



---

## Elite Insider Circle Monthly Handicap Improver July 2017

---



Hello Fellow Golf Enthusiast,

This is Jaacob Bowden.

### Last Month

To recap last month, golf expert Adam Young wrote about the Stages of Learning. By understanding the learning process a bit better, it can help us to become better golfers.

Golf equipment guru Tom Wishon wrote about “When to Think About Graphite Shafts For Your irons”.

Today’s graphite shafts are much better than those in the early days of graphite.

Some reasons for you to possibly consider switching could be that:

- A lighter total weight of the irons may help you gain more consistency, control, and distance.
- Graphite might help alleviate joint pain and discomfort from swinging

- You could possibly have one less club in to the green

I mentioned a few side notes including:

- That our Sterling Irons single length irons now have a Lob Wedge...and are also available in a left-handed model.
- That Brooks Koepka's handicap differential in his US Open win translated to +8.5, +6.2, +7.7, and +8.5...and Omar Uresti's win of the PGA Professional Championship averaged +4.1.

Imagine what those scores would be on your own golf course!

I wrote a little bit about my experience caddying for Andre Bossert in the US Senior PGA Championship and being paired with guys like Joey Sindelar, Kevin Sutherland, John Daly, and more.

It's impressive how much the Senior players still practice and work hard on their games...and similar to the PGA TOUR and golf in general, distance is a huge advantage.

So get going on that swing speed training using the information contained on the website in the members area!

We also included a CD of my audio interview with Trackman founder Fredrik Tuxen. Trackman is that little orange box that you may see in lots of photos at tour events, the World Long Drive Championships, with your teacher at your local golf course, etc. It's a launch monitor that measures all kinds of useful data.



## **This Month**

This month, here's what's coming up for you.

- We'll do a Long Drive Q&A with 49-year-old Jeff Gavin, who is the 2014 World Long Drive Champion in the Masters division and has swung as high as 152 mph on Trackman. We had mistakenly said this was going to

be in last month's MHI, but that was a typo on my part. But it's here this month!

- Golf expert Adam Young will come at us with a piece about technique versus skill, what those are, how to train skill, and what to avoid that may cause decline in skill.
- Equipment expert Tom Wishon will tell us his thoughts on why middle to high handicap golfers benefit more from custom club fitting than low handicap players.
- I'll answer a question from one of your fellow MHI members.
- We'll have our usual "Member of the Month" and golf joke.

And as part of your Monthly Handicap Improver Insider Circle, we've included a CD of my interview with...me!

Ha!

Normally, I find some various industry expert, ask them leading questions to get them to talk about themselves and their perspective on golf to let you decide what you want to take out of it, record the conversation, and send it out to all of you.

However, this time I'd like to do something a little different.

Since 2011 or so, I really haven't played that much golf, instead working for about 5 years on further developing Swing Man Golf and creating Sterling Irons single length irons. I got in to Speedgolf to help keep myself in shape and also stay somewhat connected to playing, but even that wasn't much. This past winter during our move from NYC to DC I didn't play at all from November to April.

Finally, in the spring I decided to put some emphasis back on my own game and I got a membership at the 7,015-yard University of Maryland Golf Course, which is a tough golf course that has hosted a couple of Web.com events...coming in at a course rating of 73.7 and slope of 137.

When I got back out on the course, I found I had lost distance and fallen all the way back to about an 8 handicap. Since then my handicap has been dropping back down again. In fact, last week, I had a +1.6 handicap differential round that was a - 2 70 at Devil's Ridge Golf Club in Michigan.

My goal is to get it in to that +4 to +6 handicap range because that is the level it takes to get out on tour and stay there.

During this handicap improvement process, I've had to re-learn some things I had forgotten...and I've also been jotting down notes along the way of things that are working.

So, this month I'm going to use this as an opportunity to share with you these things in the hopes that you can come away with even more things than our normal interview that you can apply to your own handicap improvement.

I also get copies of PGA Magazine, Golf Magazine, and Golf Digest sent to me at home each month. There's an awful lot of well-meaning but not good golf advice out there. This will be an opportunity for me to help you sift through all this information.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy it.

If you have anything specific you want me to cover, just sent in an email to Bessie at [info@swingmangolf.com](mailto:info@swingmangolf.com) with subject "Question for the MHI", and she can get those questions to me.

### **Side Notes**

A few side notes...

