CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1: The Thirty Yards Nobody Mentions

The first tee, in my experience, is where the trouble shows up. Your partner's drive has already settled in the fairway. Yours climbs, hangs for a moment, and drops like it ran out of breath. Then you walk, and you pass his ball on the way to yours.

Nobody says anything. That silence is the worst part.

The silent walk past your ball and why it stings more than any comment

A joke you can answer. A needle from a friend you can return. When your group simply walks past your drive to reach theirs, there is nothing to answer. The course has made the comment for them.

In a GolfWRX instruction forum, a 64-year-old golfer described what many of you are living. His clubhead speed had been slipping for eight to ten years. Drives that once travelled 285 to 295 yards now came up about 30 yards shorter. Other members answered without surprise: senior players, they said, typically lose 30 to 40 yards off the tee over time (GolfWRX Forums, Instruction & Academy).

> **Case:** A 64-year-old member of the GolfWRX forums lost about 30 yards off drives that once went 285–295 yards. The loss came gradually over eight to ten years. He noticed it only after it had added up (GolfWRX Forums).

Notice the word *gradually*. The loss does not arrive on one bad morning. It comes a few feet a season, so you never feel a clear moment to act. One day you are pulling a 5-wood where you used to hit a 7-iron, and you cannot say when it changed.

I remember the round when it hit me. It was a Tuesday game with the same three men I had played with for years. I made my best swing of the day on the 7th, and walked past two of their balls to reach mine. I didn't say a word about it in the car. I thought about it for a week.

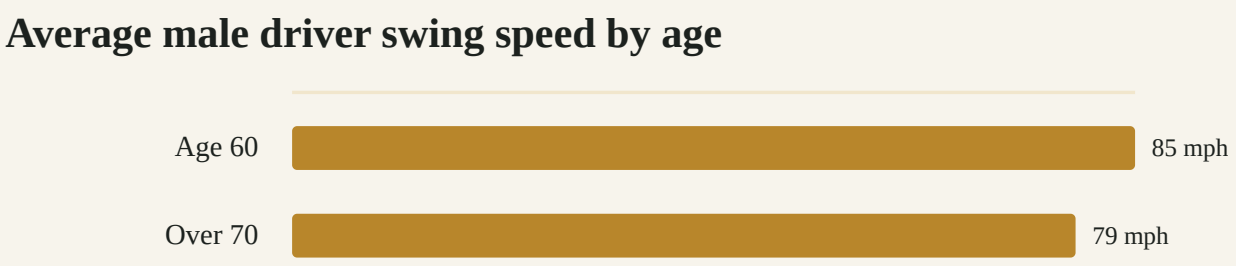
If that walk is familiar, this book was written for you.

What is really shrinking: carry, not your ability to play

Here is what the lost yards are not: they are not proof that you have forgotten how to play. You still read greens and still know which side of the fairway to miss. You still manage a round better than most forty-year-olds. Your judgement did not shrink.

What shrank is **carry**, the distance your ball flies through the air before it first touches the ground. Carry is mostly physics. It depends on how fast the ball leaves the face, how high it launches, and how much it spins.

Some of the speed feeding that physics does decline with age, and the numbers are honest about it. Benchmark data puts average male driver swing speed at about 80–90 mph for men in their 60s. The decline also accelerates after 60. The average drops from about 85 mph at 60 to about 79 mph for golfers over 70 (HackMotion; MyGolfSwing, 2026).



Average male driver swing speed by age

Six miles an hour sounds small, and it isn't nothing. But speed is only one ingredient in carry. The other two, launch and spin, get decided in a fraction of a second at impact. And almost nobody talks to senior golfers about them.

Launch-optimisation guides say that for driver speeds below about 85 mph, the ball needs a higher launch of roughly 13 to 16 degrees and spin of roughly 2,600 to 3,000 rpm (UpYourClub; GolfLens; MyGolfSpy). Their reason is simple: a slower-swinging player needs more lift to get the most carry.

