

# Playing Through

- CHRISTIAN SMITH

## SPRING EQUIPMENT REVIEW: WOODS & IRONS

Last month, in the first article of this equipment series, we talked about golf balls, how they're constructed, what they're designed to do, and how to pick one that fits your game rather than just your budget or what you see on TV.

This month, I want to move into the clubs themselves, specifically woods and irons. I'm not going to get into brand comparisons or the newest release versus last year's model. Our Head Pro can do that far better than I can. What I want to focus on instead is how these clubs are designed, and what that means for your game.

### Irons – More Help Than Most Players Realize

One of the biggest differences in irons is the category they fall into—typically something along the lines of blades, game improvement irons, or something in between.

Game improvement irons typically have larger clubheads with a thicker top line (top of the clubhead as you look down), are usually cavity backed, and are usually cast, and have a harder feel than forged irons which are hammered from a single billet of metal. They tend to have a lower center of gravity which helps to get the ball in the air more easily, and enhanced perimeter weighting to counteract strikes that are off center, which straightens out the flight. These are best for beginners and higher handicap players.



The 'in-between' irons will usually have a little bit smaller clubhead, have a cavity or 'muscle' back, and come in cast or forged varieties depending on the head design. They usually have a lower center of gravity weighting to get the ball in the air. They provide more forgiveness than traditional blade irons while providing more ability to shape shots high and low and left or right. They are mostly mid played by low handicap players.

Traditional blades are forged irons with small heads, no cavity or muscle back, and have a thinner top line of the club. There is very little perimeter weighting and the center of gravity is higher to produce more penetrating lower ball flights. These irons also provide the most intense feedback on your strike because off-center hits can be felt and the ball will curve offline more. These are designed for low handicap players, and folks who make a living playing the game.

Hybrids have also become more popular and are seen even in the bags of Tour Professionals. The longer irons, usually 3-6, are often a cavity or muscle back and then the short irons down to the wedges are blades. This provides more forgiveness in the harder to hit long irons, and the precision required in the shorter irons.

- Game improvement irons make the game easier and are more forgiving
- 'In-Between' cavity & muscle backs provide more forgiveness and still some workability
- Blades, or players irons provide more control and workability, but are harder to hit

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## Woods – Same Idea, Different Scale

Modern woods are designed for forgiveness and launch, with weight distributed around the clubhead to reduce twisting (what's called MOI) and help keep shots straighter even when you miss the center. Almost all brands now allow adjustment of the loft and lie of the club. They come with a wrench to detach the clubhead from the shaft and then you can pick the setting you want. For lofts, you can usually adjust up to 3 degrees, 2 on some models. The lie of the club can then be set to more of an open or closed position. So for someone that slices the ball, they could set the face angle to be closed to help straighten out the ball flight. These settings can also be useful based on course and weather conditions.

The new drivers and fairway woods also have adjustable perimeter weighting, center of gravity, and MOI. Center of gravity affects trajectory,

perimeter weighting helps correct off-center hits; MOI reduces twisting of the face when struck off center.

## A Word on Weight

Total weight is how heavy the club is. Swing weight is how heavy the club feels during the swing. You can have two clubs that weigh the same but feel completely different depending on how that weight is distributed. Think of holding a hammer: if you hold it at the end, it feels heavier than if you choke up. That difference is swing weight.

The combination of head, shaft, and grip weight all play a role in this. Shafts come in varying degrees of grams (60-120) is the primary range, and also different flexes (Senior, Regular, Stiff, X-Stiff, etc.). As a rule, the faster you swing, the heavier and stiffer the shaft you want. But not too much! *Too* stiff or heavy, and it will feel like you're swinging a telephone pole! For instance, I bought a new set about a year ago, but the shafts were 120 gram which was just too heavy for me. It felt laborious to swing the club, so I swapped out the iron shafts with 85 grams and they are much more comfortable to swing.

Another thing to consider is the type of shaft you use. Steel shafts tend to have a more rigid feel that travels through your hands, wrists, elbows, and arms on mishits. Graphite shafts have improved, making them much more consistent and less "whippy" feeling. They also reduce a lot of the vibration you feel at impact. I switched to graphite shafts in my irons about six months ago, and my tendinitis thanks me!

Clubs are designed with a purpose, but proper fit is essential. It's worth it to go for a fitting at one of the golf retail stores and just get basic numbers for your swing speed, ball speed, and distances. There's equipment out there that will help you get the ball airborne, keep it in play, and will feel comfortable in play!

*See you on the course!*  
- Christian

