CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1: The Saturday Morning Chunk

The ball sits up nicely on the fourth tee. It's a short par three, maybe 135 yards, with a front bunker that has never bothered you in your life. You take the seven iron, make a smooth practice swing, and set up. Your hands feel quiet. Then comes the downswing and a dull *thud*, the sound a shovel makes in wet soil.

The ball wobbles forward about sixty yards and drops into the bunker you forgot existed. A clump of turf the size of a paperback lands closer to you than to the ball. Your hands buzz from the palms up into the forearms. Nobody in your group says a word, and the silence is worse than a joke would have been.

If that scene feels familiar, this book is for you.

The sting in the hands and the silence in the group

A fat shot, which golfers also call a chunk or a heavy strike, happens when the club hits the ground before it hits the ball. The turf slows the clubhead and the ball gets only part of the energy. Your hands take the rest of it.

I know that sting well. On a frosty November morning years ago I caught a six iron so heavy that the club bounced off the hard ground. My left thumb ached through lunch. When my wife asked about my hand, I said I had closed it in the car door, because that was easier than admitting it.

The physical sting fades by the next hole. The social sting lasts longer. Men who have played together for twenty years rarely mock a chunk. They go quiet, look at their own bags, and someone mutters "unlucky." You know it wasn't luck, and so do they.

That silence carries a private question: *after all these years, why can't I trust my irons?* You have made thousands of good swings, and you can still hit a crisp seven iron on a good day. Then on Saturday morning, with the coffee still warm, the club digs in behind the ball again.

What other golfers discovered

You are not alone. On The Sand Trap forum, golfers have described how staring hard at the ball itself made them hit fat. When they moved their gaze slightly forward, they found the bottom of their swing moved ahead of the ball too (The Sand Trap forum). On GolfWRX, several players said they struck irons far better when they looked one to two inches in front of the ball, and some cited an "aiming point" about four inches ahead (GolfWRX forum).

Other golfers on GolfWRX argued the opposite and said they look at the back of the ball at address (GolfWRX forum). Each group is sure it has found the answer.

> **Case:** Two groups of amateurs, posting on two different forums, describe two opposite eye habits. Both report cleaner iron contact. Neither group is lying. They found different routes to the same destination: a club that bottoms out *after* the ball rather than before it.

That destination is where this book aims, and we'll return to the eyes properly in Chapters 6 and 7. For now, notice what these golfers shared. None of them bought new clubs or rebuilt their backswing. Each one changed one small thing and watched where the turf came up.

Why fat contact costs more strokes than any other miss

Every golfer misses. The question is which miss your scorecard can survive. A slice still moves forward, and so does a pull. Even a thin shot, the low skull that stings the other way, usually runs along the ground toward the green.

A fat iron does something the others don't. It stops short, and short is where most trouble lives: front bunkers, creeks, false fronts, and the rough in front of elevated greens. Course designers protect the front of the green because they know amateurs come up short far more often than long.

I call this **the Chunk Tax**. A heavy strike charges you three times:

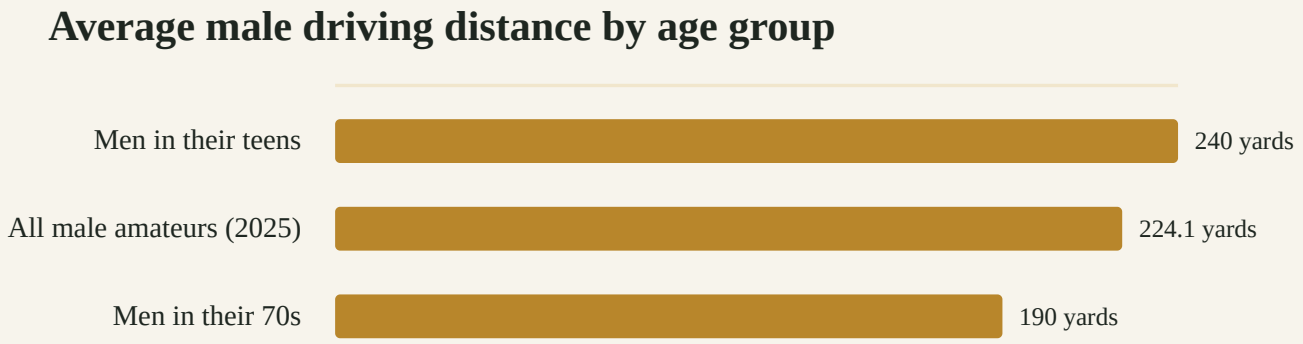
1. **The shot itself.** You lose most of the distance you planned for.
2. **The next shot.** You're now playing from sand, water or a bad lie, often with a short, delicate club.
3. **Your nerve.** On the next full iron, some part of you tries not to hit fat again, and that usually sends the ball screaming thin across the green.

