

➔ LÜSEN UP!

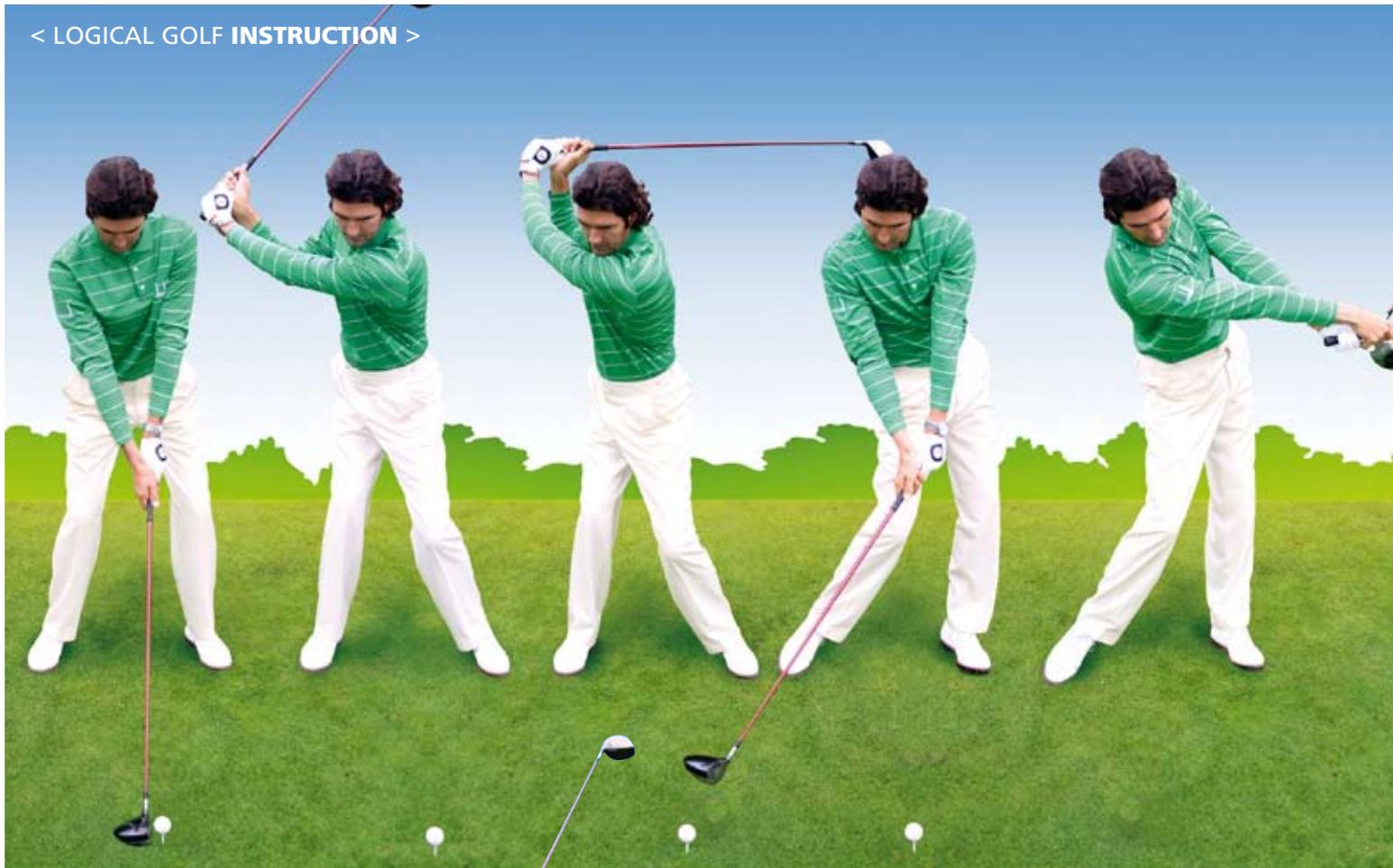
How many times have you heard someone say that you have to try to relax and 'be loose' when you play golf? What exactly does it mean, why is it important – and how can you achieve it? This month, PGA teaching pro *Robert Baker* explains it all...

SINCE ESTABLISHING

a string of Logical Golf academies in Germany, Berlin Hamburg and Munich to be precise, I've spent a lot of time in that country and it truly is one of my favourite places in the world. Since as far back as I can remember, the Germans have been on the wrong side of jokes about being overly particular, being obsessed with details and, basically, being a bit stiff. Well, that might be correct to a degree, but believe me, all you have to do is sit in one of Munich's famous beer halls for a while and you'll see a completely different side of German culture filled with singing, laughing and having a good time!

