

Chapter 1: Swinging Harder, Landing Shorter

You stand on the tee of a par four you have played a thousand times. You know the landing area. You used to carry the fairway bunker on the left without thinking about it. Today you tee it up, take a breath, and swing as hard as you have ever swung a golf club.

The ball starts left, hangs, then drifts right. It lands in the first cut, well short of the bunker you once flew. Then your partner steps up. He is your age, maybe a little older. He makes a swing that looks almost lazy, and his ball rolls past yours.

Nobody says anything. Nobody has to.

The tee shot that used to be your pride

For most of your golfing life, the driver was the club you trusted. Your chipping may have been shaky and your putting streaky. But off the tee, you were somebody. Partners watched your drives. You picked the tee box. You were usually the one hitting second into the green.

That identity does not disappear quietly. It slips away over a few seasons, one fade at a time. First the ball stops reaching the spots it used to reach. Then the fade gets bigger. Then you start aiming down the left edge just to keep it in play. Eventually you realize you are playing a different course than the one you learned. The par fours are longer. The par fives are three-shotters again.

I have watched this happen up close. In my own Saturday group, the longest hitter for years was a man who swung like he was trying to break the ball. When his drives started falling short, he swung harder. Then he swung harder still. His drives got shorter each summer, and his mood on the first tee got darker. The quietest swinger in our group now outdrives him most mornings.

If that story feels familiar, keep reading. What happened to him is more common than you think, and it has less to do with birthdays than he believed.

Why effort and distance stopped moving together

When you were younger, effort and distance moved together. Swing harder, ball goes farther. That link felt like a law of nature. So when the yards started to disappear, the natural response was to add effort. Many golfers past sixty do exactly that, and it does not work.

Look at what golfers on public forums report. On the GolfWRX forum, one player described hitting his hybrid as far as his driver, sometimes farther. The only difference was an easy swing and a low tee with the hybrid. Another player with a swing speed of 106 to 115 mph said he could not drive the ball past 200 yards. Replies pointed to where he struck the face and how he delivered the club, not to a lack of speed. A third golfer asked why he hit his driver farther with one hand than with two. The thread discussed how tension and over-control with both hands can choke off the club's release.

Three golfers, three strange results, one thread running through all of them: **more effort produced fewer yards.**

The measurements say the same thing. Off-center strikes lower ball speed because less energy passes from the clubface to the ball (TrackMan). The golfer who swings at 110 mph and strikes the heel can lose to a golfer who swings slower and finds the middle. Contact decides how much of your speed actually reaches the ball.

The Effort Trap: past a certain point, swinging harder changes the order and the contact of your swing, and both cost you more yards than the extra effort adds.

That is the principle behind this entire book. When you force the driver, your body tends to start the downswing from the wrong end, with the arms and shoulders instead of the hips. The club travels on a poorer path. It meets the ball away from the center of the face. The ball starts left and curves right. We will take that chain apart link by link in later chapters. For now, just notice the shape of it. You are not short of effort. You have too much of it, arriving in the wrong order.

The research backs up the idea of order. In an efficient swing, the pelvis starts the downswing, followed by the trunk, then the arms, then the club. Each segment reaches its top speed later and faster than the one before it (Titleist Performance Institute). A study comparing professionals and amateurs found amateurs had lower pelvic rotation speed at impact. The more of their measurements fell outside professional norms, the higher their handicaps tended to be¹³.



Being outdriven by a man older than you

Here is the part that stings. If distance were purely about age, the older man in your group would always be shortest. He often is not.

A typical case, shown for illustration only:

Case (illustrative): Two partners, both in their late sixties, play together every week. One swings with everything he has and fights a fade that loses him yards to the right. The other swings at what looks like three-quarter speed and finds the middle of the face. The smooth swinger is routinely longer. Their bodies are similar. What differs is sequence and contact.

