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FIT for PAR

To Fit Or Not To Fit, That is the Question

By Bill Kelly

Ask any golfer: Would you like lower scores? Would you like more distance with your driver and your other clubs? Would you like better accuracy? Would you like more consistency?

You know what the answers would be.

For most golfers, it takes action in three specific areas to achieve the goals listed above: good technique, golf fitness and clubs that fit the golfer's size, strength, athletic ability and swing characteristics.

■ A Time Allotment

A fitting for a full set of clubs, including driver, fairway woods, hybrids, irons and a putter, can take up to four hours of ball-striking and data collection. Because of this, the fitting is usually split into two sessions of about two hours each. Test clubs are then built from the data obtained during these sessions, and an additional, but much shorter, "tweaking" ball-striking session is scheduled to confirm the build and make whatever adjustments may be required.

Fitters have an array of club-heads, shafts and grip sizes, and the various heads and shafts can be connected with a system that allows for testing of any of the head designs with any of the shafts.

■ Shafts Are Important

A typical fitting may require five or more changes to find the best shaft for the golfer. During this effort the fitter is looking for the best shaft weight and length that allow the golfer to strike the ball in the center of the club most of the time. Most fitters use about eight different head designs for irons and often as many for drivers. In drivers, the most important spec is loft angle, so there are often driver heads in the mix that are of the same design, but with different lofts.

Golfers often believe that shaft flex is the most important spec of the shaft. Sorry: weight and length are. We are, however, concerned with shaft flex. We pick flex based on clubhead speed at impact, tempo (which is the time from start of back-swing to impact with the golf-ball) and release of the golf club during the down swing.

■ Launch Monitor Data

We measure clubhead speed at impact with a launch monitor, and tempo and release with video. Once the correct shaft is defined we repeat ball-striking with different head designs, observe the launch monitor data and find the head design that is best for the golfer. The launch monitor records what the ball did and what the club did at impact. Club-face impact stickers are used to show where the ball was struck relative to the club face center.

Fitters know that total club weight and head weight are of the utmost importance for each golfer. Since most clubheads and grips from any manufacturer are of the same weight, total golf club weight is determined by shaft weight. The total weight of a golf club influences the golfer's swing path. Head weight, on the other hand, influences clubhead face angle at impact.

Golf is no different: Clubs need to be fitted to the golfer's size, strength, athletic ability and swing characteristics.



What the fitter is doing in this ball-striking effort is determining what total club weight will cause as close to a down-the-target-line club path as possible and what head weight will cause as close to square to face angle as possible at impact.

It has been shown after thousands of fittings that with clubs that fit a player properly, ball strikes are closer to the center of the club face. Clubs whose total weight and clubs with the proper head weight help golfers swing down the target line with a square clubface to club path at impact. These are the attributes of ball-striking that produce longer shots, straighter shots, more consistent distance control and more consistency.

■ One Size Does Not Fit All

Just as in other stick-and-ball sports – tennis, baseball or hockey – there are many options for the length, weight and handle size that can lead to superior performance. Golf is no different: Clubs need to be fitted to the golfer's size, strength, athletic ability and swing characteristics.

The array of one-size-fits-all clubs with shafts which are identified as Ladies, Senior, Regular, Stiff or Xtra-Stiff, are not based on a golfer's size, strength, athletic ability and swing characteristics. Why would one, especially someone interested in becoming a better golfer, buy such clubs?

They shouldn't.

They should, instead, find a club fitter near them and make an appointment to get fit. It's a surefire way to improve.

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