The stereotype, however, got me thinking about a vital aspect of trying to improve your golf game – the concept of being 'stiff' when you are trying to swing a club. It's such a vital concept to understand because it impacts on the overall geometry and dynamics of the golf swing, so I hope all my German friends out there will realise that I'm just using it to illustrate the point by using them as the illustration. And yes, the lederhosen really are mine! OK, let's try to 'lösen up'...







THE KINEMATIC SEQUENCE



THE FIRST THING we need to look at is something called the 'kinematic sequence'. It's essentially a graphic illustration of how the body and club should move during the golf swing. By wiring up hundreds of golfers and studying their swings, it has been established that there is an identical sequence of speed or energy generation for all great ball-strikers. What has been established is that it is completely true that a good downswing works from the ground up. In short, the lower body moves first (yellow line), then the torso (green), then the arms (blue) and, finally, the clubhead (red). Each segment of the body builds speed off the previous segment, increasing speed up the chain until it peaks with

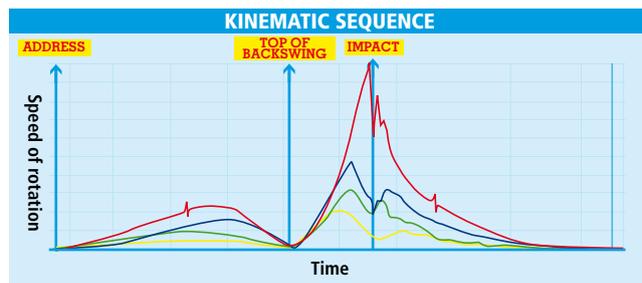
the clubhead snapping through at impact – like a lightning bolt.

The key to the kinematic sequence is a steady acceleration and deceleration of the four different 'parts' in order to maximise power. It's exactly like cracking a whip. Your arm must accelerate, then decelerate to crack the whip.

Take a look at the good sequence (left): the first move on the downswing is a rolling of the ankles which allows the left hip to open up, which in turn pulls the shoulders and, as they accelerate, they pull the grip of the club down, transferring energy through the shaft and into the clubhead – wham!

(NB: If you think this makes it sound 'automatic', you're taking the idea a bit far – there is, of course, a conscious pulling of the grip to get it ahead of the ball. The point is that if you don't get the sequence correct, you will never transfer energy to the clubhead correctly.)

So here's the key thought: you need to be completely loose and relaxed in order to allow all of this to happen – and create a swing that looks like the good sequence above where the four elements are perfectly 'in sync'.

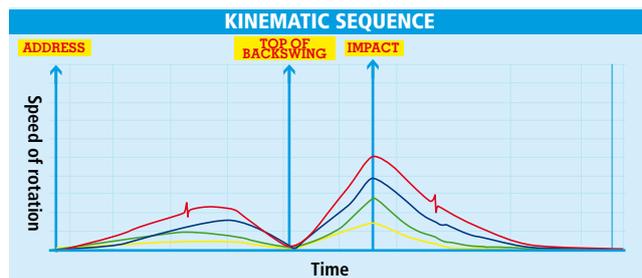


NOW COMPARE this to what's happening to our friend in the lederhosen. Does he look familiar? This is the perfect example of a stiff swing. If we were to try to create a kinematic graph for him, the backswing and followthrough would look very similar, the only difference being that in order to actually hit the ball, the rate of speed on the downswing would be slightly higher. Put differently, all four parts are moving at relatively the same rate on the downswing, so there is no building of power (and consequently no 'zip') because the four parts are not actually helping each other to accelerate.

some other part will have to compensate – and that's where 'tightness' creeps in. It's this process of 'waking up' all the muscles that the pros are trying to achieve when they waggle, twitch and move around at address. There's an old Scottish saying, 'As ye waggle, so ye shall swing,' and, to a large degree, that's absolutely true.

Here's the good news – thanks to the principles of Logical Activation, you can learn to 'turn on' the muscles in your body yourself. Turn the page to find out how...

