

What Shaft is the Best for Me?

As many of you know, there are several internet forums where golfers with an interest in golf clubs can go to ask questions about any aspect about equipment. From time to time I scan a few of the forums to learn what the hot topics are and as time allows, I'll do a post here or there to share what I know about the subject in question – especially when the questioner is being steered in the wrong direction by incorrect information.

It's always been interesting to me to observe how many posts are submitted by golfers asking for feedback on this shaft or that shaft, and asking a question to the effect of "tell me how well you like this or that shaft." Invariably the questioner as well as those responding rarely say anything more as a form of qualification for the shaft feedback other than to state their handicap and how far they hit the ball. Sometimes the posters may offer their clubhead speed if they know it, but not that often.

And just as invariably, back come the suggestions. *"You need to try this or that shaft because I hit it really well."* Or, *"my buddy has the same swing speed as you and he likes this shaft a lot."* As I read these, I can't help but think,

“well there goes another \$100 to \$300 out of the golfer’s pocket and down the drain with about a 1 in 100 chance of ending up positive.” Seriously, I am convinced that a golfer searching on his own for the right shafts for his game has about the same chance of finding his perfect shaft as a blind squirrel does of finding an acorn.

Having taught more than 3000 clubmakers in more than 200 clubmaking and clubfitting training schools, I can tell you with certainty the one area of clubfitting that confuses and yes, scares more beginning clubmakers than any other is the task of SHAFT FITTING.

A long time ago it scared me too. And then, after a very long and continuous period of research and digging, I got to the point that I really feel we are on the right track for pointing golfers in the right direction to find the best shaft for their swing and even for their individual sense of feel.

Note I said *to find the best shaft for their swing*. Accurate shaft fitting is all about analyzing the movements in the golf swing that cause the shaft to bend, how much and when, during the swing. Clubhead speed plays a starting role only because to a small extent, clubhead speed is somewhat related to the force applied by the golfer to bend the shaft during the swing.

But more important are the actual swing characteristics that

cause a shaft to bend in different amounts and at different points in the swing. Chiefly I am talking about the transition force the golfer applies to start the downswing, then their downswing acceleration, and finally when the wrist-cock angle is unhinged (released) during the downswing.

Combined with the clubhead speed, these are the key swing characteristics that determine which shaft(s) will be the best fit for the golfer.

It is very common to encounter two golfers with the same clubhead speed whose best fit shaft can be completely different in both the overall stiffness (flex) and in how that stiffness is distributed over the length of the shaft (bend profile). Let's say two golfers have a driver clubhead speed of 90mph. Golfer A has a 3/4 length backswing with a very strong, forceful transition move to start the downswing, a very aggressive downswing and a late release of the wrist cock angle. Golfer B has a full backswing, a slight pause at the end of the backswing, a gradual acceleration of the club on the downswing, and releases the wrist cock about halfway through the downswing.

Even though the two have the same clubhead speed, Golfer A's more aggressive swing moves put more bending force on the shaft, keeps that bending force on the shaft longer through the downswing, and puts more bending force on the tip half of the shaft later in the downswing. Golfer B is

virtually the opposite for how much bending force is put on the shaft, and when this bending force is applied to the shaft.

Even though the two have the same clubhead speed, Golfer A needs to be playing with a substantially stiffer shaft that is heavier in weight and also designed with a stiffer tip section. Golfer B on the other hand needs a more flexible shaft with a softer tip section stiffness design that is lighter in weight.

The next time you want to know if you should be using the same shaft as some other golfer, think about your swing movements compared to his. Better yet, think about heading to see an experienced custom clubfitter who can analyze your swing and then compare that to shaft measurement information like my company provides for him to use to do the best possible job of shaft fitting.

But then there's the added element of fitting for the FEEL of the shaft.

Tom