

## What's in your Bag?

With springtime just around the corner and another golf season rapidly approaching, now is the perfect time to ask yourself whether you're ready and what you can do today to get the most out of your game in 2007.

Most PGA professionals would agree that there are five steps to improving your game: **professional swing instruction, properly-fitted equipment, practice, play, and a positive attitude.**

Early last year, my article *Course of Action, Play to your Potential in 2006*, focused on step 1 - professional swing instruction. The off-season is a great time to have your PGA Professional take a look at your swing and suggest a lesson plan to work out any kinks that may have crept in during the winter.

Step 2, properly-fitted equipment, is the next key step in game improvement, and the focus of this article. Though challenging, golf can be made easier if you use the right tools. To determine if you have the right tools, consider these questions:

- How are my grips and do they fit me?
- How are the lofts and lies on my irons?
- How is my "set makeup"?
- Do my clubs fit me?

Many golfers give little consideration to fit when purchasing a set of clubs. A golfer who is six feet tall requires clubs that are more upright than a golfer who is five feet tall. Golfers with large hands require a larger grip size than a player with small hands. A strong golfer with a fast clubhead speed requires a shaft flex that is much stiffer than a player with a slower swing speed. These factors and others need to be considered to get the most out of your game.

The simplest item to check off your list is your grips. Many golfers play with grips that are worn out, slick, or have hardened over time. If this is the case with yours, it's probably time to change them. The grip is the only means of contact you have with the club, so it's important that it feel good. Today there are many different types of grips, each providing a different feel. The feel of the club can either improve your level of confidence as you swing or detract from it. I recommend changing your grips at least once a year.

How your grips fit is as important as how they feel. If the grip is too large, it will limit wrist rotation and cause shots to the right (all examples assume a right-handed player). If the grip is too small, it can result in over-rotation of the wrists and a tendency to hook the ball to the left. To test your current grip size, take your normal grip on the club in the playing position. Remove your right hand and pick the club up to view your grip in your left hand. Your fingertips should just touch the heel portion of your palm. If they dig in,

the grip is too small; if they don't come close, the grip is too large. Stop by the pro shop to have any member of your PGA staff assess your grip size.

Lofts and lies should be checked at least once per year. The loft is in effect the slope of the club face and the lie angle is the relationship between the shaft and the clubhead. Both of these are critically important to the trajectory of your ball flight. Over time, especially if you like to practice on the range with certain clubs, these loft and lie angles will change from the original manufacturer specifications. Do your 6 and 7-irons hit the ball about the same height? Do you hit your 6-iron really solid, but the 7-iron doesn't feel right? It may be that your lofts and lies are out of line. The good news is they can be easily checked and readjusted for a minimal fee. Two places I recommend for this are The Golf Shop of Wake Forest and Carolina Custom Golf in North Raleigh. Both have the necessary equipment and can get you on track for the start of the season.

Evaluating your "set makeup" may also pay huge dividends. More and more pros on the tour are removing the longer harder-to-hit irons from their bag and replacing them with what are known as "hybrids". If it's good enough for the pros shouldn't it be good enough for you? A hybrid club replaces those hard-to-hit long irons with a club that gives high launch and combines the distance of a fairway wood while still offering the control of an iron. Most major manufacturers are now offering hybrids that will replace the 2 through 5-iron and 5 through 9-wood. Stop by the golf shop to demo a hybrid and consider adding one to your bag.

The last item on your checklist is how your clubs fit. This is not as easy to check but is critically important to your game. Once again, a player who is tall may require clubs that are different than a player who is short. David Sykes, Head Professional at the Heritage Golf Club, is a Ping Certified Custom Fitter. For a small fee and about an hour of your time he can fit you for grip size, shaft flex, length and lie angles. David can evaluate your current set and determine whether they fit you, and give you a list of specifications that can be used to purchase any brand of clubs on the market.

Club specifications can get complicated, but let me share one aspect to emphasize its importance. As defined above, the lie angle is the relationship between a club's shaft and the clubhead at impact. To get an idea of lie angle and its importance, imagine how your clubface would look as it strikes the ball. If the toe of the club is raised in the air in relation to its heel then the club is too upright. This will result in a tendency to hit the ball left of your intended target. Conversely, if the toe is lower in relation to the heel then the club is too flat and will result in a tendency to hit shots to the right of the intended target. A club's lie angle can only be tested by using a lie board and hitting real golf balls. It is crucial to your game and should be checked before you start this season.

So now that you've covered step 2 of the game improvement plan and taken a look at what's in your bag, you should be well-prepared to play your best in 2007. I will cover Steps 3, 4 and 5, Practice, Play and a Positive Attitude in my next article. Get fitted and hit them well!

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