

# PLANE TALKING

*Gi: So, a golfer is going through a tough spell with his or her golf swing - is it better to be fixed or changed?*

JH: Fixing a problem is surely the optimum solution. To 'fix' something suggests an improvement at the end of the process, a move to a positive place. To change your swing or style is absolutely ludicrous - and yet I see so many players who try to do that, good players a lot of them. The scrapheap of golf is littered with good players who were not satisfied with how they went about it and decided to change. I go back to the 1940s with Ralph Guddahl, a wonderful player who made a short instructional movie with a Hollywood studio, which forced him to think about swing mechanics for the first time in his life. He didn't like the way his swing looked and so decided he had to change. Effectively the end of his career; he left the Tour in 1942 and, apart from a brief return in 1949, was never heard of again. In more modern times there have been other great players who have decided they had to make wholesale swing changes and it signalled the end of their careers, too. I think all styles are either one-plane or two-plane - that's not a model that's just a style. The worst golfer in the world could be either one- or two-plane and the best golfer in the world could be, too. One swings his arms more around him as he turns his body, the other keeps his arms more up and down as he turns his body. But the crux of it all is that a golfer should stay within his style, fixing and refining it as and when necessary.

*Gi: When did you first make the distinction between one- and two-plane swings?*

JH: Interestingly enough when I talked years ago with John Jacobs. He always taught a style in which the arms swing more upright than the body turns. The arms and the body are oriented in two different planes. One night over dinner I asked of John: 'Relative to the two planes, what we teach, what would you say Ben Hogan did?' John laughed, then replied: 'Well, I guess he just threw the whole mess into one plane!'

Well, that conversation led me down a path that lasted nine years in which I tried to figure out exactly what Ben Hogan did. And I started calling them one-and two-plane swings. Jose Marie Olazabal would be a classic one-planer, as would Graeme McDowell and Miguel Angel Jimenez. Tom Watson would be a classic two-planer, as would Jack Nicklaus and our current Ryder Cup captain who is playing very well right now, Davis Love III. As you picture those different players' swings in your mind I think you can begin to visualise the differences I'm talking about.

*Gi: From a teaching perspective the biggest problem for any golfer, then, is not making this distinction?*

JH: Correct. Players who fall into these two broad categories do very different things and in order to be effective a coach would need to be aware of this. Otherwise the instruction simply doesn't

Editor **Richard Simmons** talks to Jim Hardy, the author of the ground-breaking book *The Plane Truth for Golfers*, which essentially classifies all of us as falling into one of two distinct styles or categories: one-plane or two-plane. Understanding your own preference is the first step to improving your swing and each has its own guiding fundamentals.

The implication is clear: if you are naturally a one-plane swinger of the club (think rotary motion, Hogan, Olazabal) but have been working on two-plane principles you are compromising your natural instincts, effectively fighting a losing battle in your efforts to improve. If you are a natural two-planer (Jack Nicklaus, Colin Montgomerie) and have been influenced by examples of one-plane swings, chances are you are similarly trapped in confusion.

For any serious student of the game Hardy's book is essential reading for the way it shines a light on this fascinating issue. So sit back and enjoy a conversation with one of golf's true pioneers of instruction



match the swing type - oftentimes as compatible as oil and water.

The problem, as I see it, is that too many instructors see a golf swing that doesn't match their prejudice. Let's say their prejudice is for two plane. They get an Olazabal in front of them and they want to change them. Although he taught a two-plane swing, where John [Jacobs] was a genius was that he realised the overall rule of golf is a correct impact done repetitively; the method employed is of no real significance. Now, John taught Olazabal for years - a pure one-planer if ever there was one, with a strong rotary action. John recognised in the young Jose a player with a natural rotary swing, and he wouldn't change him. He'd just fix him. If Olazabal was hitting the ball too low and with a hook, John would fix him. He'd get rid of the low hook rather than changing his swing. To me that kind of teaching is missing today. I never saw Jack Nicklaus change his style - when he was off he just fixed it. Ben Hogan didn't change his style, he just refined it. Trevino certainly didn't change his natural game - if he had been advised to we'd never of heard of him! Player didn't, Palmer didn't. If they ran into a patch of bad golf they fixed it.

