-minute "infomercial" has been airing for the last two years.

It's his strongest marketing tool for a three-tape set, "Maximizing Your Game And Everything About It." And, from his home base in Maitland, Florida, he's doing quite a selling job. According to his figures, he's sold more than 100,000 sets at \$149.85 each.

Armstrong's passion for teaching manifested itself in the late 1960s while he was an All-American golfer at the University of Florida. His teammates, the likes of Steve Melnyk and Bob Murphy, yearned to be the next Arnold Palmer. Armstrong just wanted to be the next Conrad Rehling, the legendary teacher and Florida's golf coach at the time.

After a two-year Army hitch, Armstrong joined the PGA Tour in 1973. His 12-year career was largely undistinguished. He never won on Tour and earned just under \$400,000.

But while he was out there to cash a check, he was studying to become a teacher. He wasn't reading books or observing other pros—he was watching his pro-am partners.

The things he saw made him realize there must be a better way to teach the swing. He left the Tour in 1985 and started conducting clinics for kids, using his myriad of gadgets.

"I kept thinking, 'How could I get these kids' attention,'" he says. "So I began to teach with baseball bats and hockey sticks and footballs and tennis rackets. I would show them moves, grips, and swing motions that were similar to other sports."

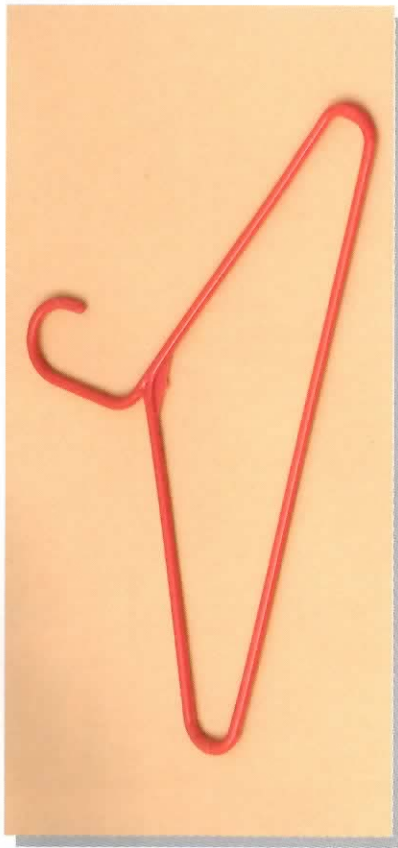
Soon, his first video was born. "Golf For Kids Of All Ages" was a hit and is still one of the best videos for beginners. His method makes him the Dr. Feelgood of instructors.

"The way I see teaching, the pro is a doctor," Armstrong says. "You look at a person and realize there is a basic swing inside everyone that is sound. But before you do that, you've got to find out what his biggest ache is.

"Many instructors don't ask enough questions to find out what the basic need really is. I probe until I find out. Then, I give a picture, a feel, an image until we make the patient well."

Some of the doctor's cures are on the following four pages.

George White covers golf for The Orlando Sentinel.

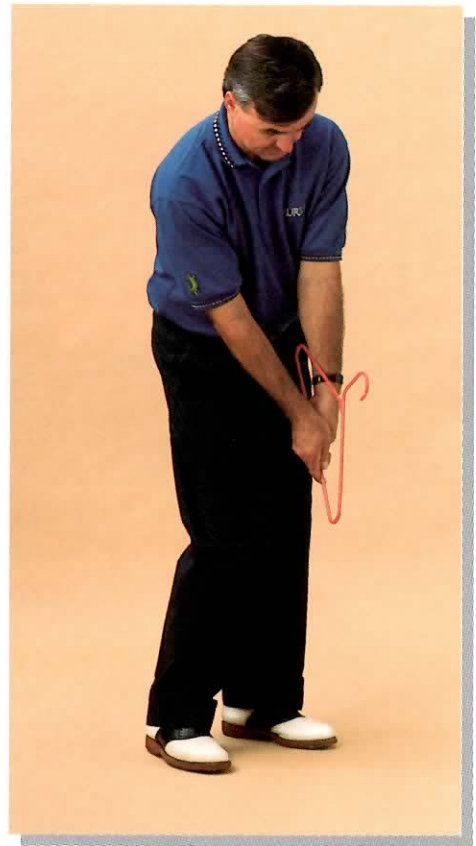


A new hang-up in chipping

Loose wrists and poor hand position can kill good chipping. If your wrists hinge on the downswing, your right hand flips under your left, the clubhead flips up, and the shot is topped.

