

WOODIES' WORKSHOP

SMART PRACTICE SERIES | VOL. 2

Attack or Lay Back? Breaking Down Tee Shot Decisions

Know your clubs. Trust the numbers. Pick the right shot before you tee it up.

FREE GUIDE

How to use this guide

This guide is a reference for understanding what each tee shot club actually does, why the driver is more often the right choice than you think, and how to build trust in your swing on the tee box.

The 3 rules of this guide

- There is no universally correct tee club. There's only the right one for the hole you're currently playing.
- The driver is not dangerous. Not knowing what your driver does, or your own tendencies with it, is the real danger.
- Practice builds knowledge. Knowledge builds confidence. Confidence builds better golfers.

What should I bring?

- Driver
- Fairway wood (3 or 5 wood)
- Hybrid and/or long iron
- Alignment sticks or a spare club
- This guide: printed or on your phone

Section 1: Know Your Clubs

DRIVER

Max distance

What it does:

The longest club in the bag. Built to hit the ball far, with a longer shaft, lowest loft, and designed to be struck on a slight upswing. For most mid-handicappers it carries 220-240 yards.

When to reach for it:

Wide, open holes where missing the fairway isn't catastrophic. Par 5s where extra distance is genuinely useful. Any tee where your miss won't find water, OB, or a forced lay-up. More often than you'd think.

FAIRWAY WOOD

Distance with a margin

What it does:

Typically 20-30 yards shorter than your driver, with slightly higher launch and more loft to help the ball up. Many golfers hit their 3-wood more consistently than their driver, but the dispersion is still wider than you'd expect.

When to reach for it:

Holes where position matters more than distance. Any hole where landing in a specific window: short of a bunker, before a dogleg, is more valuable than raw distance.

HYBRID

Versatile. Forgiving.

What it does:

The Swiss Army knife of the golf bag. Easier to hit than a long iron, with a lower and more penetrating flight than a fairway wood. Most hybrids carry 190-210 yards and land with less run on the ball.

When to reach for it:

Short par 4s where you want to control distance. Tight holes where the priority is simply in play. Wet days when the ball is stopping quickly and you need all the carry you can get.

LONG IRON

Control. Low flight.

What it does:

Low-lofted, low-launching, and demanding of a solid strike. They carry 180-200 yards but require better ball striking than a hybrid for the same distance. The upside is a lower, more piercing flight that holds its line in wind and can run out further once it lands.

When to reach for it:

Into a headwind when trajectory matters. Links-style holes where a low runner is useful. Only when you're striking the ball cleanly. A mishit long iron is a bogey waiting to happen.

Section 2: Why the Driver is Usually the Right Call

PROXIMITY TO THE HOLE IS KEY

The single biggest differentiator between a high-handicapper and a low-handicapper isn't driving accuracy. It's how close they get the ball to the hole on their approach shots. And approach shot distance is entirely determined by what you hit off the tee.

The numbers show that as your approach club gets shorter, your chances of hitting the green increase significantly, and your average proximity to the hole improves dramatically.

Average proximity to hole by handicap (feet)

Distance	Hdcp 0	Hdcp 5	Hdcp 10	Hdcp 15	Hdcp 20	Hdcp 25
75-125 yds	39 ft	42 ft	50 ft	60 ft	70 ft	75 ft
125-175 yds	45 ft	60 ft	70 ft	90 ft	110 ft	115 ft
175-225 yds	80 ft	110 ft	120 ft	166 ft	190 ft	235 ft

Representative averages based on aggregated amateur data from Shot Scope. Your numbers will vary.

THE DISPERSION MYTH

There's a widespread belief in amateur golf that shorter clubs go much straighter than a driver. It's not completely wrong, a 3-wood does produce a slightly tighter dispersion. But using a shorter club doesn't guarantee you'll keep the ball in the fairway.

Research shows that for all golfers, the dispersion difference between a driver and a fairway wood is modest. You're still spreading the ball left and right, just by a slightly smaller margin. And when you factor in that you're now hitting a longer club into the green, the net result is often a worse score, not a better one.

Fairway hit percentage: driver vs fairway wood off the tee

Handicap	Driver	Fairway wood
0	60%	62%
5	55%	57%
10	50%	53%
15	46%	48%
20	41%	43%
25	34%	33%

Representative averages based on aggregated amateur data from Shot Scope. Your numbers will vary.

Ask yourself one question on the tee: is there a specific reason NOT to hit driver?

WHEN SHOULD YOU LAY UP?

Lay up when...	Don't lay up just because...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hitting driver puts you directly into a penalty hazard - Your driver dispersion brings OB, water, or thick trees into play. A shorter club would keep you in safer ground. - You're badly out of form with the driver and need a ball in play to settle the nerves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The hole 'looks tight' - Hitting a shorter club 'feels safer' - You hit a bad driver on the previous hole - Someone in your group hit a great 3-wood

Section 3: Range Drills -- Building Tee Shot Knowledge

These aren't technique drills. They're knowledge drills. By the end of this session you'll know what your ball does off the tee and be able to use that information on the course.

BLOCK 1 -- THE FAIRWAY FINDER

5 balls

DRILL 1 -- TEE IT LOW, 90% SWING

5 balls

Tee the ball low, just above the ground. Use the line on the ball to aim at your start line, then play your natural shape. Swing at 90%. The goal is a ball in play, not a ball hit far. Once you've done it 5 times, note how your ball flies relative to your start line. That's your natural shape. Knowing it builds confidence for the next time you step onto the tee box.

WOODIE'S TIP

A lower tee height reduces the driver's ability to launch high and promotes a more controlled contact.

BLOCK 2 -- THE STOCK DRIVE

Understanding your baseline | 10 balls

DRILL 2 -- KNOW WHAT YOUR DRIVER DOES

10 balls

Tee the ball so roughly a quarter of it sits above the top of your clubface. Normal swing. Not a conscious effort shot, not a conservative punch. Just your swing. Hit 10 balls and watch where they go. Don't fix anything. Don't adjust. Just observe. Does it start right and draw back? Start left and fade? Go straight? This is your stock drive.

BLOCK 3 -- TEE IT HIGH, LET IT FLY

For the open holes | 5 balls

DRILL 3 -- MAX HEIGHT, FULL SWING

5 balls

Tee the ball high, roughly half of it above the clubface. This is a genuine effort shot. Swing at full speed without worrying about where it goes. On the course, this is for wide open holes with no serious danger. On the range, it teaches you what your driver does under real attack conditions: the trajectory, the shape, the extra yards. Compare to your stock drive.

WOODIE'S TIP

This is not the swing you use on every hole. But knowing what it produces means you can reach for it confidently when the course gives you the room to let the big dog eat.

Notes & Reflections

What does my stock drive do?

One tee shot decision I'm going to make more deliberately this weekend:

The focus now is your next round. You know what your clubs do. Trust the information. Make the decision, commit to it, and go enjoy yourself.

Keep an eye out for the next guides in this series:

- > Vol. 1 -- The 45-Minute Session That Gets You Ready for the Weekend
- > Vol. 2 -- Attack or Lay Back? Breaking Down Tee Shot Decisions
- Vol. 3 -- The Chipping Framework -- Simple Decisions That Get the Ball Close