Now think about what most of us do when the ball comes up short. We swing harder, grip tighter and hit down on it. That makes the ball launch *lower*, and a harder, steeper hit usually adds spin. The ball balloons, then falls. We try to fix the smaller problem by making the bigger one worse.

This leads to the one idea this book is built around. I call it **the Impact Dividend**.

One community thread made the same point from another angle. A senior golfer asked about swing speed and smash factor. The discussion turned to centered contact as the way to get distance back without adding speed (GolfWRX Forums, Classic Golf and Golfers). Smash factor is just ball speed divided by clubhead speed. It is a report card on how well you found the middle of the face.

Why this book starts with the driver and your first tee shot

You might ask why I don't start with putting, where strokes are easier to count. We will get to the short game later. That is where many of the strokes hide, and Chapter 22 shows you how many.

But the driver is where the dread lives.

The first tee is the only shot of the day that everyone watches. It sets the mood of the round. If you reach for a 3-wood there because you're afraid of the driver, you have lost something before you've hit a ball. And if your drive finishes forty yards behind, every approach after it is longer, harder and more tiring.

The driver is also where the Impact Dividend pays the most. It has the least loft in your bag. So it is the club most sensitive to launch angle, spin and where you strike the face. A small change in setup can move a driver's carry more than the same change would move a 7-iron.

Before we go on, try this one-question test. Answer it honestly, in writing if you can.

> *When I stand on the first tee with the driver, what is the first thought in my head?*

If the answer is "don't embarrass yourself" or "hit it hard," you have found the reflex we will take apart in Chapter 11. Keep the answer. You will compare it with a very different one by the end of this book.

The promise: more yards from an easier swing, not a harder one

I want to be precise about what I am promising, because you have heard enough promises.

Speed can still be improved later in life, and the research says so. In a randomised trial of 18 older male golfers averaging 70.7 years old, an eight-week functional training programme raised clubhead speed from 79.1 to 83.0 mph. The programme was three 90-minute sessions a week (Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 2007-02-01). A 2026 meta-analysis pooled 33 studies with 798 participants. It found that physical training significantly improved clubhead speed, ball speed, carry and total distance[26].