*Gi: I have a sense Tiger's name is looming here...*

JH: Tiger is undergoing his third major swing change. It's really not all that long ago when Tiger was at a place in his career where he was a truly wonderful player, and if he needed a reliable shot - a 'go-to' shot - he'd hit a low cut, or that 'stinger' 3-wood off the tee. Many was the time when he'd be experimenting through 63 holes, didn't work, and then over the last 9 holes he'd slice the ball around and beat everybody. Apparently he didn't like the left to right shot and wanted to hit high draws. So he started changing his golf swing. I think he'd have already beaten Jack's record if he'd stuck with the style he had in his golden era, between '99 and 2003. Tiger's go-to shot was that left-to-right stinger. That was certainly Jack's stock shot. And I never saw Trevino play anything other than that when he needed to. Butch Harmon taught Tiger how to play short irons. Previously, Tiger played short irons with too long a golf swing that had too much up-and-under in it, throwing the ball high into the air and losing distance control. Butch taught Tiger how to get the ball flight down with a lower and more penetrating flight. He got him a little bit wider and shorter golf swing, on both sides of the ball, and made him a brilliant short iron player. As far as his go-to shot went, well it was always a cut. That's all he needed. Why has he endured all these swing changes? Well, it just seems to be our culture today - if it's not working bag the whole thing and try something else.

*Gi: The Plane Truth - how is your teaching organisation operated here and throughout Europe?*

JH: By the end of this year we will have approaching 100 certified instructors throughout Europe and the UK, including Scandinavia. I have been here in the UK three times in recent years - and Chris O'Connell, who works with me [and who coaches Matt Kuchar] has been over more than that. We present seminars on the Plane Truth methods and help instructors achieve Level 1 certification. We have received great interest from the Spanish Golf Federation and indeed the interest in learning and becoming better instructors is very positive here in Britain as well as throughout Europe and Scandinavia.

*Gi: What is the typical reaction to your system from pros who have been trained traditionally by the PGA?*

JH: I think their eyes are opened...wide. Every one of them to a man will come over to speak with me or Chris, or our UK-based associates George [Porter] and Duncan [Woolger], and tell us this is the most incredible experience of their career. We get so

## ARE YOU A 1 OR 2-PLANE GOLFER?

So, how do you determine which is your preference? As a simple test, do you prefer playing the ball below or above the level of your feet?



**TWO-PLANE ARMS SWING UP**  
 "We use a simple test to determine a player's natural preference," says **Duncan Woolger**, a Level 3 Certified Plane Truth Instructor based at Crown Golf's Blue Mountain facility near Bracknell, Berks. "And what you find is that a natural 2-Plane golfer, who has a tendency to be steep due to the arms and club swinging up and down in front of the body, would prefer the ball below his feet. Two-planters are more likely to hit the pulls, slices and chunks when their swing gets out of position. They also tend to do better with fairway woods and long irons versus their wedges and can shape the ball more easily. If you recognise these traits then you are, most likely, a 2-Plane golfer."



**FLATTER MORE ROUND**  
 "In contrast the 1-plane golfer, who swings his arms and club around the body on a much flatter plane, will have a tendency to be shallower coming in to the ball and for that reason they will always prefer playing a ball above the level of their feet," says **George Porter**, also a Level 3 Certified Instructor, based at the North Hants Golf Club. "This shallower swing will help the 1-planer to be more effective with his wedges and driver but not as productive with fairway woods and long irons (which explains the number of hybrids now seen on tour).  
 "When they get 'off' in their swing, 1-planers tend to hit the pushes, hooks, fats, thins and shank due to the shallower nature of their attack."



many letters and emails afterwards telling us how much their teaching has improved. And the reason for that is simply that we open their eyes to the fact there is more than one way to do it. What they have been doing is *modelling* golfers - whatever way a pupil swings the club is put into the same category. When I speak at these seminars I start off by telling them there are two general categories of golf swing - i.e. one-plane and two-plane - and that all swing diagnosis issues are the same. If you are not diagnosed via ball flight and impact you are not starting at a universal place, you are starting from a position of prejudice - i.e. 'I don't like how that club sets at the top', or 'I don't like that grip'. To which my immediate follow-up question is: 'Have you ever seen a good player in that position at the top?', or 'Have you ever seen a world class golfer with that grip?'. And the answer is usually yes. So we know that a particular grip or stance or backswing is OK. It works. It happens to match up with what that particular player likes to do. The secret to good coaching is that you take what natural instincts they have and improve upon it - and the ball flight will always give you the direction to go in.

