

The first part of the perfect one-piece takeaway begins with the arms swinging back as the shoulders begin to rotate. Even as the hands reach waist high, the wrists should remain unhinged.

As you reach the top of the backswing, the shoulders have turned fully, the left arm has crossed the chest, the right elbow has already folded and the wrists have hinged fully.

Take note that the hips have not turned nearly as much as the shoulders. The club is dead on plane, above the right shoulder.

All of these movements allow an equally perfect blending of the moving parts in the down-swing all the way to impact.

There is a slight shift or "bump" to the left, but the left side stays even with the ball, and once again, the arms and club stay in front of the body. There is no disconnection of the arms or hands from the body. All work as one piece.

The  
Secret  
To

# EXTRA

The one-piece takeaway is a swing concept Sam Snead made popular a number of years ago, but what it meant was never made exactly clear. The common understanding was that the "one piece" was the entire body — hands, arms, shoulders, hips — all turning simultaneously, with some knee flex and footwork thrown into the mix. In fact, even Snead did not move his entire body or all his body parts at once. His first move was a turn or pivot of the hips, followed very closely by the swing of his arms.

# DO IT RIGHT

*Optimum Accuracy*

## The Perfect One-Piece Takeaway

By Brett Taylor with Al Barkow





**A Bad Takeaway**

Many forms of a bad takeaway exist. In this example, the hands are rolling or pronating without any significant blending of the shoulder movement. The hands and arms work ahead of the body, and the usual result is the club crossing parallel at the top of the backswing. A sound forward swing is highly unlikely from this position.



For most golfers who are not blessed with Snead's remarkable athleticism and flexibility, starting the backswing with a turn of the hips is not the way to go. There is almost invariably too much hip turn, which creates a number of problems difficult to make up for in the forward swing.

You want to concentrate on moving only the upper body as a one-piece unit. It is really a blending or close-order sequencing of the arms, which move first, and the turn of the shoulders. The two parts move essentially at the same time, but the feel is of the arms beginning the action. The hips begin to swivel, but only after the arms and shoulders have gone into action.

The one-piece takeaway is an extremely important part of the swing because it sets your overall swing tempo, puts the club on its most effective swing plane, places the club in the correct position at the completion of the backswing and generates proper weight distribution and transfer.

That's a lot of important things as the result of what amounts to only a quarter of your total swing. As we all have heard many times, once you reach the top of your backswing, there is little time to correct things in the forward swing, because it happens so quickly. Which is to say, or reaffirm, one of the most fundamental maxims in golf instruction — "The first mistake is the worst mistake."

The one-piece takeaway we are talking about here will produce the most consistent swing you've ever had and with the kind of clubhead control, clubhead speed and solid impact that produces maximum power with optimal accuracy.

**The Mechanics**

The one-piece takeaway relates to the start of the swing and effectively only to that point when and where the club is parallel to the ground and the target line. Generally, this is when your hands are approximately hip high. Depending on how you set your hands at address, your wrists may be slightly hinged at this point, but not by command. You should not begin to consciously hinge your wrists until the club is past parallel to the ground. Basically, consider your wrists not hinged at all at this point.



### **Classic Separation**

A "classic" example of separation at the start of the backswing occurs when the wrists hinge early and the arms swing out away from the body. The swing path is too vertical, sets up an outside-to-inside forward swing and a club that digs too deeply into the ground at impact.



### **The First Move**

Do the arms begin the swing or is it the shoulders? You could say that if you begin by swinging the arms, the shoulders will turn at the very same time. After all, they are attached. By the same token, if you begin by turning the shoulders, they take the arms along with them. Whichever feels best for you, go with it, but the recommendation here is to think in terms of the arms.

The most important thing is there must be absolutely no movement of the lower body (hips, knees or feet) when the swing is initiated. It is the arms and shoulders as "one piece," with no hinging of the wrists.

The central feature of the one-piece takeaway is that there is no separation of the hands and arms from the front of your body. Any separation, such as the arms thrust out away from your body, creates slack in the system and the need to reroute the club to get it on the proper plane. This will result in a loss of clubhead speed, but perhaps more importantly, inconsistent ball striking and flight control. It's not easy to make the adjustment right every time when you reroute.

