

Southside GOLF GUIDE

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PERFECT CHOICE

Golfers should
consider variables
when selecting a ball

ALSO INSIDE:

Map of local courses

Column: Driving distance
affects the course

Custom clubs can
improve your game



HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

In the last 40 years the average driving distance on the PGA Tour has increased from 256.89 in 1980 to 295.3 in 2021. In fact, the entire PGA Tour's average is almost at the 300 yard mark and you shouldn't be surprised to see the Tour's average driving distance actually break 300 yards by 2024.

So, what is the negative to added distance in the game of golf? We all loved seeing Bryson DeChambeau playing at Bay Hill in 2021. I even tuned in to watch golf on a day I otherwise might have opted for something else. Having played Bay Hill several times I wanted to see exactly how far he was hitting the golf ball.

Last year, Sycamore Hills Golf Club in Ft. Wayne had long drive champion Kyle Berkshire play in a national event they hosted. On the first hole he hit a drive 441 yards to the collection area next to the green.

The price that the game is paying for this additional distance is simply that golf courses are becoming obsolete for the elite players. Twenty-five years ago, I would have considered 6700 or 6800 to be a long golf course. That is not even close to the yardage that today's events are being played on.

Multiple factors are responsible for this increase in distance, but technology is at the top of the list. Technology comes in two forms. First of all, the equipment is simply better than it ever has been before. That is clearly evident by the fact that I can still, at age 58, hit the ball as far as I did in college.

The second form of technology comes from the equipment now used to track swing speed, ball flight, launch angle, etc. All of these items come together to give a golfer the data needed to figure out his/her optimum potential for distance. Add this data to better equipment, and you have the ball traveling a lot farther than it did 30 years ago.



MIKE DAVID

Mike David is the executive director of the Indiana Golf Association.

Ironically, since 2005 a recent report showed that the distance for the "average golfer" has decreased by 1 yard. That could have something to do with the overall aging of the golfing population but it does pose a unique dilemma.

How do you keep courses from becoming obsolete but also keep the game fun for the masses? Golf is a difficult game. That difficulty is actually part of its allure. There is always a challenge to the player as to how they can find that edge or that key to making their game better. It's impossible to reign in the top 1-2 percent of players without negatively impacting the vast majority of us, who can't generate the swing speeds of those elite players.

So, what happens next? The USGA and R & A are currently looking at the distance issues and trying to find a way to curtail the elite players but allow the average players to continue to benefit from technology. One option would be the bifurcation of the rules. Simply put, bifurcation means different rules for different players.

Basically, those playing at the highest level would have a different set of rules than those playing at a more casual level. The issue with that is that golf has long prided itself on having one set of rules that all golfers follow. Theoretically, you can play the same equipment as Dustin Johnson or Jon Rahm.

This is a feeling shared by many,

including Thomas Pagel, the USGA Senior Managing Director of Governance. "It's (playing by the same set of rules) one of the greatest attributes that really bind us to the game and allows us to play the same golf course under the same playing rules with the same equipment. We think that is an important aspect of what we are doing."

PGA Tour Player, Rory McIlroy, has a different feeling. "For 99 per cent of golfers out there, golf courses aren't too short. The ball doesn't go too far for 99 per cent of golfers. So, I would be in favor of a set of parameters for the pros and another one for the amateurs."

And, there are those who think that the game isn't broke, and doesn't need any further intervention.

"Last year (at the Arnold Palmer Invitational) when DeChambeau was right here at the sixth tee and television was all over him. He did it not once, but I think twice. That did more for golf than any one thing did last year. So, does it go too far? People love to see the ball hit that far. I love to see it hit that far. If the courses are too short for these guys, then the scores will be lower because of it. I don't have much of a problem with that," said World Golf Hall of Famer Tom Watson.

