You don’t choose your swing. It chooses you. Now, with a simple and easy test, you can discover for the first time your most dynamic, consistent and efficient motion.

By Top 100 Teacher Mike Adams
Hamilton Farm G.C., Gladstone N.J. / The Medalist Club, Hobe Sound, Fla.

with David DeNunzio / Photography by Angus Murray / Illustration by Keith Witmer
Anyone who has ever taught or played the game has had a preconceived idea—right or wrong—of how a club should be swung. This multitude of theories has produced enormous confusion over the years about the proper way to move the club back and through to achieve solid results. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that 99 percent of the instruction you read in books and magazines, see on TV, or receive from your coach is correct. It’s just that most of it doesn’t apply to you because it’s far too general to match your specific needs. The secret to success is finding and listening to the small percentage of advice that does.

Case in point: swing plane. For decades we’ve assumed that there was only one ideal plane—the lone swing track made famous by Ben Hogan and his sheet-of-glass theory over a half-century ago (originally published in 1957 as one part of a five-part series in *Sports Illustrated*).

While Hogan’s single sheet of glass (tilted to match the shoulder plane established at address) is fundamentally correct, it’s grossly incomplete. There are actually three ideal planes, and the one you should use is primarily determined by how you’re built.

It’s said that form always follows function, and your golf swing is no exception. Doesn’t it make sense that your anatomy would have something to do with how you swing your clubs? I think it makes perfect sense—otherwise, you’re putting the proverbial square peg into the round hole, setting in motion an ineffective chain of events that, truthfully, will keep your game at the same level it’s languishing at right now, while also potentially exposing you to the risk of injury.

I recently developed a test (below) that nails your golf body type like never before to help you determine the shape of your best swing—the sheet of glass you should follow to make your motion powerful and consistent. The test is very simple—no preparation or No. 2 pencils are needed—and it takes only a few seconds to complete. Once you perform it and decode your results, the information you gain will change your golfing life for the good, and for years on end. There are thousands of swings out there for you to try, and none is more efficient or better than the rest—except for the one that fits you.

**TEST: HOW TO FIND YOUR BEST SWING**

I call it the “Elbow Hinge Test.” Stand tall and point your right thumb out like a hitchhiker. Set your right elbow against your rib cage, just in front of the side seam on your shirt, and then fold your upper arm up without pulling your elbow off your rib cage. Check where your thumb points in relation to your right shoulder.

**Low-Track Golfer**
Thumb points below the top of your right shoulder.

**Mid-Track Golfer**
Thumb points even with the top of your right shoulder.

**High-Track Golfer**
Thumb points above the top of your right shoulder.
HOW TO DECODE YOUR TEST RESULTS

The Elbow Hinge Test exposes the difference (if any) between the length of your upper arm and the length of your forearm. This is important, because as you swing your right arm back in your takeaway, a longer right forearm (compared with your upper arm) will “track” the clubhead higher relative to your right elbow (the opposite is true if your forearm is shorter than your upper arm). The test defines your ideal backswing plane, blowing the single-plane theory right out of Hogan’s secret dirt. It also indicates your ideal delivery plane. While there are other variables that determine on which plane you swing the club back (p. 95), missing your track coming down forces your body to contort in order to place an appropriate strike on the ball (causing stress to your body along the way). A lot of good players have learned to make these compensating moves automatically, but most golfers lack the skill and timing to do so consistently and without injury.

LEARNING THE THREE TRACKS

1. **THE HIGH TRACK**
   If you tested out as a high-track golfer, your ideal clubhead path is defined by the plane that extends from the target line through your right shoulder at address (Hogan’s famed shoulder plane).

2. **THE MID TRACK**
   If you tested out as a mid-track golfer, your ideal clubhead path is defined by the plane that extends from the target line through the tip of your right elbow at address (right-arm plane).

3. **THE LOW TRACK**
   If you tested out as a low-track golfer, your ideal clubhead path is defined by the plane that the shaft of your driver (or any club, really) sits on when you sole it on the ground at address (shaft plane).

