

Chapter 1: The Two Inches That Cost You Forty Yards

The ball is sitting up on the third tee, a short par three, 145 yards, slight breeze off the left. You take the seven-iron. The swing feels fine. Then comes a sound like a spade going into wet soil, the club stops dead in the turf, and the ball flops forward eighty yards into the front bunker.

Nothing about your body caused that. Nothing about your age caused it either. The club simply arrived at the bottom of its arc about two inches too early. Two inches. That is the entire problem, and by the end of this book you will be able to move those two inches forward and keep them there.

I have hit that shot more times than I care to write down. My own worst stretch came in a Saturday fourball, three chunks in five holes, and my playing partner said nothing at all, which was somehow worse than a comment.

What a fat shot actually is, measured in inches

A fat shot, also called a chunk or a heavy shot, is a **low-point error**. The low point is the lowest place the clubhead reaches in the arc of your swing. Think of the clubhead travelling around you on a big circle. That circle has a bottom. Where that bottom sits, relative to the ball, decides everything about your contact.

When the low point falls behind the ball, the club digs turf first. The grass and soil slow the head down before it ever reaches the ball. Coaching sources are blunt about this: fat shots are a low-point problem, not a "keep your head down" problem, and the turf strips speed out of the club before impact, killing distance and control (RotarySwing, 2025-04; USGolfTV, 2020-02).

That is why the miss is so expensive. A thin shot at least keeps its speed. A fat shot loses the speed *and* the strike.

Your swing is a circle with a bottom. Fat shots are not a mystery of talent or age. They are the bottom of that circle arriving one or two inches too soon.

Two inches sounds like nothing. In a golf swing it is the difference between a seven-iron that carries onto the green and one that never reaches the fairway bunker's back lip.

Why the sound and the divot tell you everything

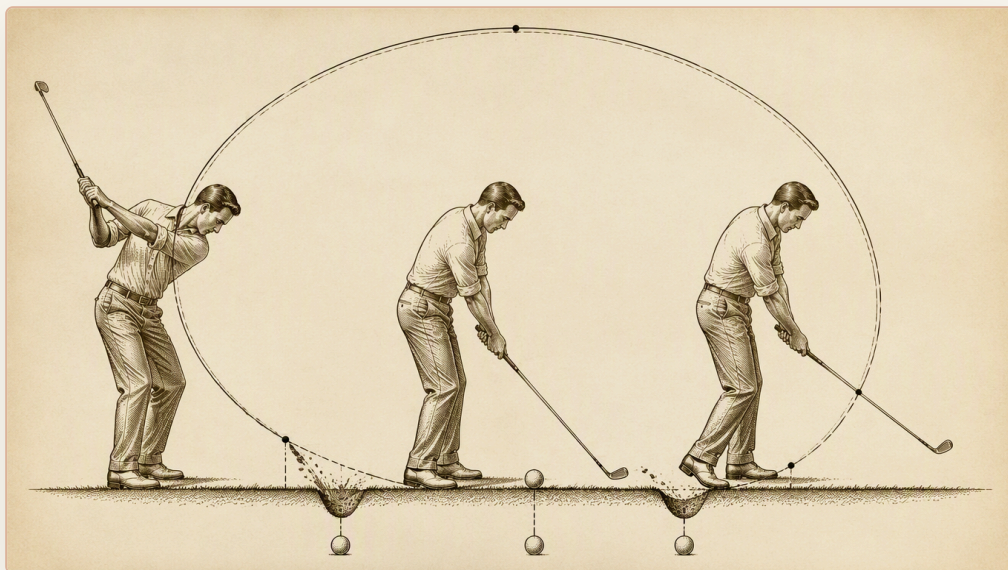
You do not need a launch monitor to diagnose this. You need your ears and your eyes, and both are already working.

The sound. Clean contact makes a short, high click, over almost before you register it. A fat shot makes a dull thud, lower and longer, with a small drag at the end. You have heard both. Start naming them out loud on the range: "click" or "thud". Naming a thing is the first step to changing it.

The divot. A proper iron divot starts *on the target side of the ball* and runs forward. If your divot begins behind where the ball was sitting, your low point was behind the ball, full stop. No opinion involved. The turf keeps an honest record. Chapter 3 turns that record into a full audit you can score.

Instructors converge on two mechanical causes of the chunk, and both push the low point backwards. The first is pressure and weight stuck on the trail side (the right side, for a right-handed player) through impact. The second is an early release, where the lead wrist adds extension and the club bottoms out too soon^{14, 8}. Chapters 6 and 7 handle those one at a time.

