

## Sergio Garcia: Hit It Solid Every Time



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It's not easy to make your best swing every time. There are pressures — external and internal — that cause you to twitch, tense up and lose focus on the task at hand. It doesn't help that the demands of the swing are difficult to repeat, even for a seasoned Tour professional. When I'm playing my best and find myself in contention late on Sundays, it's usually when I'm not thinking

about my swing, but rather trusting my setup and smoothly pulling the trigger. I won't completely rely on feel — I like to keep a few images in the back of my mind to make sure that I get the most out of my driver, irons and wedges. These are my simplest, go-to keys — they're not complicated, tempo-crushing swing thoughts that can turn any swing into a jerky slap at the ball. Copy my favorite moves and my Tour-proven setup positions, and you'll start catching it on the sweet spot every time, with every club in your bag.

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My Solid-Strike Setup Learn how to change it up I'm a big believer that your address position determines the quality of your swing and the quality of your results. When I know my setup is good, my swing is carefree and fearless. That's a powerful feeling. The big trick with your setup is that it's different

for every club in your bag. Your woods, irons and wedges are built with specific lengths and lie angles, which demand that you stand to the ball a little differently for each one. The secret is to know which elements of your address position remain constant, and which ones you have to tweak to match the club in your hand. DRIVER 1) Ball Position Your swing reaches its low point directly under your left armpit [dashed line]. That — rather than simply the center of your stance — is the baseline for all ball positions. • Tee up your driver in front of your left armpit, so that you ascend into the ball. • For irons, position the ball just behind your left armpit, so you can hit slightly down on the ball. • For wedges, position the ball two ball-widths behind your left armpit, so you'll swing steeply into impact and get ball-stopping spin from short range.



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IRONS 2) Hand Position Amateurs tend to press their hands forward so that the shaft leans toward the target. I prefer to keep my hands at my zipper and let the shaft lean in response to where the ball is in my stance. This gives me a neutral shaft lean with my irons and wedges, and a reverse lean with my driver. 3) Shoulder Tilt Because I don't lean the shaft forward at address, my shoulders tilt only slightly for each club. There's a school of thought that says you should set your right shoulder much lower than your left. I think that causes you to hang back on your right side too much during your downswing.

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WEDGE 4) Stance Width This one's simple — make your stance narrower than what you're used to. You can see that for a driver my feet are just outside my shoulders. For a mid-iron, my feet are under my shoulders, and they're inside my shoulders for a wedge. A narrower stance instantly makes your hips



more flexible. 5) Weight Distribution I prefer to use a square stance, with a slight flare of my left foot from driver to wedge. I also prefer an even weight distribution. I don't think of favoring my weight over one leg or the other, or toward my heels or toes. The main thing is to feel balanced.

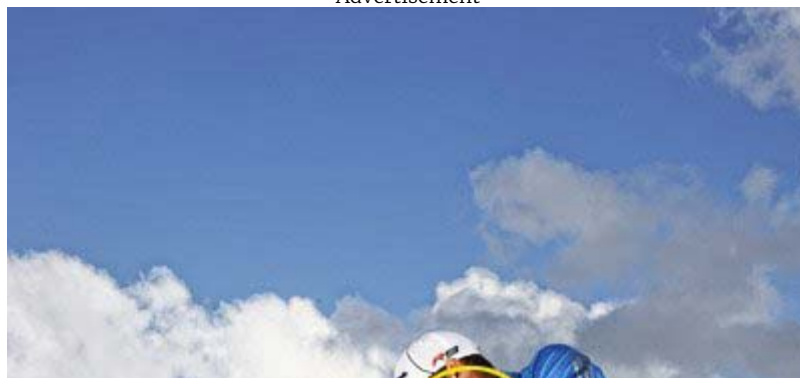
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**DRIVER:** (left) Forward Bend Look closely at my belt loops — a line drawn through them points at the same angle, whether I'm swinging a driver, an iron or a wedge. This means that I'm bending from my hips the same amount every time. I just change my knee flex depending on the club (more for wedges, less for a driver). **IRONS:** (middle) Arm Hang Because my forward bend is consistent, so is my arm hang. A line drawn through the shaft and my left arm makes the same angle whether I'm setting up with my driver, an iron or a wedge. The angle looks different in each photo, but that's because it's tilted to match the lie angle of the club. **WEDGE:** (right) Posture My lower back is flat, but my upper back is rounded. You don't want to stand with your shoulders pulled back, like you're standing at attention. That's a little too rigid. An extra bit of shoulder roundness correctly sets your hands in front of your body.

