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Testosterone and Technology: Why Golf Courses are Under Fire

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As Americans, we enjoy a number of things in our everyday lives that can easily be taken for granted. After all, we are the pulse of the financial world, the lifeblood of the technological age, and the keeper of the peace around the globe. We are the beacon of freedom and the country where anyone can become someone. Why else would thousands of people risk their lives each year to come here? Among other things, we are the inventors of the telephone, the incandescent light bulb, the automobile, and peanut butter. The United States is also home to the world's greatest athletes. Forget the Olympic medal counts—we're talking real *professional* sports here: real football (not soccer), baseball, basketball, and—yes—golf!

Granted that an American hasn't always been the world's number one player in the World Golf Rankings, Americans do typically make up the majority of the top players. And considering that golf is the largest participation sport, this translates into more participants. More participants means more expendable consumer dollars spent on equipment, and more consumer spending means more advertising and even more investment in research and development—both are necessary to increase market share and satisfy shareholders. Of course, the research and development is needed to bring to market new and exciting products and without advertising, we wouldn't know about these products. This is all well and good—the American way in fact—but another American trend has taken a strong foothold in the golf industry. Although not entirely new to golfers, we've seen an acceleration of the phenomenon in recent years in other segments of American society and it's come back to golf tenfold.

The roaring 90's brought about increased wealth on the heels of a red hot Internet industry that could seemingly do no wrong at the time. And what do Americans do with more money in our pockets? We spend it! This is what keeps "well-oiled" the machine of American prosperity. But more money requires more and better things upon which to spend it. Somewhere along the line, the marketing industry discovered that "bigger" would be synonymous with "better" with the proper spin applied and we consumers would never ask otherwise. It was almost too easy. And what made it easier is that the roughly fifty percent of the species who are male still control the majority of the spending decisions—although women do influence these decisions to a degree and undoubtedly to a higher degree among the married members of the species. In the end, however, the higher earnings still rest with those of us controlled by our elevated testosterone levels, our admiration of fast cars, and our allegiance to classic Clint Eastwood films. It's natural for "guys" to do "guy things" and buy "guy stuff." And whether they admit it or not, it's the reason women love us—and sometimes hate us. Thus the clever marketing spin begat very large sports utility vehicles and man-sized pickup trucks. But what about the married men who wanted to spend the \$30,000+ for such an SUV? How would he convince his better half that the family needed such a manly machine? No problem. The marketing folks at your local multi-national automotive conglomerate were kind enough to put the "bigger is safer" spin on these monsters of the road—safer at least for those inside the soccer mom transports.

But the phenomenon didn't stop there. It had only just begun. The golf industry has seen its share of technological advances—some good and some bad—over the past century or so. Steel shafts, graphite shafts, metal woods, composite clubs, and undoubtedly golf ball technology have made some of the more notable leaps in recent memory. But with more men drawn to the game of golf for the first time, something had to be done to stimulate that same bundle of synapses in the brain that keeps men glued to NASCAR races so they would stay glued to golf as well. Enter new drivers the size of your favorite NASCAR driver's hood, balls that travel through the air like long range B-2 bombers, and inserts on wedges that make the ball sit down like a flying leap from the top rope of a WWF title match. Architects say that this overheated acceleration in technology is bad for the game: making the classic courses too short and outdated with less consideration given to the influence of a golfer's skill level. As a result, new courses have to be longer and that requires more land—translating into higher maintenance expenses and consequently more expensive green fees. Club and ball manufacturers are quick to lash back at the architects in the name of technological advancement, saying that restrictions would stifle their ability to bring new and exciting products to the consumer. Lest we forget, we're talking about golf equipment, not modern medicine.

Of course everyone wants to be the longest off the tee in his (or her) group, but isn't it more satisfying if your long drive is also in the short grass? Golf was then, is now, and forever will be a game of how near and not how far. So the next time you start thinking about the newest driver or ball on the market that will add length to your game in an effort to shave strokes from it, try this little drill first: using the same clubs and ball you always do, play a round at your favorite course. Think about the playing the course, not overpowering it. And each time you miss a fairway (no matter how badly), pick up the ball, walk back toward the tee 10 yards, and place your ball in the middle of the fairway. Never mind if you hit it out-of-bounds or in the water—in this exercise, there are no penalty strokes as a result of missing the fairway. See for yourself which one is more important: length or accuracy? You may be surprised at what you discover—and you may find that the money you had earmarked for new clubs would be better invested in a handful of lessons first. If you get a chance, contact me at email@lipouts.com and let me know too.

Nathan Crace is the Senior Design Associate at Maxwell Golf Group in Jackson, Mississippi. His freelance "Lipouts" column is based on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2002.