So to crack the whip, you need to be physically 'loose' which, put into slightly more technical terms, means that you need all the different muscles involved in swinging a club to do the job they're supposed to be doing. If, for example, you aren't using your legs in the swing,



SOUTH AFRICAN-born Robert Baker is recognised as one of the world's leading golf instructors and is a permanent member of *Golf Magazine's* elite 'Best 100 teachers' panel. He has taught Logical Golf to countless professionals and amateurs worldwide – including five world No 1s: Greg Norman, Nick Price, Seve Ballesteros, Nick Faldo and Ernie Els. In the process, he has taken Logical Golf worldwide, opening facilities in London, Glasgow, Miami Beach, Pittsburgh, Cape Town, Pretoria, Mallorca, Puebla, China, New York City and, recently, Munich. *Compleat Golfer* visited Baker at his home base in Munich to shoot an instruction series that perfectly illustrates why Baker and Logical Golf have become golf household names the world over. It is a unique brand of golf instruction – one that works anywhere, anytime, for everybody.

Muscle activation is all about 'waking up' the muscles and getting the correct muscles to do the correct thing at the correct time. Remember that a structure that's already tense can't contract effectively, so the following four activations are a perfect starting point if you are trying to prepare your body to get into the correct sequence in the golf swing. In other words, it's designed to relax your muscles and enable them to perform effectively.

WHEN YOU have tight structures, it's a sign that the muscle sequence cannot fire effectively and that the body is compensating by making other muscles do the job. To get a real feel for this whole activation idea, I strongly suggest that you swing a golf club before you start, just to get a feeling of where you're at to begin with. Then, after each of the four activations (which only take 30 seconds or so each) swing the club a few times. You will instantly feel the difference.

HIP FLEXOR:



THIS ACTIVATION is needed to activate the hip flexors which are the deep inner muscles that run from the front of the spine down to the top of the hip. When you lift your leg up, you are using your hip flexors. When the hip flexor is not firing effectively it will, by a process called 'reciprocal inhibition', shut down the gluteal muscles – the largest and most important power-generating muscles in the body otherwise known as your butt!

One of the main functions of the glutes is to keep you standing upright, so they're very important in the golf swing. If your glutes aren't working at all, you will fall over. So the body realises this is not a great plan and calls on the hamstrings to take over the job of the glutes. To do this, the hamstrings have to tighten up – and when they do that, it severely limits your pelvic rotation. In terms of the kinematic sequence, the pelvis is the first thing that has to be working, so it's pretty logical that if your pelvis isn't active, you really are stuffed before you begin!

GET ACTIVATED WITH DOUG HEEL!



ACTIVATION: Simply press in firmly and rub in circles two inches either side of the belly button. If it feels a little uncomfortable, you're pressing about right! Do this for 30 seconds.

NOW TAKE A SWING: you will probably feel significantly freer in terms of your hip movement already.



GLUTES

AS EXPLAINED, the glutes are vital, if not the most important, muscles in the whole sequence. By activating the hip flexor, we've already partially woken up the glutes, but now we need to get them fully engaged with a specific activation.



ACTIVATION: OK, this one might seem a little crazy, but stay with me. In my experience, very few golfers have glutes that are firing effectively during the golf swing. Try to understand that there's a simple domino effect that will happen all the way up and down the body if the glutes aren't working properly. So to activate the glutes, you actually start at the neck – at the base of the skull.

Feel for the back edge of your skull and work in small deep circles from the centre all the way out – like a really good, deep-muscle neck massage. Do it for 30 seconds.

Once again, a good clue that you're doing it correctly is if it's a little uncomfortable and you can feel stiffness around the neck. The tighter it feels the less your glutes were working!

SWING THE CLUB

All sorts of good things could happen now, but you'll most likely feel more relaxed and balanced at address – and swinging the club with power will seem easier. What's happening is that you are starting to get into the correct kinematic sequence with the correct muscles working to help one another.



BREATHING: EVER WONDERED

why Tiger seems so calm under pressure? He has a great understanding of how to control his physiology, keeping his mind and body relaxed and focused. One of the most powerful methods to do this is diaphragmatic breathing – also known as 'breathing with the stomach'.



IN → OUT

TAKE 10 DEEP BREATHS

Use the diaphragm and breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth – with all the movement in the tummy – not in the chest. You'll probably feel light-headed. That's a reasonably good thing – we call it oxygen! You may also think that people around you are talking louder. What's happening is that your mind is going quieter and relaxing – essential elements of being focused.

SWING THE CLUB

Can you feel it?" You certainly should. You are now 'luse'!

ACTIVATION: The diaphragm is a muscle that sits at the base of the lungs. To get it firing, we need to activate along the sternum – the breastbone. Press in at the bottom of the sternum and make small massaging circles all the way up to top (near the neck) and then back down again. This will allow the brain to 'find' the diaphragm so we can use it properly.