

The New Ball Game

Buying golf balls is no longer an off-the-rack proposition, as players enjoy the benefits of getting fitted **BY SCOTT KRAMER**

Golf ball fitting—the process of finding the best ball for your game—has been around for a few years. But it's coming more into the spotlight this year, as ball brands have been aggressively pushing the benefits to the average golfer. Playing the proper ball for your game can result in extra driving distance and more accurate approach shots.

While only Titleist and Bridgestone—not coincidentally two of the top three brands in ball sales—offer a live, in-person ball-fitting service to consumers, several others have interactive systems on their websites that'll do the job, provided you answer the questions honestly.

There are some proven advantages to getting fitted for golf balls. First, you'll find a ball that feels right to you and performs best for you where you need it most—more greenside spin, longer tee shots, softer feel, etc. Tiger Woods, for instance, put a harder-cover version of the Nike One Tour ball into play at last month's AT&T National in Philadelphia, resulting in increased distance.

Your current ball, unbeknownst to you, may be completely the opposite of what you need, or at best may only be half as good as it could be. By getting fitted, you could narrow your choices for a more suitable ball in a matter of minutes. And find your way to lower scores quickly thereafter.

How it Works

The biggest advantage of doing a ball fitting in person is that you'll get to see exactly how

the balls perform in full flight and compared to one another. In many cases, you'll also have professionals giving you exact ball and shot data to support their recommendation.

For example, Titleist's three mobile fitting vans are each armed with devices that measure swing and ball data. Each fitting session takes about 15 minutes. Visit www.titleist.com to see a list of their Golf Ball Education, Selection and Fitting days in the Met Area. The website also has a ball fitting feature where you can do some advance research.

Titleist's ball fitting is based on the premise that most scoring opportunities are created by approach shots to the greens. Miss the green, and you can add up to two extra strokes per hole, their research claims. Thus, find the ball that gets you the greenside spin needed to control pitches and chips, and then work your way back to the tee for distance.

One of Titleist's new balls for 2010, the NXT (\$34/dozen, titleist.com), offers more distance and accuracy than the NXT Extreme it replaced. It is Titleist's most durable ball and features a high-velocity, low-spin, solid core.

Since 2007, Bridgestone has conducted a traveling Ball Challenge aimed to help golfers choose a ball based on their driver swing characteristics. Why focus on the driver? It's the longest club and thus yields the highest club-head speed, affecting loft and spin more than



any other club. The driver is where Bridgestone feels that the proper ball can have the biggest impact on your game.

The Challenge's ball fittings have been conducted on more than 70,000 amateurs. In fact, Bridgestone's B330-RX ball was designed as a result of swing data collected from golfers through the Challenge. The company's goal was to develop a ball that offered tour-level spin around the greens, yet optimized distance off the tee for average swing speeds. They say that 80 percent of golfers going

through their Challenge discover they're playing the wrong type of ball.

The company, which also offers an online fitting option, recently started a "BFIT" online fitting chat between consumers and its technicians. Type in any question, anytime, and you'll receive real-time answers. One of the balls those technicians may steer you to is the **Tour B330-RX** (\$56/dozen, bridgestonegolf.com), which has a soft core and reformulated mantle that reduces excess spin, resulting in straighter shots. ■

It takes very little time to get fitted for the proper golf ball, but the results are long-lasting.

Five Others to Try

Srixon Soft Feel 2010

This new model outdistances its predecessor off the tee, with softer feel and more greenside spin. Its dimple pattern lowers drag and improves lift, so you won't balloon shots. (\$19.99/dozen, srixon.com)



Callaway Tour i(z)

This is touted as the longest Tour ball in the Callaway family. It has a refined dimple pattern on the urethane cover that reduces drag and pierces through windy conditions with a penetrating flight. (\$42.99/dozen, callawaygolf.com)



Nike ONE Vapor Speed

Ideal for average swing speeds, this ball has a newly reformulated core and optimized aerodynamics, which combine to increase ball speed and maximize distance. (\$40/dozen, nikegolf.com)



TaylorMade Penta TP

The Penta comes with five layers (core, inner mantle, middle mantle, outer mantle and cover) that each optimize performance in key shot categories for all skill levels. Tour pros use it, and so can you. (\$45.99/dozen, taylormadegolf.com)



Wilson Staff D:25

A low-compression, two-piece ball that comes off the driver with minimal spin to help lengthen carry distance. With higher-lofted clubs, it generates more spin to stop shots quickly on the greens. (\$29.99/dozen, wilsonstaff.com)