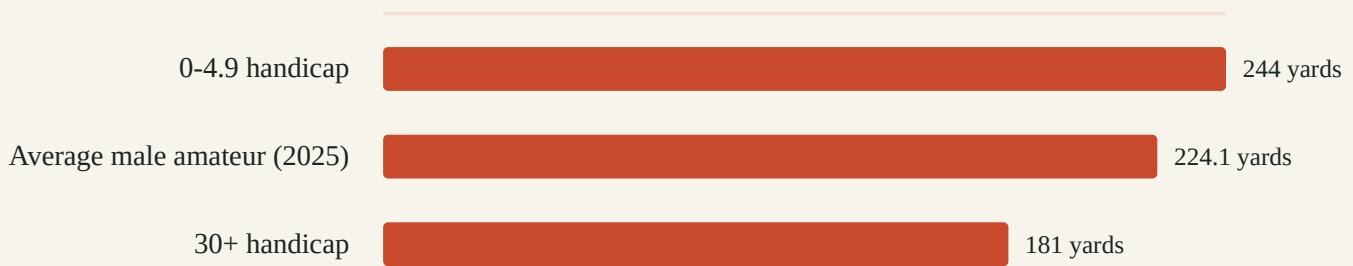
It helps to see how ordinary golfers actually perform. The 2026 Arccos Driving Distance Report drew on more than 5 million rounds and nearly 10 million driver tee shots played in 2025⁸. By that data, the average male amateur drove it 224.0 yards in 2018 and 224.1 yards in 2025¹⁵. Eight years of new drivers, new shafts and new balls, and the average barely moved.

0.1 yards: the change in the average male amateur's drive between 2018 and 2025, across millions of tracked shots¹⁵.

Equipment did not solve the distance problem for the average player. That is useful news, because it means the answer probably is not in the pro shop either.

The gap between skill levels is far larger than the gap between years. Arccos data shows men with a 0-4.9 handicap average 244 yards off the tee. Men with a handicap of 30 or more average 181 yards¹⁹. That is a 63-yard spread among ordinary amateurs.

Average male amateur driving distance by skill level (Arccos data)



Average male amateur driving distance by skill level (Arccos data)

Speed tells a similar story. TrackMan data puts the average male amateur, around a 14 handicap, at about 93.4 mph with the driver. Scratch golfers average about 110 mph (GOLF.com). At roughly 93 mph, typical total driver distance comes out around 214 yards (TrackMan Golf Japan blog). Keep those figures in mind. In Chapter 4 we will use them to set an honest target for your own game.

The man who outdrives you is not cheating time. He is probably doing a few simple things in the right order, and doing them without strain.

What this book will and will not ask of you

You deserve to know the terms before you commit your practice time.

This book will not ask you to:

- ▶ Rebuild the swing you have spent forty years grooving
- ▶ Buy a new driver, a new shaft or a launch monitor
- ▶ Find flexibility your body no longer has
- ▶ Swing harder, lift weights or chase youth

This book will ask you to:

- ▶ Change the *order* in which your body moves, starting from the ground up
- ▶ Accept that a smoother swing can send the ball farther
- ▶ Read your own ball flight, so the misses teach you something
- ▶ Spend a few minutes a day on simple drills, most of which need no range

Your swing still holds plenty of good pieces. Your grip may be sound. Your takeaway may be fine. You have a lifetime of feel for distance and lie. We are going to keep all of that. The target is one hidden fault in the timing of your downswing. When that changes, the slice and the thin shots and the fat shots start to fade together.

Before you turn the page, do one honest exercise.

- ✓ Write down your usual driving distance *as it is today*, not the number you remember from ten years ago.
- ✓ Note your most common miss: fade to the right, pull to the left, thin, or fat.
- ✓ On your next round, rate your effort on each drive from 1 to 10. Beside it, note where the ball finished.
- ✓ After the round, compare your 9s and 10s with your 6s and 7s. Which group went farther and straighter?

Most golfers who try this are surprised by what they find. The hardest swings rarely produce the best drives.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Stop adding effort to fix lost distance.** Past a point, a harder swing costs you contact and sequence, and both cost yards.
- ▶ **Judge your drives by contact first.** Off-center strikes lower ball speed, so a centered hit at modest speed can beat a mishit at high speed.
- ▶ **Take the equipment question off the table.** The average amateur drive moved just 0.1 yards between 2018 and 2025.
- ▶ **Run the effort-versus-result log on your next round.** Let your own numbers show you whether the Effort Trap has caught you.
- ▶ **Keep your swing and change its order.** Hips first, arms last is the thread running through every chapter ahead.

There is one more clue hiding in your game, and it is stranger than lost distance. How can the very same swing send one ball thin and dead right, then bury the next one in a fat trench behind the ball? Two opposite misses from one golfer look like chaos. As the next chapter shows, they may be the clearest signal you have.