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THE FORGET-ABOUT-IT GUIDE™ TO BETTER GOLF

HOW TO LOWER YOUR SCORES BY LIMITING WHAT YOU LEARN.

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THE FORGET-ABOUT-IT GUIDE TO GOLF EQUIPMENT

“I’ve had some of the world’s richest businessmen come for lessons . . . and the clubs they bought were the best that money could buy — but for someone else, not for them.”

—TOMMY ARMOUR

The only thing more confusing than the golf swing is the technology that goes into modern golf equipment. Today we’re bombarded with articles, ads and information on every little metallurgical marvel and every dimple deviation that comes along. Every four or five months there’s something new. And the media covers anything and everything that relates to equipment advances. For 99 percent of the golfing public, it’s just too much information.

You don't have to be a senior tour veteran to remember when the choices were a whole lot simpler. In irons you could choose pro-style blades or Ping Irons. Balls were Balata, and not Balata. Woods were wood, not some high-tech combination of five different space-age alloys. And shafts came in three different grades of steel: regular, stiff and super stiff.

Inevitably, technology is changing the game of golf, especially for the tour pros and the architects. But statistically speaking, all these marvelous new improvements are not helping our scores. (The average handicap in this country is still 16.1.) A ball's high-density polybutadiene core or ionomer transition layer might translate into a few more yards off the tee, but the element of doubt that's been introduced outweighs any distance advantage.

The rapid advances have only encouraged a lot more trial and error. And the minute you start experimenting with different shafts, testing new balls and researching drivers, doubt creeps in. Suddenly there's a little voice in the back of your mind all the time saying, "this ball's not right for me," or "this particular club's not forgiving enough," or "if only I had that 450cc driver, I could really crush it."

To play your best golf you just have to forget about it. You must have total confidence that the club in your hands is going to work as it was designed to. Otherwise, you'll subconsciously compensate. Instead of relying on one simple, dependable swing, you'll have to recall a different feeling for your long irons, your fairway woods and for your wedge. You'll start thinking that you have to change your swing to fit the club, and that's a very slippery slope.

So the question is, with all those choices and all those claims of product superiority, how do you know which clubs are right for you? How can you possibly sort through all the hype and make a confident buying decision? The answer is clubfitting.

MOST GOLF CLUBS FIT LIKE A CHEAP PAIR OF SOCKS.

Ever notice what a wide range of feet most socks will fit? It's quite common to find a pair of dress socks that "Fits men's sizes 7-12." Puh-lease. Those socks won't fit a guy with a size seven foot any better than the lucky guys on the other end of the scale. Socks are really only made for people with "average" size feet, like a nine or a ten.

The same thing can be said for most mass-marketed golf clubs. They're built to appeal to a wide range of players, but they really only fit a few.

Andy estimates that only 10 to 15 percent of all the students he has seen had clubs that were well fit. So when he gives a lesson, he always starts by doing a quick check of his student's equipment. He wants to know right away if it's the player's swing, or if it's the club that's producing the given ball flight.

If the clubs look good but the ball flight is sketchy, then there's some work to be done. But if the swing is sound and the ball flight stinks, it's an easy problem to fix... Just get the right club in the student's hands. And that's exactly what Andy does.

With a little trial and error any good clubfitter can produce

a club that perfectly matches his student's swing and body type. And the results are impressive. You wouldn't believe how many people walk away thinking they just had the best lesson of their lives, when in reality it was simply a matter of having the right club for the swing they already had. It's a dramatic realization — that your existing swing, such as it is, can produce wonderful shots. Some people get irate when they see how simple it really is, and how much time and money they've wasted on standard clubs and lessons.

"Most players we teach are playing with equipment that is downright ill-suited to their needs."

-Bob Toski & Jim Flick

The fundamental problem with off-the-shelf clubs is this: If your clubs are not built to fit, you can make an absolutely perfect golf swing and still get crummy results. For instance, if the lie angle of your clubs is too flat, the ball will go right even when you make a perfect swing. Conversely, if the clubs are too upright, the ball will go left. This is a universal truth for golfers of all abilities. Now if you're Tiger Woods, you could quickly adjust to the discrepancy and play pretty well. But for most mortals it's just one more thing to have to worry about.

Think about how this misleading negative feedback affects the learning curve. If you're out on the range hitting hundreds of balls, and you're getting consistently poor results, what are you going to do? You're going to compensate. You're going to manipulate your swing in order to make the club produce the shot you want. It's only natural.