- 1) I won my qualifier for the Delta Dental State Open of Virginia. The tournament is from July 20-22<sup>nd</sup> at Ballyhack Golf Club in Roanoke, VA. I'll let you know how I do in next month's MHI.
- 2) I was once again a guest on the Game Improvement Golf podcast with host Tony Wright. If you'd like to listen to that, you can do so here:  
  
<http://gameimprovementgolf.com/084-sterling-single-length-irons-update-with-jaacob-bowden/>
- 3) I stopped by the Quicken Loans National PGA TOUR event being held at TPC Potomac at Avenel Farm. I don't really have too much to say about the event other than that I followed Bryson DeChambeau for a few holes...and I overheard Kevin Na say how he thought the course played more difficult than Erin Hills. It was certainly a tough golf course. I saw a lot of tour players hit their shots in the hazards.

Okay...let's get going!

---

## **Long Drive Q&A With Jeff Gavin**

Age: 49

Height: 6'4"

Weight: 240

Driver Specs: 3 degrees

Sponsors: Krank Golf, HOF Golf  
shafts Special

Accomplishments:

2014 World Long Drive -  
Masters Champion

What is your longest drive in  
competition?

456 yards

What were the conditions of the  
drive?

No wind. Dry. Firm grid. Denver, Colorado.

What are the fastest swing speeds you've recorded on a Swing Speed Radar and/or  
Trackman?

Trackman 152 mph

What lead you to choose your particular equipment specifications?

Feel of a shaft is huge. Then I use ball flight and ball speed as a gauge of  
what is working

Do you favor a particular shot shape to hit it long?





Wind direction plays a factor in that. But generally the straight ball goes the furthest.



Do you use any training aids to work on your speed and power?

No not for speed and power. I use a gym for that.

Do you do any other types of training to drive it further?

I do a general strength gym routine. Increase and decrease volume and load depending on time of year.

Is there any particular bit of advice you would give the regular amateur for him or her to hit the ball longer?

Ya. Quick and easy speed 80% swing and loose hands (grip). Tension in hands destroy speed.

Where can people contact you or learn more about you?

@jeffgavingolf

---

## Technique Versus Skill

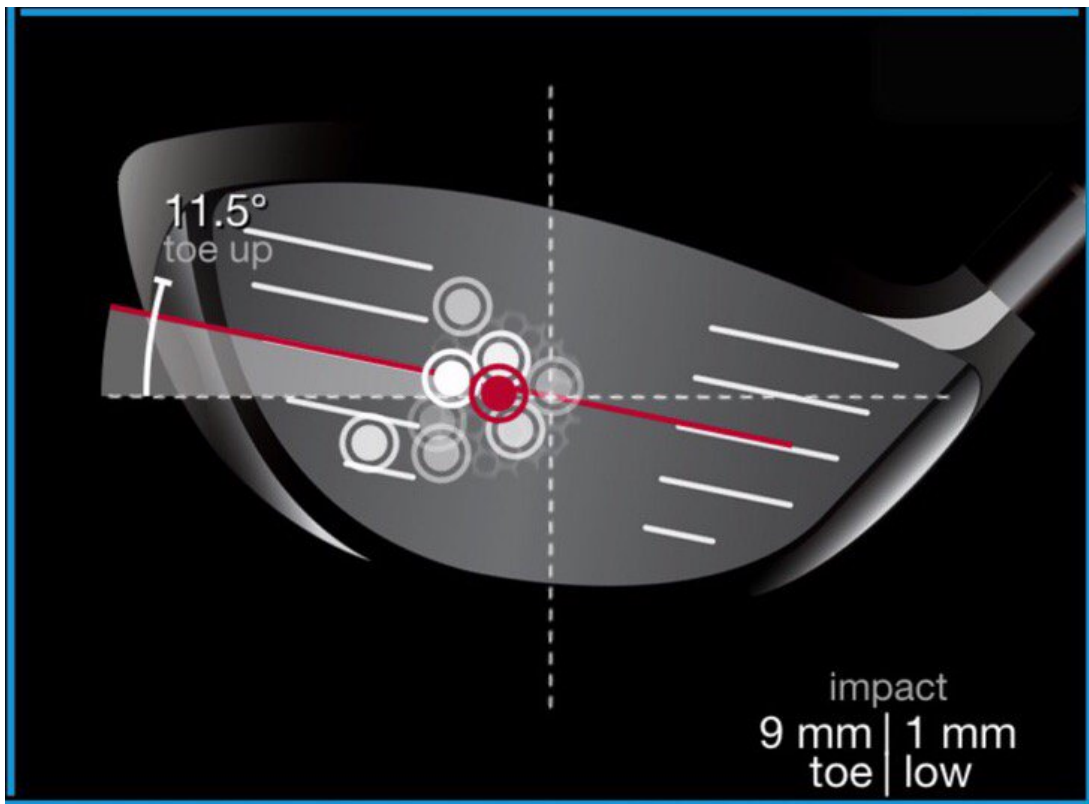
By Adam Young

Skill is different to technique.

