

## The Kent Golfer

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### The Marriage Between Coaching And Clubfitting

In 1968, as a 17-year old assistant pro, I bought my first brand new set of clubs. I was 6 foot 2 inches tall and weighed not a lot over 10 stones. I had short arms for my height and had a long, loose, willowy swing. It was decided that I needed clubs 2 inches longer with lies more upright than standard which also meant that they needed stiff shafts so that they wouldn't be too whippy and uncontrollable.

My hero was Jack Nicklaus so I ordered a set of his Slazenger clubs and I can still recall the excitement the day they arrived and hitting my first shots with them. After all, these were the clubs which were going to help me dominate world golf. It was only many years later, in retrospect, that I realised that they ended up dominating me and negatively influencing the way I played.

Yes, they suited my build but they certainly didn't match my swing and I spent several years trying to control very heavy and unwieldy clubs which were actually controlling me. They made my swing even more willowy, uncoordinated and inconsistent.

Traditionally, that's what the golf industry did, fit clubs to your build and stance. Today, some of us have far more sophisticated systems that give us a complete picture of how a golfer hits the ball. This information, when combined with the complex array of shafts and heads now available, would give a similar 17-year old a far greater chance of playing with clubs adapted to his swing but, and it's a big but, do they take into account a golfer's evolution?

Let me explain. At 17 I had dreadful posture and bought clubs that suited that way of standing to the ball. This effectively locked me into that address position. I have the same build 40 years later (although the 10 stones are a thing of the past!) but use standard length clubs which are only slightly more upright than standard because my posture has evolved. Those original clubs just would never have suited my ideal golfing stance.

At Manston, all our Positive Impact Golf coaches work hand-in-hand with the clubfitter, Rob. He uses the most sophisticated Flightscope equipment which is based on radar and gives precise and complete feedback on how each player hits the ball whilst recording clubhead and ball speed as well as spin rates, launch angles and much more. So, he can easily tell any client exactly what clubs will suit their game but, and again it's a big but, he needs to know how their swing and stance is likely to evolve. If he doesn't take this into account the client's new clubs will lock him or her into that way of playing thus rendering any coaching ineffective.

Let's hear what Rob has to say about the subject:

*"There is a common misconception that custom club-fitting is reserved for the better players amongst us, but this cannot be further from the truth. Whatever level our golf happens to be, whether we are totally new to the sport or an accomplished player, we can all benefit greatly from having the correct set of clubs, not only in type but also in our set composition. When asking a player the reason for booking a fitting session with me, the word 'consistency' is always the first word mentioned. To play consistent golf you have to be a confident golfer and for this you need to know that the equipment you have is really designed to maximise your potential. By working closely with our Positive Impact coaches and analysing your club setup and composition we can ensure that a long term goal is achieved and not just a short term fix.*

*Let me give you a real life situation. John came to see me as a 20 handicap player who feels as though he should be playing better golf than he is. He felt that his clubs may be a part of the problem as he is struggling with consistency but was also aware that his technique may also be part of the problem. He was suffering from a total lack of confidence and when he stood over the ball his mind was so cluttered he couldn't play to his potential. On inspection of his clubs I saw that he was using mid cavity steel shafted irons.*

*After watching a few shots there certainly was a problem. His clubhead speed was 65 mph with a 6 iron (soft graphite shafts needed!) the ball flight was erratic and the lie angle needed to be much more upright as this was partly the reason for his weak slice. So the persistent use of these clubs over a period of time when they are clearly wrong means that it was no wonder John was*

*struggling to improve and tension was being introduced into his swing by trying so hard to compensate and make them work. Now, when I gave John a club that is suited to him we immediately saw an improvement albeit not as much as he was hoping for. The ball flight was better, more consistent and straighter but was this fulfilling his potential? Had this solved the problem? I could see that his posture was still very tense and that he still had an out to in swing path.*

*Although I could sell him a new set of irons and send him on his way knowing that I had helped him as much as I could, and yes he would play better golf, I felt that he would benefit greatly with a coaching session or two to remove the anxiety from his swing and un-clutter his mind, something that our Positive Impact Coaches are experts at achieving.*

*The changes that would arise from his new found freedom in swinging the golf club meant that potentially the clubs I sold him today may not be right in the long term so I suggested that after a couple of sessions with a coach he comes back to me and we reassess our findings.*

*Fast forward one month and John has booked another session with me having had two coaching sessions and immediately I can see the positive changes in his swing.*

*After the first shot it becomes apparent that we still have the right shaft and club head type but the lie angle has changed. Also with better posture, John's wrist to floor measurement has changed meaning that the club lengths need to be adjusted slightly. Now we can be sure that John will have the right clubs, swing and mental attitude to improve his golf beyond all recognition and by taking a little time and doing things the correct way the marriage of coaching plus club-fitting are the two pieces of the jigsaw needed to ensure a confident more enjoyable golfing experience."*

My summary:

Good coaching can help golfers to swing the club in a more relaxed and dynamic manner. If you have read my previous articles about the 6 basics as I see them, you will know how to release yourself from the debilitating effects of classic misconceptions. The right choice of clubs can undoubtedly help you

to produce your best golf without the interference of your equipment working against you. However, combine these two positives and you can really benefit from a large portion of golfing magic!

*Brian Sparks*