But in that case, your equipment is fooling you into thinking you need to change your swing, when you really need to change your equipment. In other words, the feedback you get from an ill-fitted club is not an accurate reflection of what's really happening with your golf swing. Most people see a bad result, and they assume it's a bad swing. But that's not necessarily the case.

Forget about it. Your clubs are supposed to reward a good swing just like good course architecture rewards good shots. So don't buy clubs just because they're popular. Invest in a set that truly fits your body type, your swing and your style of play. The custom-fitting process will eliminate any doubt you might have about your equipment and will ensure that you don't drop 1500 bucks on a set that's not right. It takes all the guesswork out of buying and gives you a huge advantage over your buddy who changes drivers more often than underwear.

WHY THE FAVORITE CLUB IN YOUR BAG IS THE FAVORITE CLUB IN YOUR BAG.

Almost every player, from beginner to tour pro, has a favorite club or two. Usually it's that tried and true 5-wood that's been in your bag forever, or an old, blade-style putter that your father gave you. Once you get your favorite club in your hand all the planets just seem to align themselves in your favor. Your confidence soars. Your swing comes together. And you can pull off shots that you'd never dream of trying with any other club.

Well guess what. There's a reason that one, magical club works so well, and it has nothing to do with the golf gods. It's probably the one

club in your bag that fits. Just by dumb luck, it has the right shaft flex, the right kick point, the right lie angle, the right face design, the right swing weight and the right length. You're confident with it because it fits, or at least it's closer to the right fit than any of your other clubs.

But what about the other side of the coin? Just as we all have specific nemesis holes that continually give us fits, most people have a least one club in the bag that just doesn't seem to work. It's jinxed, or bent, or something.

"If you buy a set of clubs off the shelf with no regard for lie angle, shaft flex, length or any other variables, you might get lucky and have one or two that actually fit you. Or you might not."

-Andy Heiny

Obviously, part of the problem is a mental block that says, "I just can't hit this club." But what precipitates that is probably a fit issue. The shaft may be too stiff, or the kick point too low. Who knows? There are so many variables it's impossible to tell without doing a test with a certified clubfitter. But rest assured, it's not all in your head.

Unfortunately, very few players can differentiate between club problems and swing problems. Instead of realizing that it really could be the club, you assume it's a flaw in your swing and you act accordingly. Next thing you know, you start fiddling around with your mechanics in order to get good results with that one particular club, which in turn messes up the rest of your game. It's a vicious cycle that traps thousands of players every year.

Forget about it. Trying to recall and execute a different swing for one specific club is asking way too much. If you're hitting the

ball pretty well and continue having trouble with one club, just get rid of it. It probably doesn't fit you, and forcing the issue will just ruin your confidence with all the other clubs in your bag.

The fact is, there's enough variation from one club to the next even within a set of name-brand irons to have a significant impact on your ball striking. You'll never hear this from a salesman, but it's true.

Graphite shafts are especially problematic. The manufacturing process is not perfect. . . there's going to be some variation, even among the shafts with the same flex rating and the same brand name. So it's up to the club manufacturer to test each shaft for consistency. However, quality control in many of the big companies consists of testing random samples from each batch of shafts, and things slip through the cracks. So you might end up with a seven iron that flexes differently than the eight, and so on.

Smaller companies that sell clubs exclusively through teaching professionals test every last shaft before they're shipped out. Plus, there's a follow-up appointment, where the clubfitter can double check the flex characteristics of each individual club. If something's amiss, he'll know it just by watching you hit balls.

And here's another thing about shaft manufacturing that's not common knowledge. There are no industry standards that define what the labels "stiff" or "regular" even mean. A lot of guys are convinced they need a stiff shaft — no doubt due to their immense power off the tee. But one company's "stiff" is the next company's "regular". Two stiff shafts can perform like polar opposites. There's no standardized testing.

Whenever Andy is asked about the stiffness of a club he's recommending, he always comes back with a flatteringly vague answer like, "yea, that's the shaft for you," or "Oh yea, I'm sure you can handle this one." Labels mean nothing. It's all about perception, and the perception is that if you're a good player, you should play with stiff clubs. Wrong.

HOW YOU BUY CLUBS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT CLUBS YOU BUY.

Choosing a set of clubs these days can be a mind boggling affair. And a costly one at that. There are dozens of brands, hundreds of models and reams of information to sort through before you even set foot in a store.

Forget about it. If you want to simplify the process dramatically and take the guesswork out of buying clubs, start with a personalized clubfitting session. If you think in terms of fitting rather than buying, the shopping process will be downright fun and the decision will be easy.

