



by Brian Wilkes
Brian's Custom Clubs

FROM THE Club FITTING BENCH

Fitting Different Iron Head Designs

Customers drop in with all brands of irons. Each brand has a slightly different look, but they all have the same fundamental design characteristics. Whether you are a PING person, or prefer TaylorMade or Nike or Adams stuff, etc., there are certain design characteristics common to all of them, depending on what you are trying to accomplish with your game.

In principle, iron heads can be broken into two categories – game improvement designs for the mid to high handicap player, and different designs for the better player. And what makes a better player? Well, typically, the better player will have a more consistent swing, will likely have a square to slightly inside-to-out swing plane, probably starts the downswing using the lower body, likely does not decelerate on the downswing, and will have enough clubhead speed to properly mobilize the ball. The better player will also likely have a more accomplished short game and be a better putter.

The mid to high handicapper on the other hand will likely have a more inconsistent swing, start the downswing with the shoulders or arms, have an outside to in swing plane, and may decelerate the clubhead during the downswing. These players may also have a less accomplished short game and putting ability.

Iron manufacturers accommodate these swing

characteristics in so-called "game improvement" iron heads, designed for the mid to high handicapper. These characteristics include large or "oversize" club faces, lots of steel near the sole of the head to lower the centre of gravity, and toe and heel weights to reduce twisting on off-centre strikes. The low centre of gravity in the head puts more mass under the ball, helping it into the air when struck. These irons are also often designed with a lot of "off-set", to enable the club's face a fraction of a second more time to square up before striking the ball.

All of these design features will result in an iron that, in theory, is easier to hit and will produce a half decent ball flight. When we fit a player into game improvement irons, we also make certain the playing length is correct, the shaft is the right flex, the swingweight is comfortable, and the grip size is correct. All these features, when properly put together for an individual golfer, will certainly help with lowering their score.

Iron head designs for the low handicapper are the reverse of the game improvement heads. Typically they have smaller faces and a higher centre of gravity for a lower, more penetrating ball flight. They typically do not feature significant toe and heel weight, or perimeter weighting, because the low handicapper can usually strike the ball more consistently in the centre of the clubface. They tend to be far less off-set. They are also often made from forged carbon steel rather than the investment cast stainless.

So the slight variations in design amongst the manufacturers mask these basic characteristics that are common for all iron heads. Brand loyalty is less important than getting the design characteristics right for your type of swing. Clearly, the mid to high handicapper will struggle with clubs meant for the better player. The low handicapper may not enjoy playing with the game improvement clubs because they are too forgiving; shots cannot be shaped by opening or closing the clubface as the ball is struck.

Additionally, neither of these designs will play properly if other characteristics of the clubs are not right, such as playing length, swingweight, shaft flex and grip size. We spend a lot of time making certain these are right for each customer. A proper fitting will tell the tale about which kind of iron head design best fits your play.

For mid-handicappers who are trying to improve and lower their scores, we also have in the studio what we consider to be "crossover" head designs. These are forged iron head with less off-set, but with game improvement characteristics. These are fantastic iron heads that will facilitate a mid-handicapper to improve their game. They also feel wonderful when striking the ball. But, they are not clubs meant to find you a lot of distance, like some strongly lofted stainless steel iron heads. Rather, they are meant to enable a solid feel ball strike.

We have demo clubs in the studio. Please come in and strike a ball with them.

For custom repairs or custom fitting, Brian Wilkes can be reached at brian@briansclubs.com, by telephone at 250-516-3392, or you can visit his website at www.briansclubs.com.