

Points To Consider When Selecting New Woods

By: Ricky Strain 1/15/06

The following parameters should be considered when selecting a driver or fairway woods to assure an optimum fit and performance.

1. Clubhead

a. Loft

- i. This parameter affects both the launch angle and the spin rate. People with high clubhead (95+ miles per hour) speed tend to have too much spin. Golfers under 85 MPH can have problems of too little spin. This can actually be measured with a launch monitor. The loft must be carefully chosen to optimize these two characteristics as they are related.

b. Effective Loft

- i. This is a result of the actual loft and the location of the center of gravity of the clubhead. This can be as much as 1-2 degrees different from the measured loft of the clubhead.

c. Size (CC) Volume

- i. The larger the head chosen, in general, the more forgiving the club will be on off center hits. The average golfer should stay with the larger heads 400 cc+ for the forgiveness.
- ii. The better player may prefer smaller heads for the improved workability. The smaller heads are easier to draw and fade.
- iii. Definitely pick a size the appeals to your eye. If you like the looks of the head you are much more likely to hit it well. Don't underestimate the importance of this.

d. Offset

- i. A head with offset should be chosen when the golfer has trouble squaring the clubface. This would mean a right-handed golfer is losing the ball to the right. (A left-handed golfer would lose the ball to the left.
- ii. Do not choose an offset head if you have trouble hooking the ball or you are already hitting the ball fairly straight.

e. Face Angle

- i. Some driver heads can be purchased with an open or closed face. The open face would help the golfer with the hook and the closed face would help the slicer.

f. Center of Gravity

- i. This is a very important parameter, although very hard to know when looking at a head. The lower the CG, the easier it is to get the

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ball up in the air. The effect of this property can be seen in the effective loft discussed earlier.

- ii. This can actually be altered some in the drivers that have the adjustments screws. The more weight you add low, the easier it is to get the ball up. The problem with this is that the club can get too heavy when doing this. You definitely change the “feel” of the club as you add weight. I do not recommend this method.

g. Lie

- i. This becomes important when the golfer is tall with short arms or a very short golfer. The standard driver lie is usually okay for most golfers. If you are not sure, you can always consult your local club fitter.

h. Face Depth

- i. This is more personal preference. The larger drivers tend to have deeper faces, again making them more forgiving.
- ii. If you want a driver to be able to be hit from the ground (not teed), then choose a driver with a shallower face. This is usually for the better player.

2. Shaft

a. Weight

- i. In general you want to go with the lightest weight shaft you can find. There are some shafts under 50 grams now. 55 and 65 gram shafts are pretty common. You will be able to generate more clubhead speed the less weight you have to swing. This is especially true for most juniors, seniors and women.
- ii. If you are one of the few that have a driver speed over 100 MPH, you might actually want a little heavier shaft for better control. I would say no more than 85 grams.

b. Torque

- i. One aspect of torque is feel. The higher the torque the softer the club feels. Don't confuse this, however, with stiffness. They are totally different. A golfer with less than 80 MPH of clubhead speed will do well by choosing a higher torque shaft for a better feeling club. A torque of 4.0 or higher would be good.
- ii. A low torque shaft of 3.5 or less should be sought by the 90+ MPH golfer. At this speed you will still have good feel and lower torque is needed to prevent the clubhead from twisting excessively at impact. This will yield the straightest shots.

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c. Bend Point

- i. You usually have 4 choices of bend point. They are low, mid, high and ultra high. The lower the bend point, the easier it is to get the ball in the air. You might want a mid bend for a driver while a low bend point may be a good choice for you fairway woods. Most golfers you stay away from high bend point shafts.

d. Tip Stiffness

- i. This is a measure of how stiff the shaft is at the clubhead end. The stiffer the tip, the harder it is to get the ball in the air. The better player may benefit from tip stiff shafts if they are hard swingers.

e. Frequency

- i. This is the actual stiffness of the shaft. It is measured in cycles per minute. The higher the frequency, the stiffer the shaft. **This is a most important parameter.** If you get a shaft that plays too stiff, you will hit it short and offline. If the shaft is too soft, you could be prone to hitting big hooks or losing the shots to the right (right hander) because of the clubface lagging open at impact.
- ii. There is no standard for how golf shafts are labeled!! One manufacturer's stiff may be another's regular. The only way to find the true stiffness is to measure the frequency. There is a standard based on frequency. For example: a driver that is 45 inches would have a frequency of 248 CPM for stiff. The same driver would have a frequency of 238 CPM for regular.

3. Grip

a. Type

- i. The type of grip is mainly a personal preference based on looks and feel. A corded grip will normally perform better in wet conditions than a noncord grip. A cord grip can be abrasive to the hands.

b. Size

- i. The finished size of the grip is very important. A grip too large inhibits the release of the club. A grip too small can make it impossible to get your hands on the club properly and also cause the player to be too handsy. Grips come in several sizes and can be fine tuned by adding extra layers of tape to get you between the standard sizes.

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4. Club Length

- a. For drivers, the current standard is considered 45 inches and 3 woods are usually at 43 inches. If you are looking for accuracy, you might find that $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch shorter than standard works well. You should lose little, if any, distance as a result of the shorter shaft. You could actually see an increase in distance because you contact the center of the clubface more often.

5. Club Swingweight

- a. This is a measurement of how heavy the clubhead feels. If it is too light, you will have difficulty hitting the ball with the center of the club, because you can't sense where the clubhead is. If the swingweight is too heavy you will lose clubhead speed and distance. I would recommend a swingweight between C-8 and D-2 for swing speeds less than 95 MPH. At 95+ MPH D-0 to D-7 would be fine.

6. Club Total Weight

- a. As a general rule you want the lightest club weight possible so you can generate more clubhead speed and distance. A good driver should be no more than 350 grams. A good 3 wood should weigh in at around 340 grams. The 95+MPH golfers can go somewhat heavier if they like to get added feel and to help maintain a good tempo.

7. Ball

- a. You need to select a ball that gives you the proper spin rates and the proper trajectory as well as good feel around and on the greens.

8. Swing and Ball Flight Characteristics

- a. Your average clubhead speed needs to be determined. It is important in many of the choices you have to make in the first 6 categories already discussed.
- b. Your launch angle with your current woods must be known so you know what to do to improve.
- c. You also need to know the backspin, sidespin and total spin of the ball you are hitting now.
- d. Your current shot pattern must also be determined to see if any changes need to be made to your new equipment. For example, if you are hitting lots of hooks, a stiffer, heavier club might be in order.
- e. Your actual swing needs to be observed to assure the clubs are setup to perform with what you got. You **do not** want to change your swing to fit the clubs!!

SUMMARY

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The purpose of this document is to give you some idea of the complexity of choosing the right equipment. It will help you understand why it is so difficult to look at a club on the shelf or in a magazine and determine whether or not it is right for you. I am not suggesting that there is only one right fit for you. I am not saying that the clubs sitting on the rack at your favorite golf store or Pro Shop are bad. I am saying that if you want equipment that has a high probability of performing well for you, all of the mentioned factors need to be considered. Take this knowledge and partner up with a TRUE club fitter to make your next clubs the best you have ever hit.