



Fit for a president

By Jim Burnish

I had never been that close before to an American president.

To be more accurate, I had never been that close before to an American president's golf club.

I was in the early stages of a custom club fitting session at The Complete Golfer in White Plains, New York on an early July Saturday. My then current clubs were being analyzed when one of my fitter's colleagues interrupted us. Evoking a little-known amendment to the Constitution pertaining to executive golf privilege, my 5-iron was supplanted on the shaft analyzer by the driver of William Jefferson Clinton. Although it wasn't divulged to me why his club was in the shop, I silently wondered if our 42nd president had sent in his driver for pulling too far to the left or, even worse, leaking dangerously right.

But all kidding and politics aside, as the engraved club posed for a photo opportunity, then went on its way, the incident reaffirmed my belief that I was in one of the country's top custom club fitting centers. I soon discovered that other notables including the PGA Tour's Mark Brooks and Donald Trump use the same facilities.

The Complete Golfer caught my attention when I had learned that it was the only East Coast affiliate of the highly regarded Max Out Golf Labs from California.

"They (Max Out) have the same business philosophy that we do," says Complete Golfer president John Ioris. "Our focus is on the customer, not on the manufacturers. When you come into our facility, you won't see posters on the wall promoting any of the manufacturers. We've done that deliberately."

The Complete Golfer began in 1981 as what would now be considered a traditional golf retail business. Back then, however, it was the only off-course golf retailer in Westchester County. Minor club repairs gradually evolved into more advanced repairs and club fitting for many of the golf courses in the New York City area that are still an integral portion of the business.

Things took a quantum leap forward after Ioris flew West to check out the Max Out Golf Lab operations in 2002. "It was the best golf technology I had ever seen," Ioris recalls. By the following year, the addition of Max Out had transformed The Complete Golfer into a high tech fitting center.

"It's incredible technology," Ioris says. "It has allowed us to hone in on fitting. We can do as good a fitting as anyone."

And what technology it is! Expect to spend anywhere from three to four-and-a-half hours at a fitting session. After filling out forms to self-describe your game and clubs, your sticks will be computer analyzed for shaft length, frequency, swing weight and bend profile. Here you will find out if your shafts are really the flex you think they are or, perhaps, why you always go left with your eight iron while your seven tends to produce balloons to the right. You will also hear the first of many references to the "PUREing" of the shaft. Developed by Strategic Shaft Technologies (SST), the PURE (Plane of Uniform Repeatability) process identifies irregularities inherent in the straightness, roundness and stiffness found in all mass-produced golf clubs. Without requiring an MIT engineering degree, suffice it to say the process finds the best plane in which the shaft is the most stable during the swing and at impact.

"Club manufacturers can't always achieve optimal shaft stability at a reasonable price," explains Ioris, whose facility is one of only two SST PURE licensees in the Northeast. "By using that system, we can take the variables out of the golf shaft. The result is improved accuracy and increased distance." Opting to PURE shafts can be an expensive proposition, but for the serious golfer, it can be worth the confidence in knowing that the clubs in the bag are as scientifically stable as can be created.

The next step in the fitting process is the use of another unique bit of technology referred to as Shaft Max, which involves wearing a wristband connected by a cable to a driver shaft. After hitting several balls, a graph printout is generated. Ioris says it shows "at what point, pace and degree you load your shaft. We at Max Out are the only one who has it." That information is used to determine the appropriate shaft characteristics that fit each individual swing and to uncover any power leaks in your swing.

If you are looking for new clubs, the fitting process will next move into the really fun stage. Using Launch Max, the launch monitor with a high-speed camera, you'll be able to determine the best club head/shaft/ball combination for your game. The computer prints out all sorts of data: ball speed, spin rate, launch angle, carry, total yardage, deviation from center and side spin. "It's the guts of the system,"

Ioris says of Launch Max. "Hitting range balls, you'll learn nothing. You're not going to hit new Pro V1s at the range. Here, we can simulate game conditions with tremendous accuracy."

So, will the Nike Slingshot mated with a Mitsubishi regular flex and Callaway HX Tour ball turn you into the next club champion? Perhaps the Cleveland Hi Bore 10.5 degree driver head, a Grafalloy ProLaunch Blue Stiff shaft and a Pro V1 will get you the extra 10 yards off the tee you've been craving. The combinations seem endless, and as long as you have the stamina, you'll feel like a kid in a candy store.

Just when you think it can't get any more high tech, you'll say hello to the SAM PuttLab. Short for Science & Motion, SAM churns out fascinating data to help you on the greens. Recording face angle at address and at impact, the path your putter takes, the spot of impact, the rise angle and shaft angle at impact, clubhead rotation, SAM brings the world of putting to a whole other dimension. Many who go through the putter fitting, as Ioris notes, find out that there is a great divide between the perception and reality of something as seemingly simple at properly aiming the putter.

Despite all the high end gadgets, there's an important human side to all fittings at The Complete Golfer. "It's critical that we know the customer's expectations and they know their limitations," Ioris emphasizes. "Of all those who come in for a fitting, only 5 to 10 percent have strictly club issues while 90 to 95 percent have swing flaws that need to be addressed. We certainly can make some dramatic corrections to help someone's game. But we would be just as happy to have that person take a lesson with their teaching pro and then come back to us."