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My Solid-Strike Driver Keys Favor tempo over speed When it comes to hitting solid drives, the secret is to swing within yourself. I know that sounds like a cliché, but it's true. If you swing at 100 miles per hour and hit it on the toe, you won't hit the ball as far as you would with an 80-mph swing that catches the ball in the center of the clubface. My average clubhead speed with a driver is 118 mph. That's fast, but I can — and sometimes do — swing faster. However, that's also when I tend to miss cuts. 1) Practice Swings When you make practice swings on the tee, think "tempo" first. When you watch me make practice swings on TV, notice that I never make them at full speed. I'll make a nice, controlled move back and through. I'm not practicing for power, I'm practicing for balance. 2) Do A Chin-Up It's easy to get bunched up when you set up with your driver, since the club is so long. Hold your chin up, and keep it there. If you bury it into your chest, you won't have room to swing through impact. Your right shoulder should work under — not into — your chin on your downswing.

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MY DRIVER SWING: Start Slow, Finish Fast If I really need to pounce on a drive, I'll make an extra-slow backswing and keep it as wide as possible (notice how long I delay the hinging action in my wrists). A slow backswing makes it easier for me to set the club at the top. That's a big key. If I feel that I'm set at the top, I can add extra juice on the way down without worry. When my backswing gets fast, I can't really tell where it ends and where my downswing begins. This makes me stop, set the club and then swing down — an incredible waste of energy.

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Go-To Move: Let it drop A lot goes into making a good driver swing, but if there's one thing that really pulls it all together for me it's dropping my hands and arms straight down from the top. This is what gives your swing "power lag." I lag a lot more than the other guys on Tour, and if I told you exactly how I do it, I'd have to kill you. Honestly, there's no secret — just a good feeling of your arms dropping down from the top as your hips unwind. Be careful not to spin out with your shoulders. Make a practice backswing, stop at the top, then pump your arms up and down without moving your shoulders. That'll give you the feeling you're after.

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Start Down With Your Hips: The Secret to Creating Power Lag It looks like I'm actively dropping my arms down from the top, but they're actually being pulled by the rotation of my hips (look how quickly my left leg disappears in these photos). This is the only way you can create a power lag and find the slot on your downswing. Also, check out my left shoulder — it hardly moves during the initial stages of my downswing. If you start turning it to the left too early, you'll throw the club out in front of you and hit a slice or a pull.

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My Solid-Strike Iron Keys: Ground your swing Whenever I start missing greens, I go back to my rhythm. I tend to swing too fast with my irons, and judging by what I've seen from the pro-ams I've played in over the years, so do you. At that point, I'll take a look at my lower-body action and make sure my feet are staying grounded. If you're swinging fast and adding too much lower-body action, you'll see it in your feet — you'll be up on your right toe way too early. 1) Plant Your Left Foot You can get away with a little extra leg action when you're driving the ball, but you can't afford it when the ball's not on a tee. Here, just after impact, my right heel is up slightly but my left foot is solidly planted on the turf. This is textbook, not just for me but for all players. 2) Make A Post As you keep your left foot on the ground, you should feel your left leg straighten, with your hip turn transferring all of your weight into your left heel. A posted left leg gives your hands and club something to sling past — like the crack of a whip — so you can contact the ball with maximum speed.

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My Iron Swing: Maintaining Forward Bend As I swing though impact, notice how I maintain my forward bend toward the ball — it's the same amount of bend I established at address. You need to stay over the ball through impact like this to hit pure iron shots. If you lean backward, your club will flip up and catch the ball thin. You might think that you lifted your head, but what actually happened is that you came out of your address posture.

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Go-To Move: Get left Once I complete my backswing, the only thing I really think about is getting my weight firmly onto my left side. I do this by starting my downswing with a turn of my left hip slightly up and behind me. I'll follow this move by pulling my left hand into the impact area so that the rest of my body starts moving toward the target. If you don't get through the ball like this, you're going to hit your irons thin, fat and all over the place. 1) Make A Sideways 'C' Even this late into my swing, I'm still keeping my forward bend toward the ball (see how the bend in the right side of my torso makes a "C"?) If you can pull your weight through the shot while maintaining this bend, you'll catch the ball solid every time. 2) Finish On The Outside Edge I like to feel that 80% of my weight is on my left foot as I swing into my finish. In fact, you should feel like your weight is on the outside of your left foot (notice how my left instep is off the ground), with your hips facing the target and your left shoulder "chasing" after the ball.