The USGA continues to review the distance issue and I'm sure there will be more to come on this topic. According to the most recent update from the USGA and the R & A, they stated that they are continuing to evaluate the situation and mentioned that changes being considered could include the following:

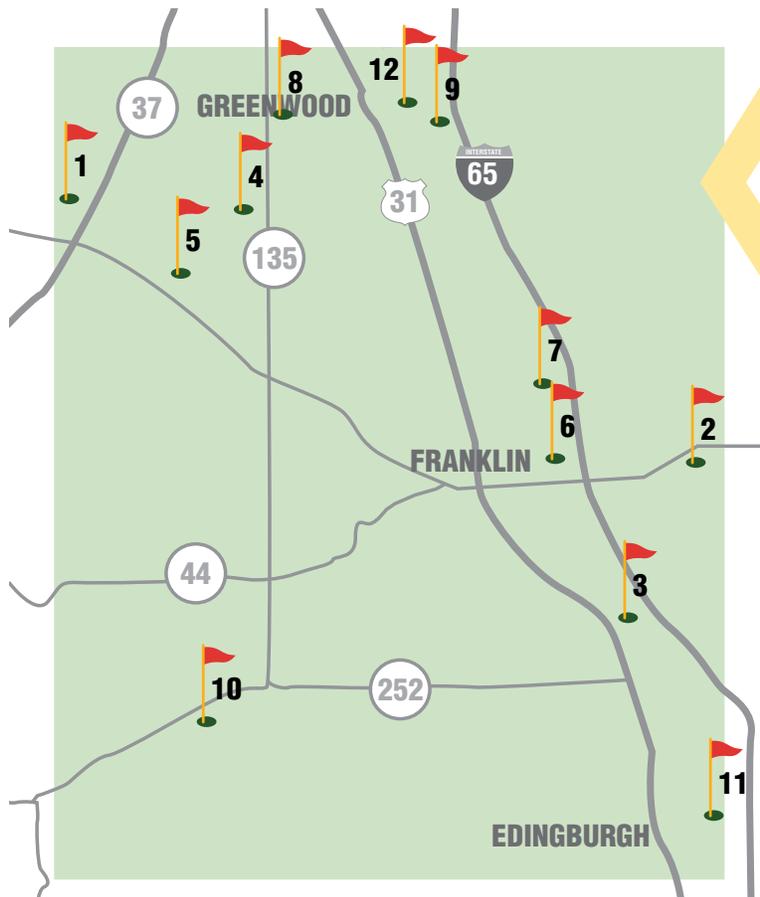
Address hitting distances for the longest hitters, whose impact on the game of golf courses has been most significant;

Minimize the impact on shorter hitters with slower swing speeds at the recreational level;

Allow for continued innovation of balls and clubs for players of all level.

So, what does all this mean for those of us trying to gain an additional 4 or 5 yards on our golfing buddies? Probably not much. While this isn't bifurcation in its truest form, it does seem like the USGA and R & A are attempting to allow the average amateur to do their best to get the most out of their games while curtailing the elite players to some degree.





JOHNSON COUNTY GOLF COURSES

1. Bluff Creek Golf Course

2710 S. Old State Road 37
Greenwood, IN 46134
317-422-4736
<https://www.bluffcreekgolf.com/>

2. Cypress Run Golf Course

7265 E. State Road 44
Franklin, IN 46131
317-738-2555

3. Deer Valley Golf Course (9-hole course)

5357 E. County Road 3005
Franklin, IN 46131
317-738-4441

4. Dye's Walk Country Club (private)

2080 S. State Road 135
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-535-9666
<https://www.dyeswalkcc.com/>

5. Hickory Stick Golf Course

4422 Hickory Stick Blvd.
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-422-8300
<https://www.hickorystickgolf.com/>

6. Hillview Country Club (private)

1800 E. King St.
Franklin, IN 46131
317-736-5555
<https://hillviewtime.com/>

7. Legends of Indiana

2555 N. Hurricane Road
Franklin, IN 46131
317-736-8186
<https://www.thelegendsgolfclub.com/>

8. Orchard Golf (par 3)

251 N. State Road 135
Greenwood, IN 46142
317-883-3840
<http://www.orchardgolfcenter.com/>

9. Otte Golf & Family Fun Center

681 Sheek Road
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-881-4620
<https://www.ottegolfandfamilyfuncenter.com/>