Although you’ve read about other ways to move your club between your backswing and delivery positions (by slotting or applying a two-plane method), minding your track from start to finish produces the most consistent contact and reduces body stress to a very low level. It’s important to note that the three tracks are equal—no one track is better than the other two. A low-track swing, for example, won’t produce any more distance or accuracy than a high-track swing, and vice versa. It’s a matter of what best fits your body.
COVER STORY: THE RIGHT SWING FOR YOU

TRACKS IN ACTION

The backswing and downswing clubhead paths of some of the best ballstrikers on Tour prove that hitting it consistently long and straight is easiest when you swing track to track.

MR. ACCURACY
Heath Slocum
TRACK: Low-to-low
Swings back along his shaft plane and delivers the club to the ball along his shaft plane.

KEY STATS
2011 Driving Accuracy: 74.9% (2nd)
2011 GIR: 71.4% (2nd)

DRIVING PHENOM
Keegan Bradley
TRACK: Mid-to-mid
Swings back along his right-arm plane and delivers the club along his right-arm plane.

KEY STATS
2011 Total Driving: T12th
(300.7 yds., 61.5% fairways hit)

BALLSTRIKING WONDER
John Senden
TRACK: High-to-high
Swings back along his shoulder plane and delivers the club along his shoulder plane.

KEY STATS
2011 Total Driving: 8th
2011 Ballstriking: 2nd
FALLING OFF TRACK  Even the best players in the world start to struggle when they fail to move the club along their natural swing plane. The proof is in the sequences below and opposite.

BAD TRACKING: Cost Martin Kaymer the World No. 1 Ranking

When Martin Kaymer won 5 times in 12 months between January 2010 and January 2011 and soared to No. 1 in the Official World Golf Rankings, he swung the club back and down on his shoulder plane (bottom sequence), which is a perfect match based on his Elbow Hinge Test results (left). For most of 2011, however, he tried to drop the club down on his right-arm plane (top sequence) and his ballstriking took a big hit (he finished 2011 ranked 114th in GIR and 155th in fairways hit). Interestingly enough, the swing Kaymer used to birdie nine of the final 12 holes to win last November’s WGC-HSBC Champions event in Shanghai, China, was his old high-track-to-high-track motion. If he can stick to his natural swing, he’s a lock to return to No. 1.

2011: OFF TRACK  A completely different swing from what the former World No. 1 used in previous seasons—it missed the ideal track both going back and coming down.

2010: ON TRACK  By sticking to his natural high track on both sides of his transition, Kaymer reached No. 1 in the world in just his fifth full year as a European PGA Tour pro.
**NOTE:**

**THE GOAL IS EFFICIENCY**

Swings that switch tracks aren’t as efficient as those that don’t, but they’re a real and viable option for many golfers (and you may be one of them). A lot of players utilize slot swings to draw and fade the ball. If you go back on a lower plane and come down on a higher plane you’ll probably hit fades. Conversely, if you take the club back on a higher plane and swing it down on a lower plane you’ll probably hit draws.

Ideally—and I can’t repeat this enough—you should swing your clubs back and down on the same plane. It’s okay to swing the club above your ideal plane on your backswing as long as you slot down to your ideal plane coming back (and vice versa if you take the club back below your natural swing plane).

**BAD TRACKING: Caused Camilo Villegas to Take a $3 Million Hit**

If you’ve wondered where Camilo Villegas has disappeared to, check the results of his Elbow Hinge Test at left and the swing he’s used throughout 2010 and 2011 (*top sequence*). He’s another example of a great young player who has fallen off his natural swing track. Villegas measures out to be a shoulder planer (high-track golfer), but he’s currently swinging as a mid-track golfer (right-arm plane). In previous seasons he swung the club on his natural shoulder plane (*bottom sequence*) and flourished—two wins and more than $4 million in earnings in 2008. Last year he hit only 57 percent of his fairways (140th) and only 60 percent of his greens (163rd) while earning $1.2 million, the lowest season money haul of his career.

**2011: OFF TRACK**

Excessive downswing slotting currently has Villegas delivering the clubhead to the ball way below his natural plane, and it’s costing him wins and money.

**2008: ON TRACK**

Villegas was firing on all cylinders throughout 2008 (two wins and seven Top 10s) using a swing that tracked on his natural shoulder plane.

**NOTE:**

See how your favorite Tour pros test out, and whether they’re hitting their natural track. Go to golf.com/allaccess.
Once you discover your ideal plane, take some time during your next range session to get a feel for nailing it every time you swing.