*Gi: The system of pluses and minuses (relating to being either too shallow and wide or too steep and narrow) in your coaching system makes for an intriguing matrix.*

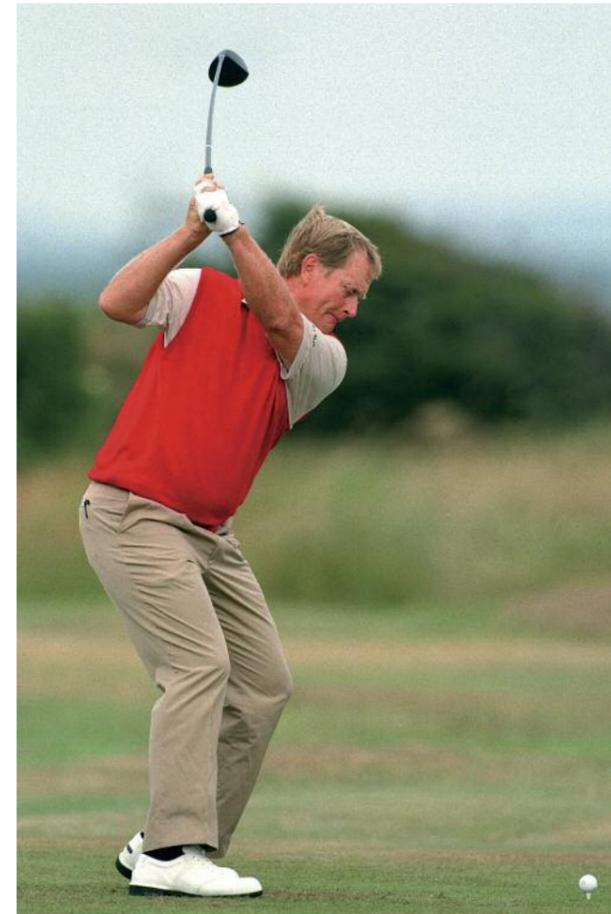
JH: Well, I have to say it all goes back to John Jacobs, the laws of ball flight. In fact, my latest book is based upon that system. The origins were certainly with John - i.e. analysing angles of attack, shallow and steep - I simply added to it the widths to the bottom of the swing (i.e. whether a swing through the impact zone is very sweepy along the ground or very narrow). Now, all golf 'misses' (i.e. poor shots) are the result of either the result of being too wide and too shallow or too steep and too narrow. So, if all misses are the result of that - a pure reflection of the golf swing - we can pin-point corrections. There are a number of ways to fix these faults, whether you're a one-planer or a two-planer, and I don't mind whether one of my certified instructors focus on the set up, the backswing or the downswing or the follow-through. And I don't care if he's fixing it using the body motor or fixing it using the arms and the club. As long as we are fixing something that is to minus then we are OK.

*Gi: A large part of your programme is that you educate the student in how to take a lesson?*

JH: That's right. And you know, so many times when you just tell a student what he is doing wrong at impact - the club is doing this and this and this to the ball - they will stand there and say, 'Well, I had no idea'. And you almost can leave the lesson alone by saying 'well, this would be the opposite if the club was doing this at impact to the ball'. I haven't told him how. I am simply waiting to see if the player, as an athlete, can find the way to correct what he has been doing. In my experience 90% of all golfers will, with the next two or three balls, see a much-improved ball flight. Because they now understand what they were doing. The problem, of course is that most amateur players tend to over-analyse and start trotting out all the traditional cliches - 'Did I keep my head still?', 'Is my left arm too straight?', 'did I cock my wrists?', and so on. So when somebody asks me to help a teacher learn to teach better I ask what is that going to do to the golf ball? They often look puzzled, as if that is unimportant. They are missing the point: a golf coach should not worry so much about making the swing better. We are in the business of making the golf ball fly better.

*Gi: You only have to walk down the range at a regular tournament or top amateur event to see there really is no such thing as a textbook swing.*

JH: Right...and yet so many young players invest all of their en-



Whatever works for you... Two-planters are in pretty good company, with Jack Nicklaus (left) and US Ryder Cup captain Davis Love (right) among those who prefer the arms to swing 'up'...

This great image of Gary Player reveals a preference for a method in which the arms are seen to swing more around the body (below), while Europe's Ryder Cup captain Jose Maria Olazabal - a long-time student of John Jacobs - reveals that same preferences for a one-plane swing during a recent Ryder Cup photocall in Chicago



ergy in trying to be perfect? I happen to think Jim Furyk has one of the greatest swings in the world. You know, for a number of years the top coaches in the States would vote on who had the best swing on Tour and I would always vote for him. Because he produced the best hitting results. I am a results oriented kind of guy. I want the golfer to leave every lesson with me or one of my certified instructors hitting the ball better than he did when he arrives and *understanding* why he hit it better.