There is measurable support for the first cause. GOLFTEC's SwingTRU Motion Study identified hip position at impact as a key indicator of skill level: better golfers have their hips further toward the target at impact, which lines up with ball-first rather than ground-first contact²².



The scene on the third tee, and why it repeats

A typical case, and I suspect you will recognise most of it.

Case: A sixty-eight-year-old weekend player, twenty years in the same Saturday group, buys new game-improvement irons and takes four lessons. He still chunks roughly one iron shot per three holes, always worse on the short par threes, where he "tries to be neat" and decelerates. His drives are fine. His scores are not.

Why the par three? Because there is no room for a good miss. On a long hole a fat five-iron just leaves a longer approach. On a 145-yard tee shot, a fat seven-iron is a lost ball or a bunker, and the memory of it walks with you to the next tee.

Why does it repeat? Because the fix he was sold was equipment and the fix he needed was geometry. New irons do not move your low point. That is Chapter 17's argument, and the data behind it is stark.

Arccos data shows an 18-handicapper's average drive travels **217 yards**, some **42 yards** shorter than a scratch golfer's, a gap swing speed alone cannot explain. It points to strike quality⁸.

Forty-two yards. That is the number in this chapter's title, and it does not come from muscle. Shot Scope's analysis of the 2025 season, drawn from more than 74 million amateur shots, makes the same point from another direction: raw distance overlaps heavily across handicap levels, and the real separator between amateurs is consistency of strike (Golf Today, 2026-07; The First Call, 2026-02).

Average total driving distance, men



Average total driving distance, men

Note the middle bar against the bottom one. The over-70s average 190 yards off the tee, and the average man across all ages hits it 224.7⁴. The distance you lose to a fat strike is on the same scale as the distance you lose to two decades of ageing. You cannot get the decades back. You can get the strike back.

Coach Adam Young puts the priority plainly:

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"Working on skills such as ground contact, centeredness of strike and club face control will always improve results, regardless of their current swing technique."¹³

Ground contact comes first on his list. It comes first in this book too.

What this book will and will not ask of your body

Let me be direct about the deal.

This book will not ask you to gain flexibility you no longer have, to turn your shoulders ninety degrees, to swing harder, to hold a gym membership, or to rebuild your grip from scratch. There is no plan here that depends on being able to squat or to rotate a stiff lower back through a range it stopped enjoying in 2009.

This book will ask you for three things. Attention to where the bottom of your arc sits. Ten minutes of rehearsal on a carpet, four evenings a week (Chapter 12). And a twenty-minute range session with a structure instead of a bucket (Chapter 11).

Speed is not the lever we are pulling. Coaches teach a forward-pressure feel of roughly 90% of your weight on the lead side at impact, and a mid-iron impact with the shaft leaning forward about five to ten degrees, as the antidote to the flipped, heavy strike^{14, 8}. Neither of those requires youth. Both require knowing what you are aiming at.

One safety note, and I mean it. If you have a history of lower-back trouble, do not chase divots by driving down harder at the ground. Depth of divot is not the goal; *position* of divot is. Every drill in this book is designed to be done at half speed first, on grass or carpet, never off concrete or a thin mat over concrete, which is where wrists and elbows get hurt. Stop any drill that produces sharp pain rather than fatigue.

Try this before you read on

Next time you are on grass with a wedge, make five slow, half-length swings at a fallen leaf or a dandelion head. Do not hit a ball. Just look at where the grass is brushed. Mark the leaf's original spot in your mind, and note whether the brush mark starts before it or after it. That single observation is your starting point, and it costs nothing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Define the fat shot correctly: the bottom of your swing arc arrives behind the ball, usually by one to two inches, and turf steals the speed before impact.
- ▶ Judge every iron shot by two free instruments, the sound (sharp click versus dull thud) and the divot's starting point relative to the ball.
- ▶ Accept that the 42-yard gap between a scratch player and an 18-handicapper is largely strike quality, not swing speed⁸.
- ▶ Stop expecting new clubs to move your low point; equipment cannot change where your arc bottoms out.
- ▶ Commit to ten minutes of carpet rehearsal, four evenings a week, and one structured twenty-minute range session, at half speed to protect your back.

Here is the uncomfortable part. Almost every golfer who chunks the ball is *trying to hit the ball* at the bottom of the swing, and that intention is the very thing keeping the low point behind it. So where should the bottom of your arc actually be, in inches, for an iron off the turf?