

Do Your Clubs Measure Up?

Make sure your putter, sand wedge and driver fit you properly, and watch your scores go down

BY TOM HENDERSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEONARD KAMSLER

If you've ever attended a major championship or PGA Tour event, you're familiar with the big equipment trucks that are often lined up on one side of the driving range like a convoy. Inside these mobile equipment centers, trained professionals constantly check and refine the equipment used by the best players in the world, taking care of everything from mis-matched driver shafts to worn-down grips. While you certainly don't need to be as vigilant as the pros, I recommend paying special attention to your putter, sand wedge, and driver. These are the scoring clubs in your bag, and you should ensure that yours have the playing characteristics you need. Here's how to do just that.



Putter: Length Equals Lie

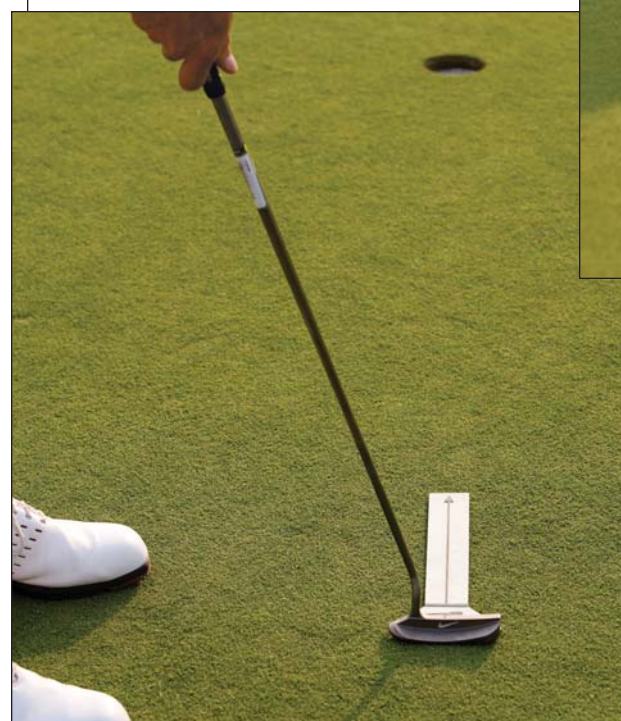
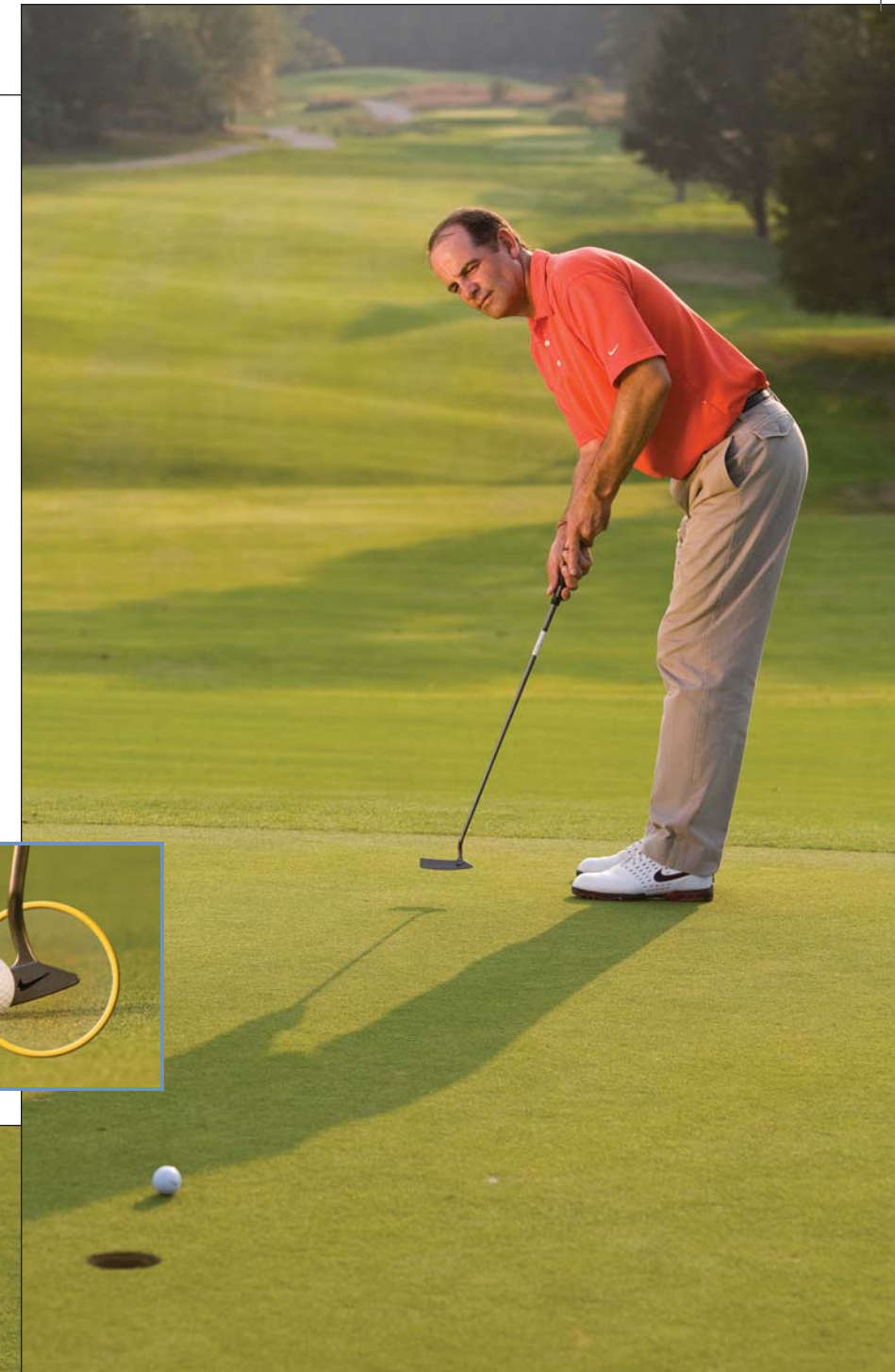
When talking about conventional putters (not belly or long models), the length of the putter shaft correlates with the lie of the putter head at address. Ideally, you want the putter head to lie flat on the ground at address so that you can aim properly and roll the ball precisely along your target line.