*Gi: Average handicaps are stuck and have been for years...is it because instruction is not results oriented?*

JH: Before I ever met John Jacobs, I told a dear friend of mine, a man called Shelby Futch, a man who ended up owning and managing John's schools in America, that it occurred to me that I've seen a lot of people who have changed their golf swing to make it pretty but they still hit the same bad shots! And I said it seems to me that what we need to be changing is how they hit the ball and not how they swing. Now, down the years, the downside to that, John's detractors in America, would say: 'Oh, John's just a Band-Aid teacher, he just fixes little things he doesn't build a sound foundation...'. Well who's solid base or foundation should we choose? Jack Nicklaus' or Ben Hogan's? Tom Watson's or Gary Player's? Colin Montgomerie's sound foundation or Jimenez's? The only sound foundation is a correct, repetitive impact.

*Gi: We could almost make the statement, then, that the most important fundamental that every golfer needs to be aware of is his own individuality and style? From there you can build and develop a golf game?*

JH: 100% correct. Every potential golfer needs to establish which of the two preferences he or she tends towards. The only two

sound foundations are seeing the game either as more rounded (one-plane) or as up and under (two-plane). You must establish your individual preferences. And you can do with a simple test (see sidebar Are you a One- or Two-Plane Golfer?). With the ball well above or well below your feet, well, one of them is going to feel more natural to you. To stand steady and swing your arms up and down or to let your body turn and get the ball off the lie above your feet. Whichever is more comfortable, then that's your natural style of swing.

*Gi: And the basis of The Plane Truth instruction concept is that once a golfer has identified that preference, there are very specific instructions that suit the one-planer and another set that apply to the two-planer?*

JH: Let me just go through the swings in basic detail to help your readers appreciate fully what the one-plane and two-plane concept is all about. In the backswing one of the things you notice, if you are going to swing your arms around you, you still have to have that angle in your spine that allows the shoulders to have some orientation towards the ground. Your arms don't have a lot of orientation to the ground, so your shoulders have to. So they are on a steeper incline. As you come down you notice that the one-planer, his left arm is not pointing out towards the ball, it's the right forearm that points towards the ball. The left arm is coming inward because it has to come around very early. A very rounded below the shoulder exit. The follow-through you see the club comes around is a very rounded below the shoulder exit.

In contrast, a two-planer is going to stand more upright, closer to the ball, and have a more upright clubshaft. In the backswing the two-planer is not going to turn on a steep angle with the shoulders, and the club is going to swing more up and



**ABOVE:** "I know Rickie Fowler well. He went to Oklahoma State, my old university. I know the programme there and I asked him if he had a coach. 'No', he replied. Good, I said. The best advice I can give you is keep it that way." - Jim Hardy

**BELOW:** The quite extraordinary swing of Matt Kuchar, a player who pulled himself out of a slump and went on to become one of the most consistent performers on the PGA Tour with the help of Hardy's chief associate, Chris O'Connell



over the shoulder as opposed to around. Coming down, the two-planer's left arm is going to be more out towards the target line and then, when he hits the ball, the right arm is going to go out more to the target line in the follow-through and the finish will be higher.

*Gi: Is there a more distinct wrist action in the two-planer's swing?*  
 JH: Yes. With the hingeing up and also again in the release, yes. The wrists are used to generate more speed. In the one-plane action the rotation of the body is a much more significant driver of speed.

*Gi: We have shot a few of your favourite drills - can you explain them for the benefit of our readers?*  
 JH: Now, the drill we can show for the two-planer is really one for the better two-planer, but he hooks, because he gets the club a little too much around him. He's a little confused. He is mixing elements. So, if he puts something in the way of his backswing, a bush or a tree or a bench, don't let the club get inside and around, get it up and down and more parallel to the bench. This is not a good drill for the two-planer who slices the ball. But it will help the better two-planer who hooks the ball to neutralise his swing and the ball flight. It teaches him to get the shaft working more up and down.

