

Golf's new trend

Just look how
balanced and
grounded Rory
is at impact...
rule one of
biomechanics.

GROUND FORCE

'Biomechanics' is golf's growing trend. Rory studies it. Tiger's new teacher is an expert in it. But what is it – and can it help you play better?

WORDS DEREK CLEMENTS PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES, HOWARD BOYLAN

You probably won't have heard of Jean-Jacques Rivet, but he is a genius. I know that is a big statement, but I make no apologies for making it. Who is he? You will know all about the importance of golf coaches and teachers – heaven knows, many of them never seem to tire of telling us how good they are and what an important part they play in the lives and careers of today's top tournament professionals.

Rivet, known to everybody as JJ, would never do that. He prefers to let his work do the talking for him. A Frenchman, he runs the Biomecaswing performance institute based at Terre Blanche, near Nice. He is not a coach, but the part he plays in helping golfers of all levels to improve is, in my opinion, even more important.

JJ is a biomechanist. This is a term that would have meant little to most of us until Luke Donald, then the world number one, decided to employ Dave Alred to help him out. Eyebrows were raised throughout the world of golf because Alred was effectively Jonny Wilkinson's kicking coach. Except that he was far, far more than that. Like JJ, and Tiger Woods' new coach Chris Como, Alred is a biomechanist, a man who studies exactly what the body needs to do to achieve its maximum potential. He knew what Wilkinson needed to do to hit those massive



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Tiger's new coach Chris Como is studying biomechanics.

kicks between the uprights at rugby union grounds around the world. Donald figured that Alred could do the same thing with the golf swing. It was a giant leap of faith, but Alred decided to accept the challenge and he and Donald quickly formed a formidable partnership.

A biomechanist understands precisely what your body has to do to achieve the best possible result, and can tailor things regardless of his student's ability. He can tell you what you need to do and will give you the tools to improve.

I can hear lots of you out there thinking: "Yeah, yeah, yeah. We've heard it all before. The next big thing? The next magic bullet? I don't think so."

Well stick with me, because I have been around this game for more years than I care to admit and, having tried various coaching techniques, I am here to tell you that biomechanics is the future of golf. If you are prepared to embrace it, you can't fail to do anything else other than improve.

Rivet (pictured right) started life as a world-class windsurfer – a sport that requires perfect balance and, therefore, a perfect understanding of what the body is doing at all times. He has worked with Mathieu Bastareaud, the Toulon centre who was man of the match in the 2014 Heineken Cup final, as well as Vincent Clerc and Cedric Heymans, of Toulouse, all of whom will feature in the Rugby World Cup. Golf? He works with Justin Rose, Matt Kuchar and Matteo Manassero, to name three.

It worked for Ian Woosnam, too. After shooting a final round of 66 at the French Riviera Masters at Terre Blanche, the former Masters champ said: "That was

'IF YOU EMBRACE IT THEN YOU CAN'T FAIL TO IMPROVE'

much more like it. I've been to see JJ and I have been working hard for the last four days on what he told me.

"There was nothing wrong with my swing, it was just the way I was standing to the ball. He told me I had too much weight on my right toe and my left heel. He wanted to get me the completely opposite way round with more weight on my right heel and left toe and it seems to have done the trick.

"It's something I'm going to have to work on but it means I can now look forward to next week with a bit more confidence. I have been searching and searching for something that works but maybe I have found it this time."

A week later, he won the Dutch Senior Open, and admitted he had his great friend DJ Russell to thank. It was Russell who persuaded Woosnam to get a lesson from JJ at Terre Blanche.

"Speaking to JJ has made a massive difference and I can't thank both of them enough. It has given me confidence to stand there and hit it, rather than worrying about my swing. I can take to the course like I used to and I'm hitting it miles again. It's pitching about 275 yards – I haven't done that for a long time."

■ Jean-Jacques Rivet is an Under Armour ambassador.



