



by Brian Wilkes
Brian's Custom Clubs

FROM THE Club FITTING BENCH

Why the Obsession With Distance?

As club fitters, we just don't understand the obsession the golf club industry has with distance. It seems like the core message in all golf club marketing these days has to do with promising that this or that change in head design will increase the distance the ball can be hit. And the golfing public is hooked. It seems to us that just about every customer wants to hit the ball farther. And they seem to want to do it with an equipment change, rather than improving their strength, flexibility or their golf swing!

Is the industry simply responding to demand, or is it creating the demand by promising new designs that will hit the ball farther? Do PGA Tour players who regularly drive the ball over 300 yards fuel this obsession? If so, guess what, very few of us can be like that.

As club fitters, our concern is not with getting you more distance. Our concern is to fit the clubs to your swing so that you hit the ball as solidly as you can, and as close to the centre of the clubface as possible. It so happens that solid ball strikes in the centre of the clubface will send the

ball the farthest for that particular club and swing speed, but that's beside the point.

We are much more interested in ensuring solid ball strikes, and achieving better accuracy, the right trajectory, backspin and feel than we are about whether you can hit the ball any farther. We feel, incidentally, that getting those other elements right will improve your game and lower your scores much more consistently than just trying to add yards to your drives or iron shots.

The ends to which the mainstream golf club companies go to convince you that their clubs will hit the ball farther are pretty interesting. Some advertise a maximum permitted "coefficient of restitution" (a lot of springiness) on the clubface so that it will propel the ball further. Some offer Titanium inserts in the clubface to propel the ball further. Some sell you a 6-iron with the loft of a 5-iron so that you'll think you are getting more distance than with a six. Most will sell you a 46-inch driver that could be too long to properly control, on the misguided assumption that you can swing the longer club faster. All of these marketing approaches have one thing in common; they still require that you strike the ball correctly. We are left wondering what the advantage is of getting 20 more yards when that means being 20 yards farther into the bush?

In order to make solid ball strikes, and to hit the ball in the centre of the clubface, the club must be the proper length. We spend quite a bit of time in fittings ensuring that we get the length right. The face angle must be as square as possible to the ball at the strike. This means making sure the shaft flex is correct for bringing the club head into the ball, and that the face angle is not too much or too little to give a closed or open-face strike. Loft and lie angles should be correct so that the shot trajectory is what the player wants, and is not misdirected by striking the toe or heel of the club first.

All these factors, and more, contribute to improved and consistent play. Hitting the ball farther is well down the list of what's important. Yet that seems to be what everyone focuses on. We believe that, if played from the correct tees, there are few par 4 holes on Vancouver Island where most golfers can't reach the green with two well struck golf shots. Even if you can't get there in two, you still want the best chance of being on the fairway, and not in the rough or fairway bunker(s).

Only a fool would think that they can swing the club and hit the ball perfectly every time. But for those swings that you do execute well, don't you want a solid ball strike with clubs as perfectly matched to your swing as possible?

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