Right off the bat you can rule out most of the big sporting goods chains and golf super stores. Their high volume approach to clubfitting is just a thinly veiled sales ploy. And don't even get us started on the level of expertise you can expect. There's nothing like listening to some kid trying to sell an 8 degree, 400 cc driver to an elderly woman who's lucky if she hits the ball 175 yards.

Instead, start by talking to the teaching pro at your club or favorite course. If he or she doesn't do clubfitting — and many will

not — ask for a personal referral of someone who does. You can also go to the yellow pages and start calling some of the better courses in your area. Be specific that you're looking for comprehensive, on-course clubfitting services and find out what line or lines they carry.

There are many misconceptions as to what clubfitting really entails. Don't mistake arm measurements for a comprehensive clubfitting session. There's a lot more to it than your size. In fact, your size is relatively unimportant when you consider all the other variables. What we're talking about is a dynamic fitting process that involves a teacher and student on the driving range, experimenting with the club length, lie angle, loft and shaft flex until you find the precise combination that produces the optimal trajectory, distance and direction.

"If you buy a set of clubs from an experienced clubfitter to suit you and your swing, you will have increased your chances of playing to your potential. Good technique and correctly fitted clubs go hand in hand."

-David Leadbetter

Good clubfitting is a craft. It's part intuition, part science and a truly dynamic process that takes time, patience and a trained eye. No matter what the retail sales guys tell you, it can't be done in the confines of a store, and you sure can't do it on-line for \$6.95, like some websites would lead you to believe. You also have to see the true flight of the ball in order to get a proper fit. Only the most sophisticated new launch monitors can accurately portray ball flight.

The real beauty of the clubfitting process is that it eliminates doubt on the course and virtually guarantees you a good buy. Once

the pro has gone through all the possible configurations and arrives at your precise specifications, you'll never have to think about it again. And confidence like that is a powerful tool to have. You'll never be standing on the tee second-guessing your decision. You won't be wondering if your driver's shaft is a little too stiff, or if you should have bought graphite shafts instead of steel. You'll know, in no uncertain terms, that your equipment is not keeping you from performing up to your potential.

Most people who have played for awhile embrace the concept of clubfitting, they just don't make it a high priority. There's always a "yeah, but" in the back of their mind... "Yeah, but clubfitting is too expensive." "Yeah, but isn't clubfitting for tour pros and scratch golfers." "Yeah, but I need to break 100 before I invest in something like that."

Forget about it. If you keep playing with clubs that are designed to accommodate a manufacturer's idea of the "average" golfer, it'll take you twice as long to reach your goal. If you do at all. You'll have a much better chance of reaching your potential with clubs that are built to your specifications, no matter what type of player you are. We contend that clubfitting actually has the biggest impact on inexperienced players. Tiger could probably break 80 playing with a pool cue, but most of us need a club that will make the game easier by eliminating any doubts about equipment. Especially if your style of play is wildly erratic.

Of course, for most people performance is not the only consideration when they're buying clubs. Money is also an issue, and many people forego custom clubs simply because of cost.

Actually, custom-made clubs are not that much more than a typical set of name-brand irons. Figure \$110-\$140 per club for the irons and \$250-\$450 for the woods.

Everybody likes to brag about the great bargains they got on their new clubs. But just because Scotland was the birthplace of the game doesn't mean you should be Scotch when it comes to equipment. Forget about it. Bargain-basement clubs, more often than not, will produce bargain-basement results. And before you know it you'll be back in the market again searching for the something better. It will be cheaper in the long run just to invest in custom clubs to begin with.

You should also be careful not to spend too much on any given club. The problem is, if you spend \$600 on a new driver right off the shelf you'll have a lot of motivation to make it work, no matter how wild you are with it. No one wants to admit they made a bad purchase, and you'd be amazed how long some people will continue to play a club even if they can't really hit it from day one. Luckily, you won't have to worry about that if you go through the clubfitting process.

Another nice thing about custom clubs is that you don't pay for a 2-iron you're never going to use. There's no such thing as a "set" of clubs anymore, anyway. There are only individual tools you use for different course situations. Look in the bag of the typical LPGA pro these days and you'll usually see five different woods, four wedges and no numbers lower than a 5 in the iron department. The macho days of the 1-iron, it seems, are gone for good.

Andy would rather see a player with six well-fit clubs, rather than a hodge-podge of 14 ill-fitting ones. Again, he likes to keep