That third charge is the most expensive, and it's why a single chunk can ruin a whole front nine. Chapter 2 explains why the fat shot and the thin shot come from one mistake. For now, understand that the fat shot starts the chain.

> **The Chunk Tax:** a fat iron shot costs you the shot, the recovery, and your trust on the next swing. Remove the chunk and all three charges disappear together.

Why the tax grows after sixty-five

Distance falls with age, and the numbers are honest about it. Male golfers in their teens average about 240 yards off the tee, while men in their seventies average about 190 yards, a 50-yard drop[10]. That figure comes from the 2026 Arccos Driving Distance Report, built on more than 5 million rounds and nearly 10 million driver tee shots[4].



Average male driving distance by age group

Those are driver numbers, but the lesson carries over to irons. When you have less distance to spare, every yard lost to the turf hurts more. A young player who chunks a seven iron may still reach the fringe. You probably won't, and you'll have a longer club in your hand on more holes, which leaves less room for a heavy strike.

What this book will and will not ask you to change

You've heard plenty of fixes over the years. Most asked you to change a lot at once. This book asks for much less, so let me set out the deal before we begin.

What you will not be asked to do

You won't rebuild your swing. Your backswing got you through decades of golf. Chapter 3 shows why so many tips aim at the backswing when the real problem happens on the way down.

You won't buy new clubs. Consider this: the average male amateur drove 224.0 yards in 2018 and 224.1 yards in 2025[10]. That's eight years of new drivers, new shafts and new marketing, and essentially nothing changed on the tee[23]. If equipment couldn't move the average drive by even one yard, a new set of irons won't move your low point.

You won't chase speed. Chapters 18 and 19 look at speed training honestly. You don't need more clubhead speed to stop hitting behind the ball.