You can teach your wrists to stay firm, with your left hand leading the clubhead into the ball, by practicing with a coat-hanger against your left wrist and forearm. Swing your hands back to knee-height, keeping the hanger in position. Swing through to knee-height on the other side; if the hanger falls against the inside of your right forearm, your wrists are too flippy, particularly through the hitting area.

Keep practicing until you consistently chip through with the hanger remaining against the left arm.



Putt with a sickle stroke

While some pros incorporate a bit of wrist action into their strokes, the players who putt best year after year are wristless. They control the stroke with a free swing of the arms and shoulders—nothing more.

Many amateurs are too wristy, but that's only part of their trouble. They know they have a putting problem, so they try practicing to work it out. Unfortunately, they often become bored on the practice green and start experimenting with silly strokes—which do even more damage.

You can groove a wristless stroke and stay interested in your practice by swinging a garden sickle. Make sure it's a little heavy so you feel the head moving back and through as you keep the blade low to the ground. Think about the stroke, not the hole, and focus on feeling the pendulum move. ■

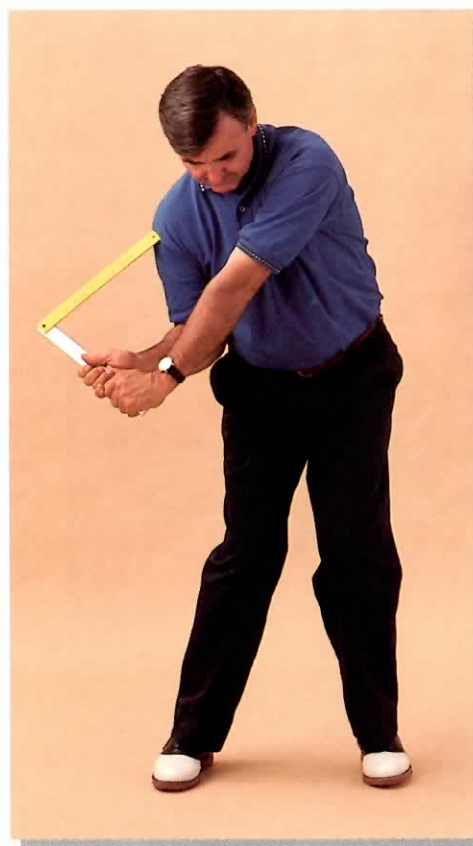




Tip to tip to stop over the top

What instructors call coming “over the top” means that at the start of the downswing the right shoulder moves outward rather than down. This fault prevents the club from dropping into a shallow plane and hitting the ball with a sweeping action. An outside swing makes you cut across the ball and slice it.

To fix an over-the-top move, use a carpenter’s folding ruler. Hold one end of the ruler in your hands and swing to the at-the-top position, so the tip of the other end rests on the tip of your right shoulder. Then shift your weight and allow your right shoulder to work downward. When you can do this drill keeping the tip of the ruler flush to your shoulder, you are on your way to feeling the correct downswing action.



Sweep for speed

More clubhead speed means more distance. To promote acceleration, the forearms must rotate rapidly in a counterclockwise direction immediately after beginning the downswing.

Swinging a broom back to the top, so one side faces the target line, then through so the other side faces the target line, is a sure way to promote a fluid releasing action of the hands, arms, and club in the hitting area. (Painting the sides different colors as I’ve done will help you see the release—and your progress.)

Using a broom and “sweeping” from red to green will promote a free-flowing release of the forearms. Regular swinging of the broom also will build up the muscles in your forearms.





Squeeze a balloon to stay “linked”

Teaching pro Jimmy Ballard calls it “connection”; I call it “linkage.” The idea is to unite the arms so they remain solid. Practicing with a balloon wedged between the forearms fosters the feeling of unity by keeping intact the triangle formed by your arms and shoulders.

If the arms work together during the takeaway, and remain close to your body in the early part of the backswing, the wrists won’t cock too early. Furthermore, the left arm won’t bend too much or move too far from the body; that leads to the club swinging outside rather than inside the target line on the backswing.