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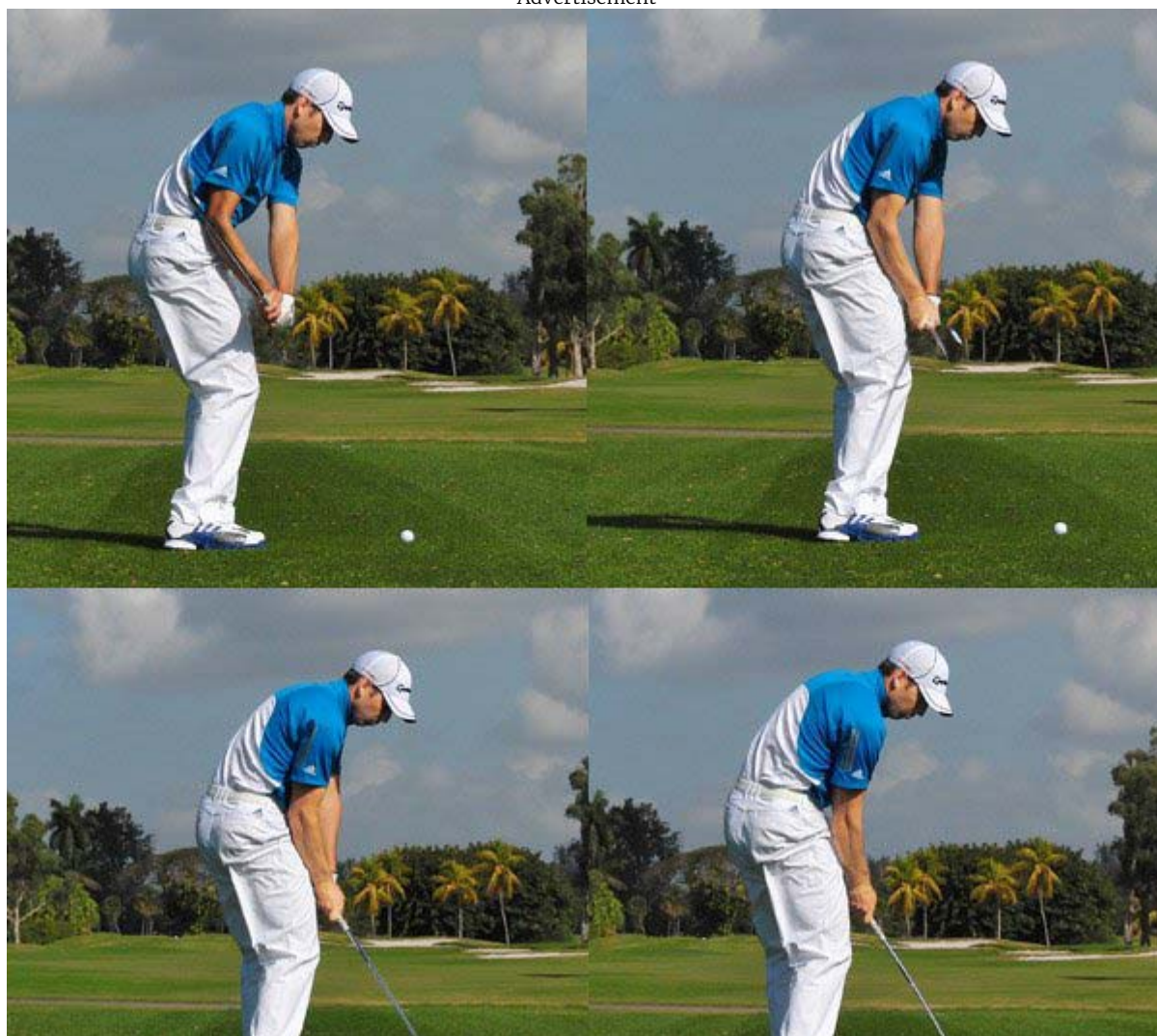




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Go-To Move: Open it up If you don't allow the natural rotation of your forearms both back and through, you can't stay connected and accelerate through impact. I see a lot of amateurs hold the face closed in their takeaway — I guess they fear hitting the shot short and right. The problem is, holding the face closed is a rhythm-killer — you're stopping your swing from naturally rotating the face. 1) Open The Face I like to feel my club rotating open, so that the toe points at the sky halfway back in my takeaway. I'll reverse the process through impact, so that the toe points to the sky on the target side of my swing. This gives me a smooth, accelerating release that almost always produces a clean, centered strike. 2) Natural Rotation It's easy to confuse opening the face with twisting your wrists, a move that whips the clubhead behind you. The feeling you're after is a gentle rolling of your forearms. You'll know you're doing it correctly if the logo on the back of your club points out in front of you, not toward the sky.

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My Wedge Swing: Knuckles Down Because of the back ball position, the bottom of your natural wedge swing occurs in front of the ball. This is what allows you to hit down on the ball with a wedge, but only if you maintain a descending path. To make sure this happens, focus on your left-hand knuckles — notice that mine point toward the ground through impact. If they point up, you'll have almost zero chance of crisp contact.



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