



Plan of Attack

Padraig Harrington tells Jeremy Ellwood how his club line-up has evolved, why all golfers should spend time pinpointing any distance gaps in their sets, and why, for him, 64° lob wedges are a complete no-no

On the hybrid v long iron debate...

More and more players on tour are replacing 3-irons with hybrids and some don't carry a 4-iron. Most people would think the guys carrying the long irons would be the better iron players, but it doesn't work that way. If you did a survey with the guys who don't carry a 3-iron or don't carry a 4-iron, I'll bet they hit it closest on the 220+ yard par 3s.

On first switching to a hybrid...

When I started carrying a hybrid my caddie said 'oh right, you're bringing a 9-wood with you.' And I said, 'if he calls 9-wood at any stage on the course and that's picked up on TV, he's getting the sack! This is my 3-iron. It might be

a hybrid, but we're calling it a 3-iron for the moment.' Joking apart, I'll use whatever's best for me because that's what's going to help me win tournaments. There is a stigma in golf, but I'd say it's gone a bit the other way. If you see a guy with a 1- or 2-iron now, you're actually looking at him and thinking, 'he hasn't got any self-confidence', whereas years ago it was seen as a confidence thing to carry a 1-iron. If you've got a 1-iron in the bag instead of a 5-wood or hybrid, you're not giving yourself the best chance on those shots out of the rough, or high shots into a lot of the par 5s we play. The stronger character – the guy who doesn't care what anybody else thinks about him – is the guy using the hybrids now.

On hybrid versatility...

There's a certain level of rough on tour that you might struggle to hit a 5-iron out of, and certainly wouldn't want to hit a 4-iron. When I can't hit anything else I'll often go up to the hybrid knowing it will come out a lot easier than a 4 or 5-iron and I can make a lot better contact. If I'm in enough rough that I'm struggling to reach the green any other way, I don't mind taking a bit off and manufacturing a shot. If I carried normal 5-, 4- and 3-irons, I wouldn't be able to reach the green full-stop.

On high-lofted lob wedges...

I used a 64° wedge at last year's Masters, but when I played on the Monday after, I gave it to >>

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MAJOR LESSON

Golf Monthly associate editor Jeremy Ellwood reaped instant dividends from a five-minute wedge session with the triple Major-winner

Warming up, I was reassured when my first effort nestled close to the flag. Call it over-confidence, I then hit the next one very fat with my ball covering half the desired distance. An eerie hush descended as the man himself walked in. "Let's see you hit a few," he said and with growing trepidation I stepped forward to try and propel the ball 75 yards into the breeze. First try, pin high, 12ft right – a good result. Second effort, all over the stick, 12ft long. I breathed a sigh of relief, but there was no pulling the wool over Padraig's eyes. "I know those have finished quite nicely, but they weren't the best of strikes, were they?" he says. He's right. The results may have been good, but the contact had been decidedly iffy – not thin, not fat, just not quite right. Step up Padraig the teacher...

“ I wouldn't ever suggest that you do need to pivot in the golf swing. But when it comes to shorter shots it's not about power, and when it comes to a non-power shot like a wedge you really don't want too much lateral movement backwards in your golf swing. You need to stay more still and a little more flat-footed. You should work your feet in a long shot, but you shouldn't work them so much in a short shot. For me, you had a bit of a sway back and were then hanging back, whereas you've really got to feel like you're a little bit on your left side when you make a backswing with a wedge. ”

After a few remedial practice swings, it's time to go live. To my great surprise and Padraig's obvious delight ("If I wasn't a professional golfer I'd love to be a coach of some sort..."), the first ball not only ends up inside my earlier efforts, but more importantly feels like a proper shot. Instant success. I've somehow been able to listen, understand, and convert Padraig's words into actions first time. Do you think he's booked up this year?



Padraig demonstrates the movement he's after



The Open champ keeps an eye on his pupil's wedge-play

one of the amateurs I was playing with before turning to my caddie and saying, 'if you ever see that club in my hands again, hit me with it!' It's too specialised a club and it takes too long to learn how to use it. Although I'd had it in the bag for a month up to that, I still hit as many bad shots as good shots. I'd been carrying 54°, 58° and 64° wedges. The 64° was too much loft, but my 58° was probably too little, so I went to a 60°. There isn't a shot I could hit with that 64° wedge that I can't play with my 60°. I then went to 55° in my sand wedge (a 54° head bent to 55°), weakened my wedge to 50° and spread the lofts out a little more from 9-iron to 4-iron. So essentially I've gone back more towards the wedge lofts of 10 years ago.