10. Tameka Woods Golf Course

4849 S. County Road 450W
Trafalgar, IN 46181
317-878-4331
<https://tamekawoodsgolf.com/>

11. Timbergate Golf Course

151 St. Andrews Ave.
Edinburgh, IN 46124
812-526-3523
<http://www.timbergate.com/>

12. Valle Vista Golf Course

755 E. Main St.
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-888-5313
<https://www.vallevista.com/>



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MAKING THE PERFECT CHOICE

Golfers should
consider variables
when selecting a ball

STORY BY GREG SEITER | PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

For some golfers, the hunt for a “perfect ball” is an endless quest filled with experimentation, trial and error. However, others tend to believe that one ball is just as good as another.

Can ball selection actually impact player performance? The short answer is yes but industry experts say there are many variables to consider.

Up until several years ago, there were essentially two types of balls to choose from. Wound balls that had a small core wrapped with a long strand of rubber and encased within a thin cover were preferred by professionals while solid balls, with a thick core surrounded by a thin cover, were thought to be more appropriate for casual golfers.

But today, wound balls are mostly extinct and the solid ball market is complex and overwhelming. In fact, it's now common knowledge that while some golf balls are made with characteristics that can lead to longer flight distances, others are designed to provide more opportunities for backspin and extended roll distance. In short, for those who choose to compare one golf ball to another, things such as overall construction, compression and even dimple count must be considered.



“When you’re talking about technology, the biggest jump in golf over the last 20 years has been with balls,” said Kyle Kolarz, PGA Director of Golf at Hillview Country Club in Franklin. “These changes have helped with distance, spin and accuracy. But a lot of what you can do with a golf ball depends on swing speed.”

Nick Bianco, head golf professional at Valle Vista Golf Club and Conference Center in Greenwood, agrees.

“If I have a swing speed of 80 mph, the ball is going to do the same thing no matter which one I use,” he said. “If you’re not swinging your driver over 110 mph, I have to believe most golfers won’t see a big difference from one ball to the next.”

Edinburgh’s Timbergate Golf Course General Manager Wayne Gibbs recommends low-compression golf balls for players who tend to have what most

would consider a slow golf swing.

“High end balls are not going to help higher handicap players,” he said. “If you have a really slow swing, you need a softer ball; the softest you can get.”

According to Kolarz, players in search of a soft golf ball might want to experiment with Callaway Supersoft and Titleist Tour Soft brands.

The compression (hardness) of a golf ball refers to how tightly wound its core threads are. Generally speaking, low compression balls are easier to compress at club impact and allow for players who have slow swing speeds to maximize overall ball flight potential.

Interestingly enough, golf ball dimples also impact flight distance by creating a thin layer of air pressure around the ball itself which, in turn, reduces air drag. While the number of dimples on a regulation golf ball can vary, the common number of indentations per

ball can be anywhere from 300 to 500. Balls that have more dimples tend to fly lower to the ground than balls with fewer, larger dimples, which cause the ball to fly high through the air.

Anyone wanting to analyze the construction of a golf ball should think about things such as inner core composition — pressurized rubber or synthetic rubber — the number of inner layers between the core and the cover (exterior) and the material used for the ball’s cover. Golf ball exteriors are constructed with a form of either ionomer (a hard and durable substance) or urethane (a softer, slightly less durable synthetic compound).

“It’s all very performance based,” Kolarz said. “If you play the correct ball, you will probably see a drop in your scores which will naturally create more enjoyment and might encourage you to play more often.”

But Bianco insists that swing mechanics must be addressed before the effectiveness of a golf ball change can be enjoyed.

“If I slice, the slice is there because of poor fundamentals and the golf ball isn’t going to change that,” he said. “You’re just putting a tuxedo on a pig.”

“I recommend a few lessons before you go out and buy new balls and equipment.”

“I believe golf is a game of the mind once the ability to hit the ball has been addressed,” Bianco added.