Many golfers don't realize this and aimlessly work on their swing form without any consideration for their skills.



For example, if a player is producing a certain strike pattern which is suboptimal, this is their technique. However, their ability to move the strike around the clubface (intentionally hit different parts of the clubface) is the skill element.



*In the above example, the player has a toe biased strike pattern (technique). Their ability to improve this pattern will depend on their skill level (their ability to move the strike around the face to where they desire).*

## Swing Style

While ‘swing style’ would also be categorized as technique, it is also very different to skill.

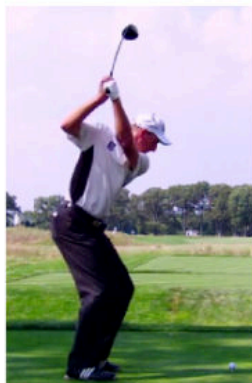
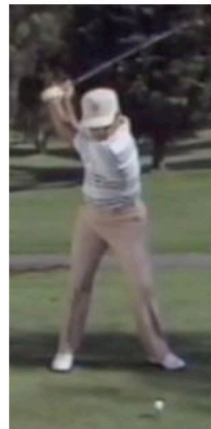
For example, there are many different swing styles on tour – from flat/steep/laid off/across the line/weak and strong grips, etc. However, as different as the players swing the club, all swing styles on tour still produce functional impacts as a result of the player’s skill-sets.



VS



VS



VS





In fact, a tour player would be able to produce multiple different swing styles/techniques (draw/fade/high/low etc.) and still produce functional impacts and shots.

## **The Golf Industry Needs a Shake-Up**

Since forever, the golf industry (magazines, TV commentators, books, coaches etc.) has only looked at golf from the perspective of improving swing style. Often, we look at the player who is in vogue at the moment and we show how they move their bodies/the club. However, golfers are missing a vital element in their improvement programs – skill development.

And, with the best players all swinging the club in different ways, and different coaching methodologies offering different viewpoints, wouldn't it be better to look at the commonalities?

Skills such as:

- Ability to control strike with the face
- Ability to control ground contact (depth, location)
- Ability to control loft
- Directional control
- Speed control

## **Skill Training**

Luckily, skills are very trainable.

And when we improve skills, we automatically get better, even if we use the same swing style. And if we were to change our swing style for whatever reason, our skills would still stay with us – this is why Tiger Woods was still able to win so many events with Butch/Haney/Foley's swings.

While skill training is a massively in-depth topic, some of the ways that I use in lessons to improve my pupil's skills are:

- Understanding – improvements in clarity of task (what causes a good/bad shot)
- Awareness – improvements in ability to identify what actually happened
- Feedback – helps improve awareness
- Scaling – putting the feedback on a scale to increase awareness

- Practice Methods – differential and variability practice improves your ability to ‘edit’ your technique and also improves coordination
- Task Difficulty – increasing or decreasing the difficulty to push improvements in skill or understanding
- Gamifying – turning the task into a game speeds up learning
- Attention – where you place your focus can improve or destroy your skills

As a result of skill improvements, we see dramatic performance changes in spite of the swing often looking very similar on video.

## **What Harms Skill?**

As well as looking at how we can improve our skill, we should also look to what could make skills worse in order to avoid those things.

Unfortunately, many of the things average golfers do are actively hurting their ability for their body to coordinate movement effectively.

- Overly Internal Focuses – thinking of body positioning rather than club/ball strike
- Too Much Thought – having too many swing thoughts at once can disrupt the brain’s ability to produce coordinated movement
- Tension – relaxation can allow the muscles to create positive variability more easily. This is why we often choke under pressure, as our body instinctively tenses up.

Many golfers reading that list will be able to identify with at least one, if not all of those elements.