On wedge distances...

The gap on a full swing between my two most lofted wedges is 20 yards – 85 up to 105, then up to 125 with my pitching wedge. In between I'd go down to three-quarter or half swings

and then down the shaft a bit and hit it easy. So I can actually step it down five yards at a time. A normal sand wedge goes 105 yards; a smooth one goes 100; a three-quarter one goes 95; a smooth three-quarter one goes 90; a half one goes 85; a smooth half one goes 80. I control it by swing length and when I say smooth, I go down the shaft a bit. I then work to those yardages – I don't try and hit it 82 or 82.5 yards. Those are interesting yardages because I can hit a full lob wedge 85 or I can hit a smooth one 80. But I can also hit a half sand wedge 85 and a smooth one 80. I'd determine where the wind is, how firm the green is and how much I wanted the ball to spin before deciding which shot and club to play.

On modern wedge grooves...

When I was growing up I chipped the ball like I was throwing it out of my hand. That's how I envisaged every chip – like a soft lob. And the way I'd stop the ball was by trying to get it to come down

dead. With modern grooves, I've become a much more aggressive chipper – I fire the ball in hard at the pin. You've got to be brave to do it because you've got to assume it's going to spin. Every time I tee it up at a big tournament, I go with fresh grooves in my Twg wedges – I'd say they're as close to the edge as possible. At every major tournament I have them checked just to make sure they're conforming. Because of my experience, I know where they stand and can say, 'that one they're going to think about, that one they're going to pass.' The only time they fail is when we've been tinkering – a couple failed because I kept saying, 'that one's passed; let's make the grooves even sharper.' Now we've taken it back to 95% or something like that. But I've only got another year with my current grooves anyway.

On pinpointing distance gaps...

Get a nice stacking in your wedges, especially if you've bought a set that only goes to pitching wedge and then bought

separate sand and lob wedges. There might be an 8-10° gap there you're never going to bridge – you're looking at 25-30 yards. If there is anything your readers should take out of this it is: get to know your clubs and how they perform in different conditions. Then they can start putting extra clubs in when they realise, 'just what am I meant to do when I'm between a wedge and sand wedge downwind. I know I can't hit my sand wedge, but if I hit my wedge it's going to land the right distance then release too much. I've got to have an in-between club...' To be honest you're going to have to spend a bit of time working it out. There's no substitute for standing there on a nice day hitting normal pitching wedges then normal sand and lob wedges, seeing the actual differences and really figuring things out. There comes a point where there will be a gap, and Wilson's new Twg wedges are here to fill those gaps – just as the FyBrids are at the other end of the set.

CLOSING THE GAP

Over the past couple of years Wilson Staff has devoted considerable time to plugging distance gaps at both ends of the bag

Last year, to address the confusion caused by three different club types for similar distances at the long end of the set (irons, hybrids and woods), Wilson Staff introduced its FyBrid range to simplify things and close potential distance gaps.

Now it has turned its attention to the other end of the set in its efforts to prevent golfers snookering themselves by not having the right club to propel the ball the desired distance. After all, most of us struggle to manufacture or force shots on demand.

The loft gulf between sand and pitching wedges has grown over the years, leaving many golfers with awkward gaps of as much as 30 yards. So the new Wilson Staff Twg wedges, which Harrington liked so



Getting the full lowdown on DynaFit

much he put straight in the bag just before The Open, are available in 2° increments from 48° up to 60°, giving every golfer the chance to find a perfect, gap-free line-up. They feature aggressive tour-milled U-grooves, and from 52° to 60° retain a blade-style head. The 48° and 50° models incorporate a shallow cavity for added forgiveness. They're available in two anti-glare finishes – satin (£74.99) and black PVD (£84.99).

Beyond that, Wilson Staff has introduced a comprehensive fitting programme under the DynaFit banner to pin down precisely the right 14 clubs to help you get the most out of your game – whether that's finding the best iron model in a line-up ranging from the bladed FG59 to the deep-cavity Dig, or deciding if you'd be wiser to load up with extra long clubs or more wedges in the quest to bridge distance gaps. Wilson retailers will have the system in early 2009.

For further details about the Twg wedges and DynaFit system log on to www.wilsonstaff.com.