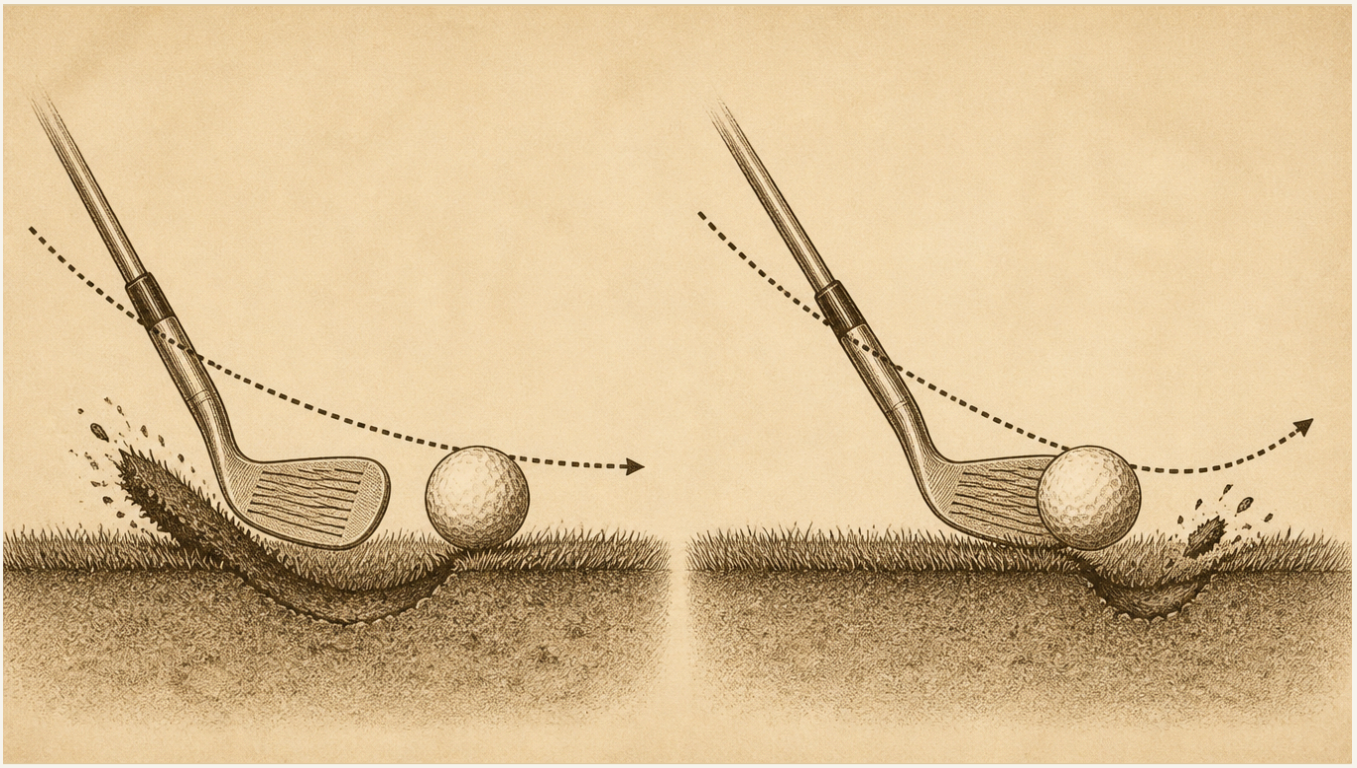
What you will be asked to do

You'll work on one thing: **where the bottom of your swing arrives.** A good iron shot bottoms out slightly after the ball. Almost everything in this book serves that one position.

We'll get there through the body's sequence rather than the hands. Research comparing professionals with amateurs shows that tour players reach peak rotational speed in a set order: pelvis first, then chest, then arms, then club. Amateurs tend to bring the arms in earlier and time their sequence less consistently (ResearchGate, kinematic sequence study). Chapter 9 explains why that order matters more after sixty than strength does.

We'll also use a particular kind of swing thought. In one well-known study, golfers who focused on the club's motion hit pitch shots more accurately than golfers who focused on their arms. That held for beginners and experts alike (Wulf & Su, *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 2007). So you'll find few elbow or wrist instructions in these pages. Most cues will point at the ball, the turf or the target.

Finally, you'll learn to read your own evidence. The divot, the scrape on a mat and the mark on a towel tell you exactly where the club bottomed out. By the end, you won't need anyone to tell you whether you've fixed it.



Your first assignment: the Saturday Ledger

Before you read another chapter, collect honest evidence. Memory is kind to golfers. It forgets the chunks and replays the pures.

- ✓ Put a small card and pencil in your back pocket for your next round.
- ✓ After every full iron shot (not chips or putts), mark one letter: **F** for fat, **T** for thin, **P** for pure.
- ✓ Don't try to fix anything during the round. Just record.
- ✓ At home, count the letters. Note whether the F's came in clusters or were followed by T's.

The exercise carries no physical risk and changes nothing in your swing. It gives you a starting line, and when the fix works in later chapters, you'll have numbers to prove it.

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> Ask yourself honestly: after your last chunk, was the next iron shot calm, or did you try to "help" it?

Keep your answer in mind. It becomes important very soon.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Keep the Saturday Ledger** for one full round before changing anything, so you know your real pattern of fat, thin and pure strikes.
- **Treat the fat shot as the most expensive miss.** It stops short where the trouble lives, and it pushes your next swing toward a thin one.
- **Keep your clubs and your backswing.** Eight years of new equipment didn't move the average amateur drive, so spend your effort on contact.
- **Aim at one target only:** a club that bottoms out after the ball.
- **Expect outside cues** such as ball, turf and target, rather than instructions about elbows and wrists.

Now look at your Ledger once you've filled it in. If you're like most golfers who try it, you'll find something odd. The F's and T's won't sit apart. They'll sit next to each other, a heavy strike followed by a thin one, sometimes in the same swing thought on the same hole. How can one swing produce two opposite misses, and why can't you tell which one is coming?