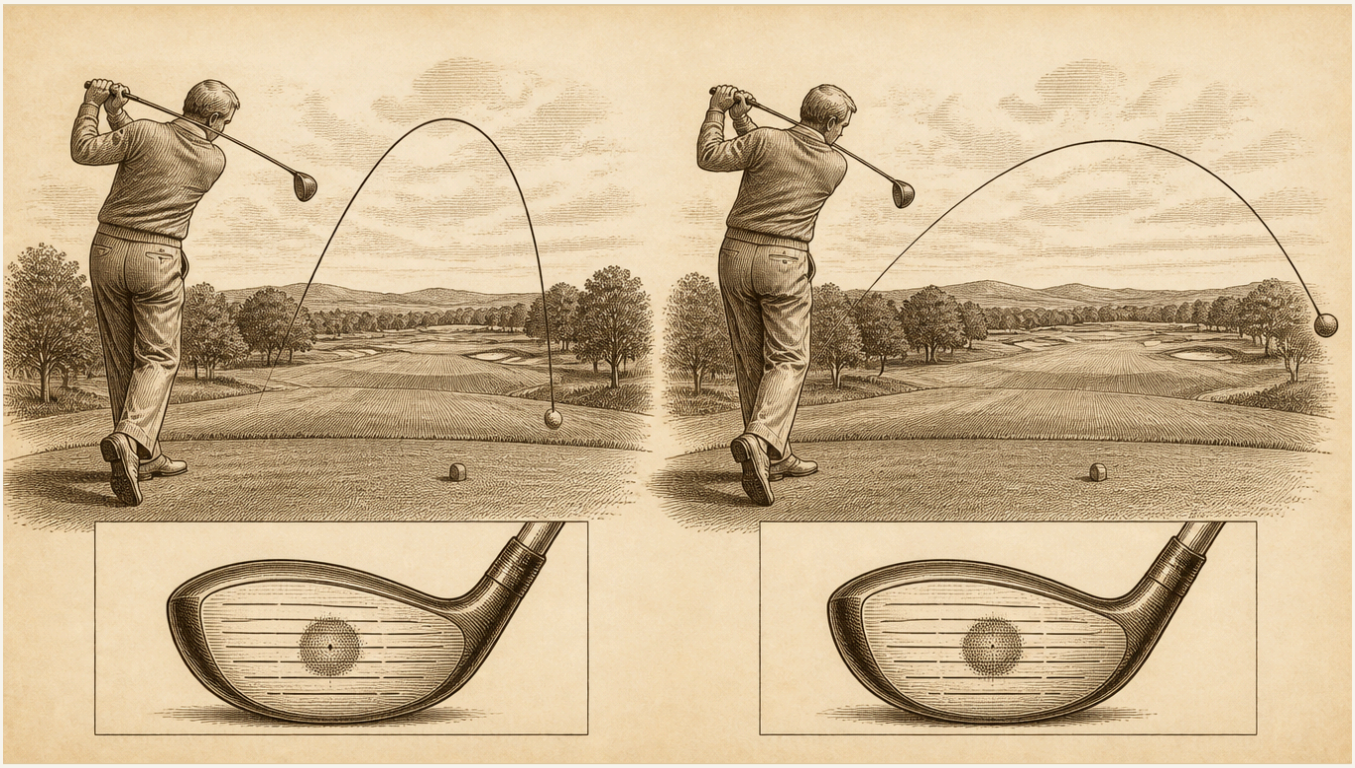
That is real, and Chapter 5 shows you how to use it without living in a gym. But look at the cost. Nearly four miles an hour took eight weeks of dedicated work. If that's what speed costs, the cheaper yards come first: yards you already own and are leaving on the face of your driver.

Bernhard Langer, still winning on the Champions Tour past sixty, put the mindset this way:

> "If I can just find one percent somewhere, that's huge." — Bernhard Langer (Sanford Health News)

That is the spirit of this book. We will hunt for many small percentages instead of one heroic swing. Better setup, a looser grip, a smoother tempo, the right tee height and a centered strike each add a little. Together they can add up to a lot.

Here is what I will *not* ask of you: to swing harder, to turn like you did at fifty, or to rebuild your swing from scratch. The changes ahead make the swing easier on your body, not more demanding.



Your first assignment: find your real number

You can't recover yards you haven't measured. On your next round, do this:

- ✓ On three par-4s or par-5s, note where your drive **first lands** if you can see it, or where it stops.
- ✓ Pace the distance back to the tee box. One long stride is roughly a yard for most men.
- ✓ Write down all three numbers and your average. Do not round up.
- ✓ Note which drives felt "easy" and which felt "all-out."

A word of caution: pacing is easy walking. Still, do it on flat ground, keep to the edge of the fairway, and watch for groups behind you before stepping out. Don't try an all-out swing just to see how far you can go. If a hard swing brings any twinge in your lower back, stop there. Chapter 25 covers why that warning matters so much.

Most men who do this find two surprises. Their real carry is shorter than they believed. And their "easy" drives are often no shorter than their hard ones.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Measure before you fix.** Pace your drives over one round and write down your true average distance.
- **Separate carry from ability.** Your course management and judgement are intact. The loss is mostly flight.
- **Stop feeding the short drive with effort.** Harder swings tend to lower launch and raise spin, the opposite of what a slower swing needs.
- **Aim for the carry window.** Below about 85 mph, guides point to roughly 13–16° launch and 2,600–3,000 rpm spin (MyGolfSpy).
- **Collect the Impact Dividend first.** Centered contact and better launch are the cheapest yards available to you.

Still, one question remains, and it deserves an answer before we fix anything. If the loss is so common that a whole forum shrugs at 30 or 40 yards, how many men are standing on first tees feeling exactly what you feel? And what does that mean about whose fault this really is?