## **Summary**

- Skill is different to technique
- There are many different swing styles (techniques) on tour, but all tour players have skills which allow them to control the ball
- We often focus too much on swing technique, and not enough on skills
- Skills are trainable – they can be improved in many different ways
- We should avoid things which cause a decline in skill

## About Adam

Adam Young wrote about these ideas and more in his “The Practice Manual – The Ultimate Guide for Golfers”, a best seller on Amazon.com in both the US, UK, Canada, Germany, and France...and has been featured as a must-have book on Golf Channel.

You can read more about his theories in his book at <https://www.adamyounggolf.com/golfventuresinc/Strike> as well as The Strike Plan - a video series looking in depth at the concepts, skill-building drills and techniques which create crisper strikes for better distance control and accuracy.

---

## Member Question

### Member Question:

*I live in an apartment, so I don't have a backyard for practice place.*

*Would it be okay if I do fitness/workout in gym and fast swings at driving range separately?*

*- Brandon H, California,*

### Jaacob's Answer:

Yes, you can do them separately if you like.

The Basic Program, in particular, was designed in such a way that you could do it virtually anywhere you desire.

I remember when I was training for the RE/MAX World Long Drive Championships, I also lived in an apartment. Sometimes for my swing training, I would just do it in the parking garage (with a towel thrown down on the ground so I wouldn't scuff up my driver on the concrete). We also had a small dog-walking area on the side of the complex. On occasion, I would do my training there.

---

## **Why Middle to High Handicap Golfers Benefit More From Custom Clubfitting Than Low Handicap Players**

By Tom Wishon

I kid you not. If I had a dollar for every time I heard a middle to higher handicap golfer tell me, "Until I improve my swing, custom fitting will never help me", I might not be rich, but I sure could have a nice round of golf at just about ANY golf course...and that includes Pebble Beach with its sky high fee!!

I know, it sounds like it should be the opposite.

The better the player, the more fitting can help. But believe me, after nearly 40 years in fitting research including tons of serious research, I am here to **GUARANTEE** you that if the measurement of fitting success is to be rated in a lower score or a visible improvement in shot consistency, it will be the middle to high handicap golfers who will get that more...and more often than will the low handicap players.

Bet the farm on it!

Regardless of what you may think, you must be a good athlete with exceptional neuro-muscular control and fine motor skills to develop a fundamentally sound golf swing. This is precisely why you see so many athletes in other sports become good golfers in a short period of time when they take up the game.

It is also why so many of us "mortals" struggle with our swing and fight like crazy to shoot between the mid 80s and high 90s. The majority of us who play off a 12 handicap and higher just do not have the athletic ability and physiology to score in the 70s unless we become absolute wizards of the short game.

Hand a very good golfer a set of clubs that do not fit his size, strength, athletic ability and swing characteristics and that player will find a way to adjust his swing to be able to play almost as well with the other golf clubs as with his own custom fit set. Maybe not long term but on a short term basis the good player can make swing adjustments to overcome most of the potential problems in playing with a standard made set of golf clubs.

I'll give you an example.

Some years ago at the PGA TOUR's spring stop in New Orleans, tour player Alex Cjeka left for the airport after his second round, believing he had missed the cut.

When finally told he had made the cut, Alex had already boarded the plane with his clubs checked securely in the baggage hold. Plain and simple, Alex had to borrow a set of clubs from the pro shop at the tournament to play the third round...and shot 71. After the round he admitted it was not easy but he had been able to make adjustments to be able to play the round with the borrowed set.

Let me tell you precisely why if you are a mid to high handicap golfer that you will benefit more from custom fitting than a low handicapper.

Part of it has to do with the fact that if the clubs are too long, too short, too heavy, too light, too stiff, too flexible, too low in loft, too high in loft, too flat or too upright, you do not have the athletic ability to adjust your swing to compensate.

A big of a part of it has to do with the fact that many of the standard specifications on the most famous brand golf clubs quite simply make it way too difficult for average golfers to have a chance to play to the best of their given ability.

I'll take it one more step.

If the golf companies went back to the standard specifications of the 1970s and 80s, FAR more average golfers would play better today than they can with any 21st century high tech set of clubs bought off the rack in any retail golf store or pro shop or online shop.

I am in fact talking about the 45 to 46" long drivers, the 43.5" 3-woods, the adjustable hosel drivers and woods, the overly long hybrids, and the shrinking loft disease that has infected every set of game improvement irons made today.

And I have not even touched upon the fact that clubs off the rack come in ONE weight and ONE grip size, while golfers come in a myriad of different combinations of size, strength, swing tempo and hand size.