Conversely, for the one-planer we suggest the X-Drill. If you place two clubs on the ground to create a X-shape, you will see the direction your arms should move in during the backswing and downswing. They move in a sequence: the first half of the backswing your right elbow follows the line of the right-hand X - not rotating, just following - and then the left arm works on the left-hand X in the through swing. The key is to let the elbows drift on those respective lines before rotating and completing both the backswing and downswing moves. If you rotate too early on the way back you will be too flat. To first get the right elbow out of the way on the backswing...

*Gi: Do you think Ben Hogan would have been bang on the X-drill back and through - especially through into the through-swing?*  
 JH: Oh absolutely. Especially the through-swing. Because the left arm is so much in the way for a one plane golf swing, you have to get the left elbow to lead off there, following the line of the X to the inside left, before the right side can rotate through impact.

*Gi: A brief lesson with Chris O'Connell a few weeks ago confirmed that I am a natural one-planer and I have always hit the ball the best when I feel the arms are swinging so far left in the through-swing.*

JH: I had read snippets of Hogan's 'secret' and when I discovered what you have just said I knew I had it. The one-planer is going to fight a low shot going left and to fix it he has to swing more to the left! It seems crazy, but the more you can get this thing over here [stands to demonstrate the left arm swinging left immediately post impact] the straighter you will hit the ball. A light goes on in your head. I will offer for the one-planer who is hooking badly to have a stake, or a shaft, 10 yards in front of him on his target line and I'll set the line on his feet exactly pointing at it, and I'll say I want you to keep swinging your left arm and right arm more to the left until you can start the ball left of that stake and cut it. Now he understands the two aiming poles of his golf swing. That could be a terrific drill. But you're a 100% right that you felt you swing the farthest to the left and hit the most crisp, powerful and straight shots.

*Gi: There is no worse feeling than that of the right arm going down the target line...*

JH: Richard, spoken like a true one-planer. I spent some time with Steve Richardson yesterday, an ex-Ryder Cup player, hooking, hooking *hooking*. So I put some marks on the ground to the left

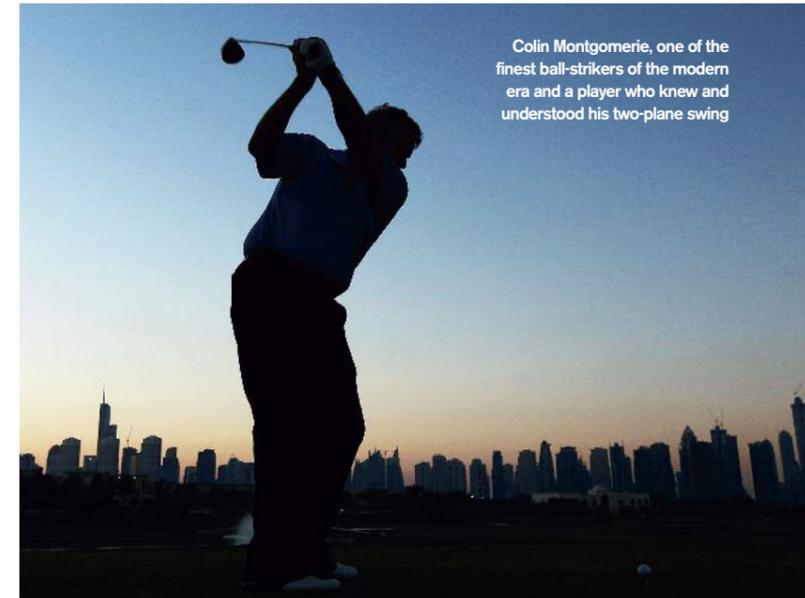
and had him doing exactly what we are talking about. I said isn't this sheer madness - here I am having you swing further left to eliminate hitting the ball left! After a few minutes he was nailing it.

*Gi: We have mentioned several current players who are distinct one-planers - how about the young American Rickie Fowler?*  
 JH: I have known Rickie for a long time. One of my long-time students is Tom Pernice Jr. Rickie Fowler grew up just down the street from Tom and idolised the man. Tom took him under his wing at about the age of 14 and they played a lot of golf together. Well, Rickie ended up breaking Tom's heart because instead of going to UCLA he went to Oklahoma State, my *alma mater*. I am still close to the program and I asked Rickie if he had a golf coach. 'No' he said. Well, I told him, let me give you the best piece of advice you will ever have: don't ever get one. Because he does something very naturally that a lot of people are not going to like and are going to want to change. I told him don't ever change what you do. It's the same with Matt Kuchar, who works with one of my closest associates Chris O'Connell. Matt does not have a pretty swing - he's 6' 5". He is a little inside and a little flat. But here's a guy who was a national amateur champion, won immediately on the PGA Tour, then lost his card, found himself on the Nationwide Tour and was basically done. Was on the scrapheap of golf. Anyway, Matt hooked up with Chris and we started working with him. Almost immediately he won on the Nationwide Tour and then won on the PGA Tour and now he is one of the most consistent performers in world golf. He always had an awkward, rounded golf swing but - get this - it was too flat. What we did is tip his spine over more so he has more shoulder angle. His arms are still low on his body, but the pitch of his body makes his swing more upright. In other words we left Matt in his natural category but simply made him steeper by adjusting his posture. Immediately all his hooking problems went away.