Four drills to



1 Get grounded

Why it's important: Ask JJ Rivet what he considers to be the key to good ball striking and he will tell you, without hesitation: "Foot grounding. Get that right and everything else will follow, I promise." This requires some explanation. Look at any top professional (like Rory on the previous page), watch their feet during the swing and you will see that, Patrick Reed apart, those feet are generally as steady as a rock. "If your feet move or roll during your golf swing the chances of making solid contact on a consistent basis are almost non-existent," JJ says.

Try this drill: When addressing the ball, JJ tells me to focus on putting the weight on the heel of the right foot, and the toe of the left foot. The key is to keep it there as you the swing. JJ suggests another practice drill that involves starting the swing with your left heel off the ground and crashing it to the ground at the moment of impact – without lifting your right heel. Neither are natural movements, and take a lot of practice, but will educate your right foot to remain in the correct place. Having such a distribution of the weight between the front of your left foot and back of your right foot at the top of the backswing helps to maintain your centre of gravity, and helps you to feel that you have room to come back to the ball, shallowing your swing.

improve your swing balance



2 Stay grounded

Why it's important: Even if they have a good grounding at the start of the swing, many of us lose that feeling as we get halfway back. As that ground pressure decreases, we stop coiling and start to lift our hands and arms to compensate for it. Better players continue to coil to the top as they're still grounded.

Try this drill: Many of us have direction or training sticks; if you don't, you can use a stout garden cane or even a golf club. Now, put one under each foot, with the sticks pointing at right angles to the target. Now strike the ball while focusing on keeping your balance. As with the first exercise, this helps to put most of the weight on the front of your left foot and the heel of your right and allows you to feel what is happening to your feet through the swing.



3 Grip it tighter

Why it's important: Top players will tell you that tension in the grip is a killer, but here is the thing; it is impossible to start a swing with a light grip on the club and maintain it. Consider it for a minute – it is possible to start with a feather-light grip on your club, but just imagine what would happen at impact if you maintained that grip throughout. You would not be able to keep the clubhead square to the ball. And without clubhead control, you have nothing.

Try this drill: "When you strike the ball it is your right hand that determines what will happen to the clubface so you should address the ball while gripping the club harder with your right hand," says JJ. OK, so it may go against everything you have been taught but, like everything else, JJ Rivet says, it works. Tension is NOT a killer.



4 Elbow-tuck

Why it's important: According to JJ, second only to foot grounding is the importance of getting your takeaway sorted out in such a way that it will automatically put your right arm and elbow in the correct place at the top of your backswing. Most club players have a tendency to let their right elbow fly out at the top of the swing, and JJ has another drill designed to teach you how to get your elbow in the right position.

Try this drill: "Take a 7-iron and grip it only in your right hand," he says. "Grip down the club slightly and swing with one hand – you really should hit a ball when you do this. It will take a while for this to feel natural, but at impact you should have the same sensation that you would when throwing under-arm. Don't try to hit the ball too hard. What you're looking for is solid impact."

The teacher's view, by David Leadbetter



Biomechanics is somewhat new in the sport of golf, but the benefits are extreme. It's enabled us to understand the science behind the swing in a way that allows you to get to the root cause of a problem much more quickly. If the advent of video was like looking at an X-ray, then the feedback from

biomechanics is similar to an MRI. It gives you a 3D image of the swing and shows you things that might not be perceptible to the naked eye.

I met JJ about 15 years ago when biomechanics was very raw. There were a few books out, but no one had a real grasp of it in relation to golf. JJ was able to straighten a slice

by putting wedges in a player's shoes and altering his balance points; it was fascinating. The fact we can now measure in degrees how much you tilt your hips and compare hip turn to shoulder turn in such detail means we can build a blueprint for each player's swing. All this filters down to the amateur. Biomechanics has lifted the mist surrounding golf teaching and helped us see clearly for the first time.