Gibbs agrees.

“If you’re a really good golfer, the type of ball you use does make a difference,” he said. “But the average golfer can play just about any ball on the market.”

“When you’re an average golfer and you buy higher-end balls, you’re buying a name. This is coming from a guy who obviously wants to sell more expensive balls.”

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When it comes to golf clubs, local experts say one size definitely doesn't fit all players.

From variances in shaft weight and flexibility to subtle differences in grips and even heads, it's an understood fact that not all golf clubs are created equal. In fact, some who work in the industry believe custom-fitted clubs can help players at almost any skill level lower their scores.

"If you're buying clubs off the rack, it's almost essential that you have them fitted to you," said Wayne Gibbs, general manager at Timbergate Golf Course. "I'm on the shorter side so my clubs have to be two degrees flat. People vary in height. Chances are an off-the-rack set of clubs isn't going to fit you properly straight off the rack."

Glenn Jones, who specializes in club fittings and lessons as golf director and instructor at Otte Golf and Family Fun Center, agrees.

"Custom clubs are made for your stance, height and swing speed," he said. "When your clubs fit, you don't have to adjust to them and that makes swinging and hitting so much easier."

The custom-fitting process is relatively simple and usually begins with the collection of data including consideration of a person's age, sex and golf-related tendencies.

"If you're a senior player, you're probably looking for something that will help you get the ball up in the air a little more," said Kyle Kolarz, PGA Director of Golf at Hillview Country Club."

While player hand size is considered in relation to club grips, an individual's height and arm length are also analyzed in order to determine the desired shaft length for each club being fitted.

Utilization of a launch monitor to capture things such as spin rate, launch angle, clubhead speed, club path, carry and overall distance will probably also be part of the evaluation process.

"The launch monitor shows a lot of important factors," Jones said. "Things like swing speed and ball flight help with identifying the flex of a shaft.

"I believe knowledge of a golf swing is invaluable. The more you learn about your swing, the better golfer you'll become."

According to Kolarz, launch monitor technology has helped bolster player interest in club-fitting services during the last few years.

"Club fitting is as popular now as it

ever has been because people are playing more golf and they want to get better," he said. "The radar shows a lot of metrics and can help a club fitter determine what's working and what isn't."

Sometimes, when assisting golfers with club fitting, Jones recommends stance and grip adjustments before incorporating launch monitor technology.

"I check posture and hand position to see if hands are actually in a good spot before we begin," he said. "We want to have correct posture and hand position in relation to a person's size right off the bat."

Golf lessons can help reveal stance and swing mechanic challenges before a club fitting takes place.

"I honestly believe golfers should go through at least two lessons before having a fitting done with their own clubs," Jones said. "It's important to get

them in a good, proper position for their body build."

Gibbs feels the same way.

"Lessons are very important because nothing makes up for a bad swing," he said. "If you don't swing correctly, club adjustments aren't really going to help."

Nick Bianco, head golf professional at Valle Vista Golf Club and Conference Center, also agrees.

"I believe in the technology and club fitting at the professional level is definitely a great thing. But if you're a high handicap player and you haven't taken lessons, custom fitting isn't going to have as much effect because you're not addressing the source of the problem; your swing fundamentals," he said.

Despite the utilization of technology, local experts say club-fitting services are relatively inexpensive.

"For a basic fitting, I just charge

\$40," Jones said. "The process may take anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes.

"I know some places may go up to around \$100 but I can do it pretty quickly and I think it's important to make it affordable.

"I probably do six to eight fittings in a month."

Hillview Country Club utilizes a Flightscope Xi Tour flight monitor to help with its club analysis services. The charge is \$45 for 30 minutes or \$60 for one hour.

"If you're just wanting to get your driver fitted, you're probably looking at about 30 minutes but if you're talking about a full bag of clubs, it's probably going to take an hour-and-a-half or two hours because we have to get a baseline for all clubs," Kolarz said.

"If you want to play better golf and enjoy the game more, club fitting is definitely worth the investment."

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