Perhaps one in a thousand average golfers has the swing characteristics to hit a 45-46" driver or 43.5" 3-wood as well or better than a 43-44" driver and 42" 3-wood. For the other 999 these overly long drivers and woods are a kiss of death for your long game.

Don't believe it?

Then just have a clubmaker cut your driver and woods shorter while re-weighting them to accommodate the shorter length and see for yourself.



The adjustable hosel drivers and woods were created to enable golfers to dial in a better loft for their swing. But they only do that if you know that you always have to HOLD the face square behind the ball when you set up to hit a shot. That's all well and good if you naturally hit the ball straight. Problem is, something like 70+% of all golfers slice the ball to some degree from nagging to big banana.

For the slicers, the absolute best way to reduce that slice is to play with a driver and woods made with a closed face angle. Closed face = face points left when you rest the clubhead on its sole on the ground.

Unfortunately to create an adjustable hosel driver/wood requires that you ELIMINATE any option in the face angle. And that's bad because if those 70% could switch tomorrow to a driver and woods with 2-3\* closed face angle, they would not only be thrilled with the improvement but they would come home after golf and help with the cooking, the dishes and taking the dog out for a walk!



Finally, if you haven't heard, the 5-iron of today is the 3-iron of yesterday in terms of the loft angle on the head.

The lower the loft, the more difficult the club will be to hit. Most mid to high handicap players do not have the ability to properly elevate the shot with an iron of lower than a 28\* loft. In case you haven't heard, that means most companies' #3, 4, 5 and for some, even the #6 have a loft lower than 28\*!!

So that means if you bought your irons as a set of #3 to gap wedge or #4 to gap wedge, you likely wasted your money on 3 to 4 of the irons in that set.

Bottom line?

If you are playing with a set of clubs bought off the rack in a pro shop, retail golf store or online golf store in the past ten years, boy are you in for some good news !!!!

If you take the time to find a good, experienced custom clubmaker he can either retro fit your old clubs or better yet, custom fit you into a new set in which all 12 of the key clubfitting specs are customized to your consistently inconsistent swing and from it, drop your handicap by 3 to 8 shots instantly.

Send the low handicapper into the clubmaker and more than likely the result won't be any measurable improvement in score.

So the choice is up to you - continue to play with clubs with specifications that are preventing you from playing to the best of your ability, or work with a good clubfitter to get golf clubs with specs that help you play better.

To find a good clubfitter, take the time to head to the websites of the Association of Golf Clubfitting Professionals or the International Clubmakers' Guild.

Drop them an email, tell them where you live, and ask them to recommend a good clubfitter with whom you can work to play better golf.



---

## Member of the Month

"After a bit of a learning curve, I'm hitting the ball better than I ever have in my 25 years of playing. This morning I shot a 74, the low round of my life by 4 strokes. It was a ball striking 74, not a putting 74 as I took 31 putts.

One of the deepest pleasures of golf for me has always been striking quality iron shots. These Sterling Irons single length irons have dramatically increased the percentage of quality iron shots I hit, which of course has also significantly increased the amount of confidence I feel standing over the ball. Gapping, distance, feel, everything about these clubs is working wonderfully for me.

Thanks for making them."

- Barry D

---

## Finishing Up With Fun



Sid and Barney head out for a quick round of golf. Since they are short on time, they decide to play only 9 holes. Sid says to Barney, "Let's say we make the time worth the while, at least for one of us, and spot \$5 on the lowest score for the day."

Barney agrees and they enjoy a great game.

After the 8th hole, Barney is ahead by 1 stroke, but cuts his ball into the rough on the 9th.

"Help me find my ball; you look over there," he says to Sid.

After 5 minutes, neither has had any luck, and since a lost ball carries a four-point penalty, Barney pulls a ball from his pocket and tosses it to the ground.

"I've found my ball!" he announces triumphantly.

Sid looks at him forlornly, "After all the years we've been friends, you'd cheat me on golf for a measly five bucks?"

"What do you mean cheat? I found my ball sitting right here!"

"And a liar, too!" Sid says with amazement. "I'll have you know I've been standing on your ball for the last five minutes!"

**We hope you enjoyed the Monthly Handicap Improver...feel free to contact us at [info@swingmangolf.com](mailto:info@swingmangolf.com) with questions, comments, suggestions, etc!**

Have a great month!