

# Playing Through

- CHRISTIAN SMITH

Photos: Editor

## SPRING EQUIPMENT REVIEW: GOLF BALLS

I get a lot of questions about which golf ball I like to play, and whether it is worth it to play the high end balls like Titleist ProV1/ProV1x, Callaway Chrome Tour, Taylormade TP5/TP5x, and the like. There are a lot of factors that go into deciding on a golf ball that is best for you. This ranges from physical attributes you may have like swing speed and strength, to how competitive you play (recreationally vs. tournament), and even includes the conditions of the course you are playing.

Before I delve into those, let's talk about the differences in golf balls. I'm going to generalize because there are so many varieties of balls out there, it would be overkill to go through all the brands.

**Ball Design:** The high-end balls that usually retail for \$50+ per dozen are typically 3-piece balls with a softer urethane cover. They are designed optimize distance while also providing more spin with the wedges and around the greens. The ball tends to stay on the face a smidge longer due to the softer cover and allows more workability (fades/draws) in shot-making. The less expensive options these companies provide are typically 2-piece balls with a firmer Surlyn or Ionome cover. These balls are designed to reduce sidespin so they fly straighter for a higher handicap player, but also provide plenty of distance. Because they have a firmer cover and a solid core, they do not spin as much around the greens so touch can be a little more difficult. I feel like they shoot off the face a little bit around the greens.

**Compression:** Back in the day you typically had three levels of compression and they were designated very distinctly. There were 'ladies' balls as they were typically referred to that were usually 80 compression, and then 90 compression and 100 compression. The 90 compression balls typically had red numbers on them, and the 100 compression had black numbers. This was also usually delineated on the package as well. The higher the compression, the more swing speed it takes to 'compress' the ball. Compressing the ball simply means the amount of squeeze you can put on it to create somewhat of a trampoline effect. If you play a ball that is too



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hard (higher compression/100 for example) and your swing speed is not adequate, the ball will come out dull and not provide the lift you need. These days you really have to look at the specs on the balls. For example, Maxfli has the TourS, the Tour, and the TourX. The TourS is around 85 compression, Tour is 90-ish, and the TourX is 100 compression. As an example, if your swing speed isn't over 110 mph, you don't want to play a 100 compression ball. In my estimation, softer is typically better because you are ensuring you are compressing the ball.

**Conditions and the right ball:** There are two aspects of this I want to cover and the first is the course itself. If you are playing a course with very firm and fast greens, it is more important to have a 3-piece ball because you need spin to control the ball and stop it where you want. It

becomes more of a guessing game if you are using a harder 2-piece ball. Conversely, if the greens are soft and receptive, you can get away without the more precise control of the 3-piece ball and save yourself some money. Second is the weather and in particular, the outside temperature. The colder the weather, the harder the ball gets. In the winter, I will usually switch to a 90 compression ball instead of 100 for me. In extreme cold, I have played 80 compression balls. For every 10 degree deviation from 72 degrees, the ball will travel ~2 yards farther or shorter based on the temperature. So if it is 52 degrees, expect the ball to travel 4-5 yards less in the air, and at 92 degrees, expect 4-5 yards further.

**How you play:** If you are a recreational golfer that just likes to have a good time and is less concerned about score, there are plenty of great 2-piece ball options like the Callaway SuperSoft, and the Bridgestone E6, just to name a couple. If you are more competitive and take scoring seriously, you might want to invest in the high end balls. I actually fluctuate and I play pretty seriously. Our greens are relatively soft and I play a lot of casual rounds (even though I am trying to do my best), and in those rounds I'll use one of the good cheaper 2-piece balls. When I play in competition, I will usually play a practice round or two with my premium ball of choice and use those in the tournament.

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Based on your profile, swing speed, how you play, time of year, I would just test some different brands out. People are finicky about brands; how they look, how they feel, etc. Look up the specs on them before you buy and make sure you pay attention to the compression and the type of ball flight it is supposed to promote (high, mid, low) and the spin factor. Once you find one you like, stay with it.

- CS

