



by Brian Wilkes  
Brian's Custom Clubs

## FROM THE Club FITTING BENCH

### New Tools from the PGA Merchandise Show

In January, I spent four days in Orlando, FL. at the 2015 PGA of America Merchandise Show. It's at this show that many golf courses and golf businesses come to buy their merchandise, including clubs, clothing and accessories, for the coming golf season. Yes, there are other golf shows, such as those in Las Vegas and Toronto, but this is the *mother* of all golf shows. It takes place at the Orange County Convention Centre and has over 2,000,000 square feet of exhibit space. For the golf show, this translates into something like 10 miles of trade show aisle. It is simply amazing! And, it's not open to the public. Only people engaged in the industry can register. More than 1,000 companies took part and over 41,000 people from 79 countries attended the show.

Many clubmakers from around the world, members of the **International Clubmakers Guild**, gather that week to rub shoulders. We hold technical meetings and get to know each other. At this meeting, I got to know the Canadian graphite shaft manufacturer, Accra, better and I'm now carrying their fantastic products. I also met a Vancouver putter company called Innovation. They make a putter with a clear window with alignment lines that let you know when you are right over the ball. This will improve most peoples' putting. I have a couple of demos in the studio if you want to come and check them

out. I also compared notes with colleagues on what I call "benchcraft" – how to do things better in the shop, and how our businesses are going.

I also saw a lot of new stuff, like lasers for aligning putters, improved golf simulators, and quite a few new GPS gizmos that track your position on the course, your strokes and your score. These seem to be a very popular item at the show, and I saw at least a dozen different versions of them from as many companies.

There was also a lot of hype at the show that I take with a grain of salt. One such item comes from a well-know brand manufacturing a "new" iron that is said to hit the ball as far as two clubs longer. They claim their 6-iron will hit the ball as far as your 4-iron. Delve a little deeper into this and you find that their 6-iron has the same loft as your 5-iron. That would account for some of the effect. The club head uses "cup face technology" that supposedly gives the ball more zip off the face. Other brands have been using this technology for a long time, at least in their fairway woods and hybrids, so it's not new. Whether the average golfer will see much difference in all this is hard to tell, but that brand was doing a huge business at the show.

I'm saving describing the best new tool for the last.

I brought home a new launch monitor called the SkyTrak. I already have a launch monitor made by Zelocity, the Tracker, and it has served me pretty well. It's a radar unit, while the new SkyTrak is an optical unit. There are importance differences. A radar unit tracks the ball flight and uses algorithm – a fancy word for computer calculations – to determine what the club head must have been doing when it hit the ball. An optical unit "sees" the ball strike with high-speed cameras, and uses algorithms to figure out what the resulting ball flight was. One is not better than the other, although the radar unit is usually placed behind the golfer where the club's head obscures the ball strike from the unit when the ball is hit. So how does it measure spin rate or face angle?

Anyway, those "tekky" questions aside, I now have this nifty optical launch monitor that is easy to use. The Zelocity does not picture the ball flight down range, and the new SkyTrak unit does. So it's much better for both teaching and clubfitting. Right now I have the image sent to a larger computer monitor so that a customer can see his ball flight from various angles, including out on the fairway as the ball approaches. Pretty neat! Soon, I'll have it projected onto a screen at the back of the net. I just love this new gizmo.

Overall the trip to Orlando was a big success and it will pay dividends for my customers who have come to expect the highest standards of craftsmanship and customer service –and deserve nothing less.

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