Who could argue with that? Certainly no one who wants to improve their game, including Bill Clinton.

By the time my fourth drive had cleared the back fence at the Easthampton Driving Range, I was a believer.

Abeliever that the two-hour journey (one way) and the four-hour custom club fitting at The Complete Golfer in White Plains, New York was going to pay off. The facility is the only East Coast affiliate for the world-renowned MaxOut Golf Labs of California.

My fitter on that day in early July was
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PRESIDENTIAL FIT *Continued from page 5.*

John Towill, an affable Englishman who has been in the States for well over a decade. His first order of business was to check out the Cleveland TA-4s that I had been playing for about 10 years and the Cleveland woods that I had for the past few seasons.

A few minutes on a computerized shaft analyzer, Towill was already learning things about my game without yet having seen my swing.

„I see you play Army golf,% he said in a disarming way that only comes from a London accent. „Your Cleveland Launcher 400,s toe wants to turn over at impact, the three wood (Cleveland Quad Pro) wants to go heel first and your five wood (Cleveland Launcher), although lighter than most, is very stable.%

That led us into an interesting discussion about the shaft instability inherent in many mass-produced brand name clubs. Most of my irons had a bias to shut to the left. The Complete Golfer,s arsenal against bogies includes a license from Strategic Shaft Technologies, which developed a system which locates the most stable position of any shaft. That, in turn, produces increased distance, more accuracy and a softer feel. Then there was the issue of shaft firmness and how much those terms vary by manufacturer. We even got into the benefits of frequency matching a set of clubs. To golf junkies, it,s pretty engaging stuff.

As we continued, Towill pointed out reasons why buying „off the rack% may not help your game. In my instance, all my clubs were too long, from a quarter-inch on my irons to a whooping inch-and-a-half on my putter. The swing weights in my TA-4s were as varied as my scores on a Saturday afternoon, some off by two weight levels. He also suggested that the gap wedge should be lengthen to match the pitching wedge and the sand wedge should be shortened to more closely partner with the lob wedge.

Acontraption called ShaftMax measured how well I load my swing. It indicated that I was a bit „handsy% at take away, but that I soon caught up and had a pretty evenly paced swing with little power lose. The resulting printout also told my fitter what I was due to move up to a firmer shaft flex. Complete Golfer President John Ioris likens this part of the fitting as getting you in „the right church.%

Now it was time to find the right pew with the LaunchMax launch monitor. Even with my Launcher 400 at 9.5 degrees, I was averaging an 18.5 launch angle with a spin rate of well over 2900 rpm, side spin of nearly 1400 rpm and total distance of about 220 yards. After trying different

combinations with club heads and different shafts, we locked in a two possibilities. Both the TaylorMade R7 Quad, 10.5 degrees with an Accra SC65 M4 weight and the Cleveland 460 Comp, 9.5 degrees with the same Accra shaft brought my launch angle down to 15.8, lowered spin to 2368 rpm, side spin was dramatically reduced to 324 rpm and total distance climbed to over 250 yards. Using the same procedure with six-irons, I was able to gain a staggering 15 yards with more accuracy with either the Cleveland CG 4s or the Ping G2s.

Acritical component to the fitting is the proper ball. Towill recommended that I continue to stay with the Tileist Pro V1, but added that if I was looking for less spin, the Pro V1x or the Callaway HX would be good choices based on my particular swing characteristics.

An interesting surprise occurred at the lie board. Hitting three of my TA4s, it was determined that I should adjust my lie angle to 2-degrees upright. Say what? I,m not a tall guy by any stretch of the imagination. If fact, I was expecting a recommendation in the other direction. The profile of flatter lie for shorter players, more upright for taller folks "fit about 70 percent of golfers," according to Ioris.

The final segment was a putter fitting. This computer, called the SAM PuttLab, showed that I held my Odyssey White Hot #4 open by 2.1 degrees at address and that it was still open by 1.3 degrees at impact. Perhaps to compensate, the putter's club head continued to rotate to an end-of-a-stroke position of 22 degrees shut. SAM also told me that I was rising the putter head up 1.8 degrees while delofting the shaft angle by half a degree. No wonder I can,t break 80! To the positive, rhythm and timing of the putting stroke were good. Towill suggested that I keep my putter, shorten the shaft length from the standard 35 inches down to 33.5 inches, add weight at the grip for better balance, and look into a teaching device to improve my patch.

Performance evaluations at The Complete Golfer range from \$50 for ball or putter fittings to \$295 for a complete program that includes irons, wedges, fairway woods and drivers. PGA instruction, custom-fitted clubs (with an unconditional satisfaction guarantee) and a wide range of repair services are also available.

As for me, I stayed a Cleveland man, going with the Comp driver, replacing my 3-iron with a Halo 19 degree hybrid, and choosing the CG 4s. My only deviation was a Callaway X three wood. Now it's off to find a new world with lower scores.

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