*Gi: Is posture a big key for the true one-planer?*  
 JH: You bet it is. A very short one-planer - let's say someone between 5' 5" - 5'8" - does not need to bend over very much. The centre of their swing isn't very high off the ground. Ben Hogan never had much bend in his posture. Gary Player didn't. Graeme McDowell doesn't. The taller you get, if you swing flat, you have to bend over. And I don't care, by the way, if you bend over at address or bend over during your swing - Ben Hogan never had much bend at the set up but he dipped his head and spine by about 6 inches during his downswing. Tiger, when he used to play his best, would do the same. His body compressed on the way down. And I always laughed when I heard some expert on the *Golf Channel* say 'Tiger's going to have to get that head drop out of his swing'. That was part of what made his swing tick (and in fact he is getting a bit of that look back now). In my first book I wrote that one-planers can either keep their spine steady or lower it - but never raise it. Two-planers can keep their spine steady or raise it. Jack Nicklaus always raised his; Monty always raised his spine angle. For a two-planer it's a way of shallowing the swing - it creates width and enables them to turn flatter through the ball. In fact, John [Jacobs] always used to prop two-planers up more, so they could get a bigger and more rounded turn. So heads moving down, spines angle moving down, for two planers that is highly damaging; for one planers it's great.

*Gi: Have there been certain players you would love to have worked with?*

JH: The thing that is very pleasurable about teaching is getting to work with wonderful people. I can remember when Tom Pernice, who had lost his card, personal finances were tough, whole life was tough. He had two daughters, one of whom was blind. She was the youngest, just 9. We had been working together for about six months and I was trying to get him to really get in to



Colin Montgomerie, one of the finest ball-strikers of the modern era and a player who knew and understood his two-plane swing

playing as he was looking great on the range. He just needed to take it to the course. We had a good finish at the Buick, and I told him that he was ready to go out and play better than he ever had in his life. The next week was the International at Colorado, which he won. His wife and daughters were there that week but when he walked off the 18th green, before he even signed his score card, he knelt down so his 9 year old girl could touch his face to feel how happy he was. I talk to Tom Pernice six times a week, and to this day he ends every phone conversation by saying, 'Jim I cannot ever thank you enough for what you have done for me and my family'. The same thing with Olin Browne. There's another fellow who had lost everything. We started working and he shot a 59 qualifying for the US Open, almost won the Open Michael Campbell won at Pinehurst, and a month and a half later he beat Tiger in a head-to-head at the Deutsche Bank, wound up 26th on the money list. Then there's Peter Jacobsen who has won PGA comeback player of the year twice! I'm just telling you this to impress upon your readers the power of understanding what your natural tendency is in the swing and working on fine-tuning that, not following a mantra that you are simply not wired up to make work.

To answer your original question, there is a guy I wish I could have worked with and that's Ian Baker-Finch. You know he had two things: he had courage - he showed that, he was a champion - and he was a great putter. How a player like that can lose the ability to hit a fairway with a driver is just criminal. It would have been so easy to put the full swing back but as John Jacobs used to say, the tragic thing about these champions is that after a certain time not playing well, even if you put them back, they have lost that superman ability they once had.

*Gi: More than anything, it's going to be fascinating in 2012 to see if that turns out to be Tiger's problem.*

JH: Exactly why I said it: You wonder, don't you. There was no inconsistency and suddenly...you don't know. He has that vulnerability now. OK, so he's won a tournament, he's heading in the right direction. But has he the reserves of mental strength to reach the peaks he once owned? I don't know if he can get it back, and it will be interesting to see if he does. ☑

To find out more about Jim Hardy's teaching and to locate your nearest Plane Truth instructor visit:  
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