Your putter shaft is too long for you if:

- The toe of the putter head is in the air at address (*fig. A, below left*)
- Your putter face is aimed too far left
- You tend to pull putts left of your target line

Your putter shaft is too short for you if:

- The heel of the putter is in the air at address (*fig. B, below right*)
- Your putter face is aimed too far right
- You tend to push putts right of your target line



Before you buy your next putter, have a PGA professional fit you. You always want to make sure your eyes are over the ball at address, and your ability to do that is directly affected by the putter's length.

Quick Tip: Regularly check your aim (putter face) and alignment (feet and body) using a training aid, such as the one shown here (*left*). Ninety-five percent of golfers I see don't have the putter face aimed where they think, and this simple adjustment will help you sink more putts.

Wedges: Bounce Factor

Do you know how much bounce your sand wedge has? Most people don't, and yet bounce is a critically important measurement. Bounce refers to the amount of curve on the wedge's underside, or flange, and affects how much the club digs into the ground at impact. A standard range of bounce on most wedges is between 8 degrees (low bounce, more dig) and 14 degrees (high bounce, less dig).



You need less bounce if:

- The fairway grass is firm and cut low
- Bunker sand is hard-packed and firm
- You hit most chips and pitches thin

You need more bounce if:

- The ground is soft or the rough is high and thick
- Bunker sand is soft and fluffy
- You hit most chips and pitches fat



QUICK TIP: Even a wedge with a proper amount of bounce is no guarantee that your short game will suddenly become Woods-ian. If you hit a lot of chips fat, focus on taking a divot in front of the ball, using a tee as a visual practice tool (*photo, left*). This will help you shift toward the target so you hit the ball first, then the ground. If you hit a lot of chips thin, you might be playing the ball too far forward in your stance. Move it back about an inch and you should see better results.



Driver: Choose the Right Combo

Everyone loves pounding a drive down the middle, and the best way to do that is to use a driver with the ideal combination of length and loft. The chances of an "off the rack" driver fitting you correctly is about 10 percent, so you'll likely need to try out different models to find one that fits your height, posture, and clubhead speed. Most players can benefit from a slightly shorter driver with more loft.



Length: A driver length of 43 inches used to be standard, but that measurement has crept up toward 45 inches, making the club harder to control. A simple way to determine what you can handle is to adhere a piece of face tape to the driver clubface and hit 10 balls. You want to achieve a pattern of impact marks near the center of the clubface (*above, right*). If the pattern is too spread out, the driver is too long for you (*above, left*).

Loft: Think of loft like water coming out of a hose: If you aim the hose too low, the water falls to the ground quickly. So it's a misconception to think that a lower-lofted driver (say, 8 or 9 degrees) will automatically hit the ball farther. When using a hose, you want an optimum amount of loft to send the water a long way — notice how, in the second photo (*below, right*), the water easily carries the puddle made in the first photo. If your clubhead speed is in the 90-mph range, I suggest a driver with 10 or 11 degrees of loft. Only if you have Tour-caliber clubhead speed (over 115 mph) can you get away with an 8- or 9-degree model. Remember the hose: the proper amount of loft will help you hit the ball longer, and that will have a positive effect on the rest of your game. ■



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