

Chapter 1: The Lesson Eleven Years of Lessons Never Gave You

The first time I filmed myself hitting balls with the driver, I almost didn't watch the video back. My buddy Ray had set his phone on a range bucket behind me, more as a joke than anything, and when I finally sat down to look at it, I saw a man I didn't recognize. My weight was hanging back on my right foot at impact like it was afraid to move forward. I'd been playing this game for close to forty years, taken more lessons than I could count on both hands, and I was still swinging like I was scooping soup out of a bowl.

That night I couldn't stop thinking about it. Not because the swing looked bad — plenty of amateur swings look worse and still strike the ball clean. What bothered me was the pattern underneath it. The fat shot I'd hit on sixteen. The topped fairway wood on eleven that dribbled forty yards. The slice I'd been fighting off the tee since the Clinton administration. I had always treated these as three separate villains, three different swing thoughts, three different fixes chased across three different instructors. It never occurred to me that they might be cousins from the same family, all traceable to one habit I'd never been shown how to break.

Three Symptoms, One Cause

Here is the thing nobody sat me down and told me in eleven years of lessons: the slice, the fat shot, and the topped fairway wood are not three problems. They are three different symptoms of two underlying issues, and one of those issues shows up in all three.

A slice happens when the clubface is open relative to where the club is traveling at impact. Research from Trackman shows that for a driver, the clubface angle accounts for roughly 85% of where the ball starts, while the swing path accounts for only about 15%¹. Most golfers blame their swing path — they think they're swinging "out to in," cutting across the ball — but the face is doing most of the damage. That's a face problem.

The fat shot and the topped fairway wood are something else entirely. They both come from the same source: where the bottom of your swing arc actually happens. Instructors call this the **low point**. When your low point occurs too early — before the ball instead of after it — you either hit the ground first (fat) or catch the ball on the upswing with the leading edge (topped). Adam Young Golf, a respected instructional resource, explains that fat shots happen because the swing's low point lands before the ball, most often because a golfer's weight stays parked on the back foot right through impact instead of shifting forward². Independent research on fairway wood setup describes the identical culprit for topped shots: weight hanging back, the low point pushed behind the ball³.

Two different faults. One shared root for two of your three misses. And here's what almost nobody explains clearly on the lesson tee: even the slice often gets tangled up with the same weight-and-position habits that cause the other two, because a golfer who's afraid of the ground swings defensively in every direction at once.

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You don't have three swing flaws. You have one habit of avoiding the ball, wearing three different masks.

The Quiet Epidemic

If lessons and equipment were the answer, we'd all be better by now. We're not, and the numbers say so plainly.

The average recreational golfer still shoots between **90 and 92** on a par-72 course. Only about **25%** of golfers consistently break 90. Fewer than **5%** ever break 80^{4, 5}.

Think about what's changed since you first picked up a club. Drivers went from persimmon to titanium the size of a coffee can. Rangefinders became normal. Lessons got more scientific, with launch monitors and slow-motion video breaking every swing into forty checkpoints. And yet the scores haven't moved the way you'd expect. In 2025, the USGA reported the average handicap index across American golfers was 14.0 for men⁶. That number has stayed remarkably stubborn for decades, despite an industry built around promising it will drop.

I don't say this to depress you. I say it because it tells you something important: the problem was never a lack of information. It was the wrong information, or too much of it, aimed at the wrong target. Over 3.68 million golfers now carry an official USGA handicap and combined for a record 82 million rounds in 2025⁶. That's a staggering amount of practice, lessons, range time, and money spent chasing consistency that mostly never arrives. And it also tells us something about golfers just like you — men who've been playing for decades, who've bought the new driver, taken the lessons, and still walk off the course apologizing for the same shots they were apologizing for ten years ago.

The Idea Modern Lessons Skip

Here's what changed everything for me, and what this book is built around: **the bottom of your swing belongs in front of the ball, not underneath it.**

Say that out loud once. It sounds almost too simple to be the missing piece after eleven years of instruction, but simple is exactly why it works. Most lessons load you up with position after position — where your hands should be at the top, how your hips should turn, what your wrists should be doing at address. All of that matters eventually. But if the low point of your swing is in the wrong place, none of those positions save you. You can have a textbook backswing and still bottom out two inches behind the ball every single time.

Ball, then ground. Never ground, then ball. The low point of a good golf swing happens in front of the ball, not underneath it.

This single idea reframes everything you've struggled with. It's not that your grip is hopeless, or your hips don't turn enough, or you need a stiffer shaft. Those things can help, and we'll get to several of them — grip mechanics in Chapter 5, the hip bump in Chapter 7, right elbow position in Chapter 8. But they only matter because of how they affect where your club bottoms out. Fix the low point, and the fat shots and topped woods start disappearing together, because you were never fighting two problems. You were fighting one.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The slice, the fat shot, and the topped fairway wood aren't three separate flaws — they trace back to clubface control and, especially, where your swing's low point occurs.
- Amateur scores have barely improved in decades despite better equipment and more instruction, which means the issue was never information, it was the wrong target.
- The single idea to hold onto starting tonight: your swing should bottom out in front of the ball, not behind or underneath it.
- Every drill in this book — the dollar bill, the handkerchief, the hip bump — exists to help you feel that low point, not to hand you another position to memorize.
- Before your next range session, watch (or simply feel) where your divot starts relative to where the ball sat. That's your evidence, not your opinion.

I still have that video Ray took of me. I keep it not because I'm proud of it, but because it's the last swing I ever hit without knowing what was actually wrong. The next chapter is where that knowledge starts: the framework that explains every one of your bad shots, and why almost nobody on the lesson tee ever draws you the picture.