One important way to prevent any separation is to keep your right elbow pointed down throughout the swing. You





begin to fold the elbow once the hands get past waist high. This is not to say you tuck the right elbow in close to your right side, as if you want to hold a handkerchief in place, because this reduces swing width and length. You only want to make sure the elbow is pointing down, not “flying” up and/or out.

### **Troubleshooting The One-Piece Takeaway**

When learning the one-piece takeaway, you must be careful to avoid some common errors that can cause the move to go awry. For example, an early wrist hinge, early and/or excessive hip turn and the left knee flexing or collapsing are three features of a non-one-piece takeaway that you should watch out for.

What usually happens when you hinge your wrists before they get to waist high is that the club swings up on a more vertical plane and away from your body.



**Excessive Hip Turn**  
With excessive hip turn, the club moves too much to the inside of the target line as the arms separate from the body. This bad backswing motion usually causes a shot that is pushed to the right of the target.

The forward swing is too steep and digs sharply into the ground. The path of the club is often from outside to inside the target line.

With an early and/or excessive hip turn, the club moves too far behind your body and too much to the inside of the target line. The arms separate from the body and cannot catch up with the body in the forward swing. The most common result is a bad push to the right.

If you begin to flex your left knee to the right at the start of your backswing, it will cause a reverse-pivot, in which your weight remains on your left side

into the completion of the backswing. It will then necessarily shift to the right in the forward swing and bring nothing but poor results.

### **Checkpoints For The One-Piece Takeaway**

Here are the things to look for when making the one-piece takeaway, either with a friend, your video camera, a look in a mirror or just by feel of what you're doing. All are predicated on the hands being at waist high.

✓ Is the club shaft parallel to the ground and target line when your hands

get to waist high?

✓ Is the clubface angled slightly so that the toe of the club points somewhat upward? This indicates the clubface is square. A “flying” right elbow (and lateral body movement) promotes a closed clubface, while an early hinging of the wrists or a rolling of the forearms promotes an open clubface.

✓ Have your hands moved slightly to the inside or a bit farther back from the target line than they were at address? This is a natural consequence of standing at the side of the ball and the turn of the upper body. If your hands are on a line straight back from the ball when you get past waist high, they have separated from your body. By the same token, if the club moves back on the target line for too long, the shoulder turn is restricted, your head is pulled and you could sway onto the outside of your right foot.

✓ Are your hands outside or past the right leg before the wrists begin to hinge?

✓ Is your spine angle the same as it was at address? This is an indication that there has been no lower body movement to this point.

✓ Is your right elbow pointing down? This is perhaps the best way to assure the connection between the body and arms is maintained. The folding of the right elbow opens the clubface, which eliminates the need to fan it open with your wrists and hands.

Other things you should feel when properly executing the one-piece takeaway include your left arm going approximately horizontal across your chest as the club is swung to the top of the backswing. Also, your left shoulder will move forward rather than downward, which is to say it will be rotating on a level plane. This is important to keeping the center of the swing intact. It also moves the hands, shaft and clubhead upward into the right plane.

When the shaft is parallel to the ground/target line, check to see that your left knee is not dipping down or bending forward.

Finally, keeping your knees forward and pushing your left shoulder forward as the club starts back will prevent your hips from moving laterally when the backswing starts. Dipping or bending your left knee in the takeaway tends to lower the body. The left leg then straightens on the downswing, forcing the body to suddenly spring

upward and pull away from the ball.

## Results Of The One-Piece Takeaway

If you don't get to the top of your backswing in the proper sequence of movements, you can't start down in the same coordinated fashion. Still, there is a certain mechanic or two to start the downswing that helps maintain the proper sequence developed via the one-piece takeaway.

The main one is a slight bump or surge to the left with the left hip. The feeling is the left hip gets over the left foot. It is very subtle and essentially works simultaneously with the swing down of the arms and the rotation of the body to the left.

At impact, your arms will be in front of your body, the left side will be turned about 45 degrees, the wrists will have just unhinged or released and your right knee will be flexing toward the left, indicating there has been the correct weight shift to the left. **GI**

---

Brett Taylor is the teaching professional at the Empire Ranch Golf Course in Folsom, Calif. He can be reached at (916) 719-5515.