**LOW-TRACK GOLFER**

If you’re a low (shaft-plane) tracker, position the aiming rod so that it matches the angle of the shaft (left photo), then make slow-motion backswings, guiding the shaft of your driver up the aiming rod until at least the point at which your left arm is parallel to the ground (right photo).

**MID-TRACK GOLFER**

If you’re a mid (right-arm-plane) tracker, position the aiming rod so that it points at your right elbow (left photo), then make slow-motion backswings, guiding the shaft of your driver up the aiming rod until at least the point when your left arm is parallel to the ground (right photo).

**HIGH-TRACK GOLFER**

If you’re a high (shoulder-plane) tracker, position the aiming rod so that it points at your right shoulder (left photo), then make slow-motion backswings, guiding the shaft of your driver up the aiming rod until at least the point at which your left arm is parallel to the ground (right photo).
Hitting your backswing track is good, but nailing it on your downswing is absolutely critical to solid ballstriking.

**DRILL SETUP**

Reposition the aiming rod six inches beyond your target line and about a foot outside your right foot, as shown above. Then follow the instructions at right for each type of swing tracker.

**LOW-TRACK GOLFER**

If you’re a low (shaft-plane) tracker, position the aiming rod so that it matches the angle of your shaft (*left photo*), then make slow-motion swings, making sure your clubhead moves just under the rod as you deliver it to impact (*right photo*).

**MID-TRACK GOLFER**

If you’re a mid (right-arm-plane) tracker, position the aiming rod so that it points at your right elbow (*left photo*), then make slow-motion swings, making sure your clubhead moves just under the rod as you deliver it to impact (*right photo*).

**HIGH-TRACK GOLFER**

If you’re a high (shoulder-plane) tracker, position the aiming rod so that it points at your right shoulder (*left photo*), then make slow-motion swings, making sure your clubhead moves just under the rod as you deliver it to impact (*right photo*).
ATTENTION!

If your right arm folds immediately, it will direct the club back on the shaft plane, regardless of your best track.

**VARIABLES AT WORK**

The actual route your club takes on the way to the top is determined by variables other than the results of your Elbow Hinge Test. Things like chest thickness, shoulder width, and how your right arm likes to work in an athletic motion all contribute to how your clubs naturally want to track back.

**Here’s what I mean.** Take your natural address position without a club and press your palms together. Without separating your hands, swing your left arm across your chest without turning your shoulders. Your right arm will naturally do one of three things: move back and up (top photo, below); move back and down (middle); or fold in front of your right hip (bottom).

If your right arm folds back and up, it will direct the club back on the shoulder plane, regardless of your best track.

If your right arm works back and down, it will direct the club on the right-arm plane, regardless of your best track.

If your right arm folds immediately, it will direct the club back on the shaft plane, regardless of your best track.

The trick is to not fight your natural tendencies during your backswing. It’s more important to hit your downswing track. If you get at least that part right, your game will improve faster than ever before.

**PRACTICE: HOW TO PUT IT ALL TOGETHER**

**SWING THOUGHTS TO STAY ON TRACK**

Once you have a feel for swinging your clubhead back and through on your natural track, remove the rod and hit some shots for real. Most students do a pretty good job of nailing their backswing track after working with the aiming rod. The trick is in the downswing, because the delivery system for each track differs. Follow the guidelines below for each tracker type.

**HIGH TRACKER**

If you’re a high (shoulder-plane) tracker, picture a steeper downswing, with your shoulders powering the club into impact as you rotate them toward the target. A good feeling to have is that you’re turning your right shoulder under your chin with your left shoulder higher than your right as you strike the ball.

**MID TRACKER**

If you’re a mid (right-arm-plane) swing tracker, you should feel as though you’re delivering the club to the ball using only your trunk (hips to chest). Think about using more of your midsection than lower-body turn, and try to get your shirt buttons in line with the ball as you make contact.

**LOW TRACKER**

If you’re a low (shaft-plane) tracker, you should feel as though you’re delivering the club to the ball using only your hips. Your lower body turn should initiate your downswing and literally pull the club into the impact zone. This will help flatten your angle of attack and allow you to hit your natural track.

Use shoulder power to track high.

Use your torso to track mid.

Use hip power to track low.