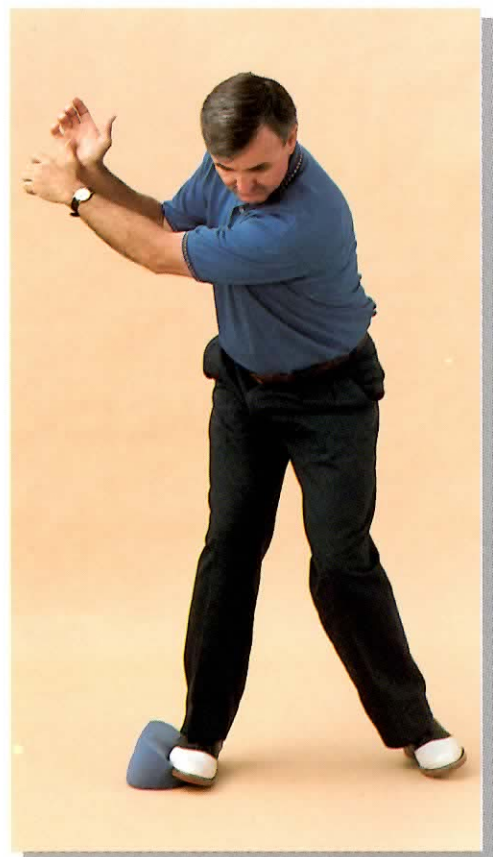
Practice with the balloon until you can swing back to waist level without it falling out from between the arms.



Sponge your turn

To maximize upper-body turn, early in the backswing you must shift your weight to the inside of your right leg and into your right hip. Pressure in the right side, especially on the right instep, indicates that you’re making a big turn; it’s also your signal to swing the club upward. But many golfers lose their weight to the outside of the right foot, which leads to swaying off the ball and a loss of balance.

To instill the proper weight shift, place a big sponge under the outside of the right foot. As you swing, the right leg will brace to give support, and you’ll feel the shift to the instep. You’ll also find it almost impossible to lose the weight to the outside, so you’ll remain steady and generate maximum power.



Household Hints

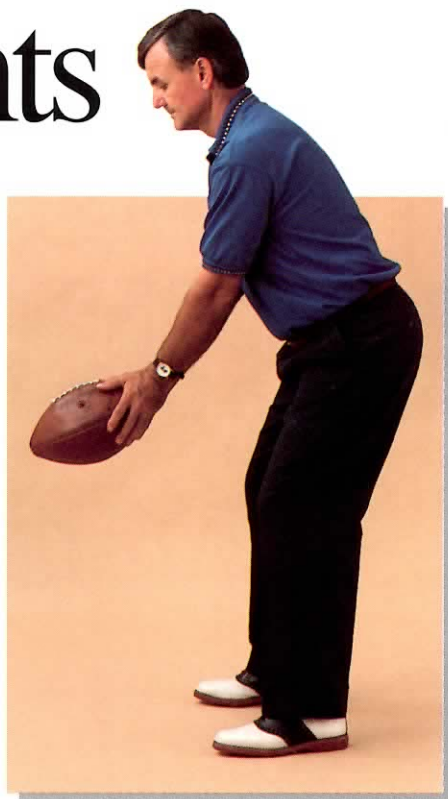
by WALLY ARMSTRONG

Forget those expensive training aids and fancy gadgets. The tools for building a better game are already in your home. Here's how to use a broom, a clothes hanger, a sponge, even a football to improve your full swing, short game, and putting

Quarterback a good setup

You can learn the correct posture of the setup by playing quarterback for a few minutes a day, holding a football as I'm doing here.

Just like a quarterback taking the snap, my knees are flexed slightly and I'm bent over at the waist, with my back perfectly straight. My arms are hanging naturally in an extended, but tension-free position and my chin is up slightly off my chest. Weight is split between the toe and heel of each foot.



Mop up your takeaway

Swinging a mop in place of a club will help you groove what might be the key move of any golf swing—the takeaway.

How far and how fast you take the club away determines how it meets the ball at impact. If you pick up the club quickly, you'll hit *at* the ball with a chop. But if you sweep the club away gently, you'll build speed gradually and accelerate *through* the ball.

The secret to a smooth takeaway is swinging the hands, arms, and club back together in one piece. This keeps the club-head low to the target line for the first foot or so of the swing. Mopping the floor exaggerates the low takeaway action, allowing you to get accustomed to the correct feeling.

