

New equipment helpful to experienced golfers

BY MIKE TERRELL

Special to the Record-Eagle

Softer landing, more spin, longer distance, more feel, more control. These are just a few of the claims manufacturers of golf equipment make to seduce golfers into buying a certain brand of golf ball — or club, or metal wood.

But if it were that easy, we'd all be playing right up there with Tiger Woods.

Unfortunately, you still have to hit like Tiger to play like Mr. Woods, according to area golf shops and pros.

"Not to burst your bubble, but all the new equipment in the world isn't going to improve your game if you don't know how to properly play it in the first place," said Charlie Schmidt, manager of Boyne Country Sports in Traverse City.

Lessons are the best way

to improve a golf game, but for those who know how to play, new equipment can make a difference in lowering a golf score.

"Every year manufacturers bring out new clubs with better weighting to improve the sweet spot, which will help improve your accuracy and ability to hit the ball a little further," Schmidt said. "It's a competitive game and golfers are always looking for that little edge over their opponents."

The Taylor-Made R-7 driver is just one of the new clubs made to improve golfers' shots.

"This new Taylor-Made driver allows golfers to actually change the weight pattern by themselves," Schmidt said. "There are several weights in the head of the driver that can be adjusted to alter the sweet spot to accommodate an individual's swing. That's

brand new."

Clubs can be custom fit and made to order, but Schmidt believes that with all the options currently available, golfers can pretty much custom fit themselves off the shelf.

"The choices are pretty limitless with the clubs, and than you can change ball types to accommodate various patterns," he said.

"Those who frequently slice the ball should be using a harder golf ball, because they hit it like a knuckleball. The better player will more likely want a softer ball for more spin control."

Golf USA on Secor Road still does a lot of custom fitting for its more serious golf customers, said owner Roger Stachnik.

"We look at club head speed, length of the shaft, grip size and even how the angle of the club head lies on the ground with the indi-

vidual golfer," he said. "You can't get that kind of customer service when you buy a set of clubs online. Plus, here, with our driving range just outside the door, you can try individual demo models to see if you like the club and how it feels before we proceed further."

Stachnik points out a big change in irons that has taken place over the last decade.

"The new ones are all cavity backed, which allows for a much bigger sweet spot where the face of the club contacts the ball," he said. "It just makes it easier to get decent contact with the ball."

With the new selection of clubs, even the average golfer should notice an improvement, he added.

"What it helps on most are miss-hit balls. Even when they slightly miss the sweet

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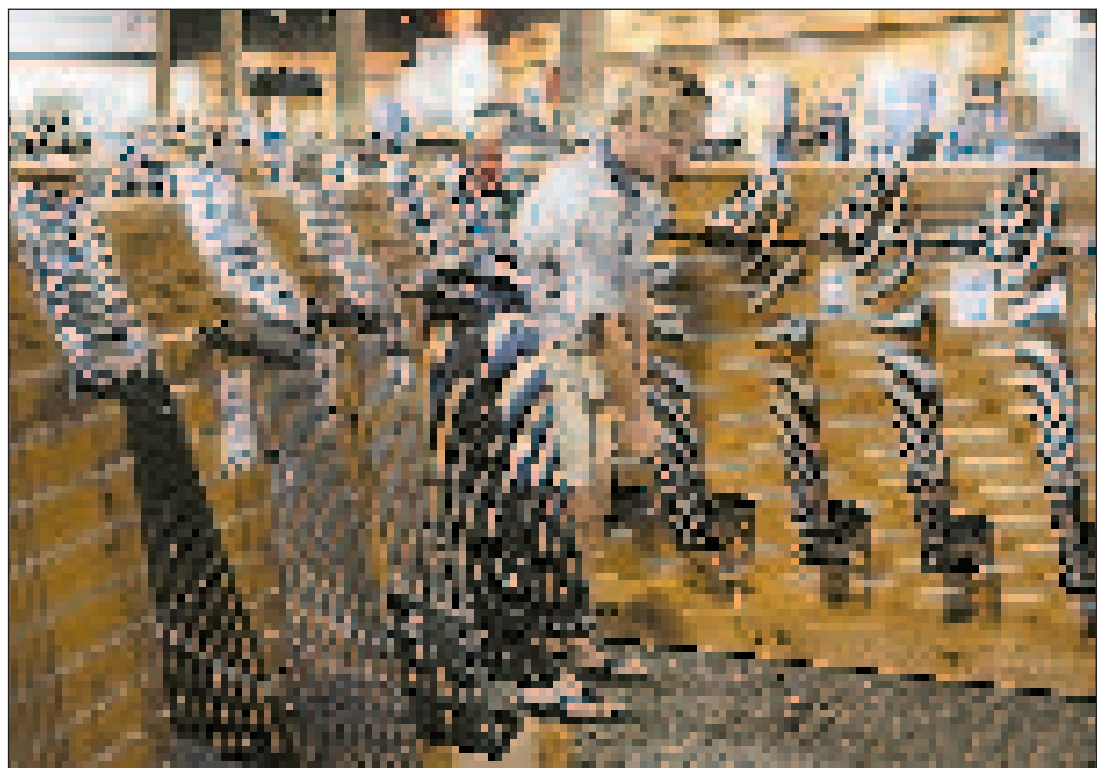
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Customer Spencer Stegenga checks out some of the golf equipment at Boyne County Sports. Boyne and other stores can custom fit people to their golfing needs.

Record-Eagle/Doug Tesner