

Chapter 1: The Chunk Two Inches Behind the Ball

The sound comes first. You haven't even looked up yet. Somewhere between your hands and the turf there is a dull, heavy *thud*, and the clubhead stops as if it hit a wet mattress. A strip of earth flies forward. The ball follows it, weakly, and lands forty yards short of a green you have hit a thousand times.

You know exactly what happened before anyone says a word. You caught it fat. The club found the ground about two inches behind the ball and never recovered.

Here is what should bother you more than the shot. The swing that just chunked that 7-iron is the same swing that flushed one on the last hole. Same grip, same tempo, same pre-shot waggle you have used since your thirties. So which one is the real you?

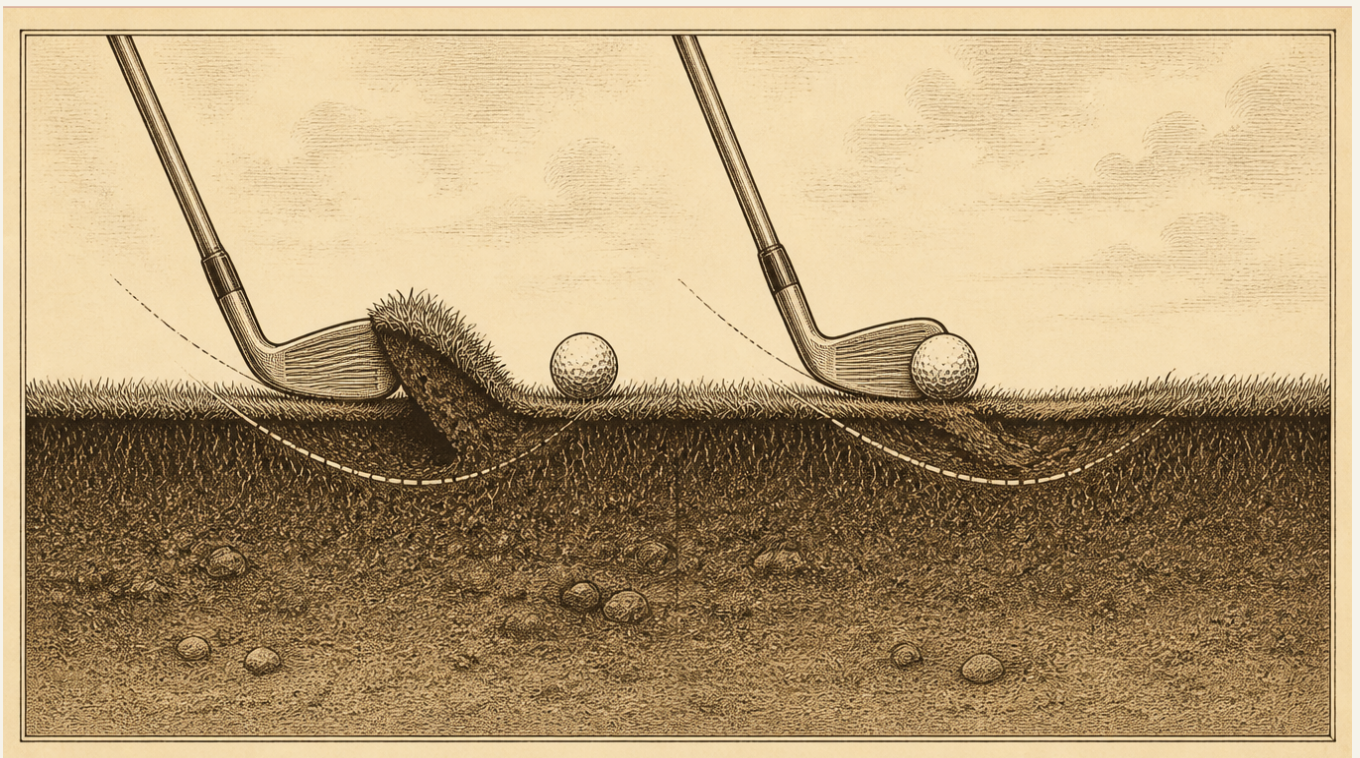
The shot every experienced golfer knows by sound

Every golfer with a few decades behind him carries a private library of sounds. There is the compressed *click* of a pure iron, the thin *tick* of a blade skimming the equator, and the heavy *thump* of the fat shot. You could identify all three with your eyes closed from the next bay on the range.

The fat shot sounds different because the club is doing a different job. On a clean strike, the clubhead reaches the ball while it is still travelling down. It meets the ball, then the grass. On a fat strike, the order reverses. The club bottoms out early, digs into the turf, loses speed and arrives at the ball late and slow.

I still keep an old 7-iron in my garage with a worn, polished patch on the back of the sole. For years I thought it was ordinary wear. It was a record. Every chunk I had ever hit had rubbed that spot a little shinier.

That is the first idea I want you to hold onto. **A fat shot leaves evidence.** It has a location, a depth and a direction. The mark on the grass, the patch on the sole, the thud in your hands: all of it is information.



Why a fat shot feels like a betrayal after thirty years of golf

When you were new to the game, a chunk was just part of learning. Nobody expects a beginner to strike it clean. After thirty years, the same shot lands differently. It feels like the swing you trusted has turned on you.

That feeling is worth taking seriously, because it points to something true. Experience has not fixed your contact. It has mostly made your misses familiar.

The numbers tell the same story across the whole amateur game. Arccos tracks millions of real rounds through sensors on golfers' clubs. Its 2025 report found that the average male amateur drives the ball about 224 yards. That figure has barely moved over eight years of tracking³.

Think about what that means. In eight years there have been new drivers, new balls and countless new tips. Still, the typical golfer hits it about as far as he did before. The same report shows men in the 30+ handicap bracket averaging about 181 yards, some 63 yards behind scratch players¹⁷.

Those are driver figures, not iron contact. They still make a point that matters for your 7-iron. More years in the game do not automatically buy better ball-striking. If they did, those averages would be climbing. Something is repeating, round after round. For many golfers, that something shows up most clearly as the chunk.

So the betrayal you feel is real, but it's aimed at the wrong target. Your swing has not suddenly gone bad. A small, specific habit has been riding along inside it for years. On some shots it hides, and on others it doesn't.

The quiet insult: nobody ever told you the real cause

Here is the part that stings. You have probably paid for a lesson or two. You have certainly received free advice. Almost none of it named the actual cause of your fat shots.

What you got instead was the usual list. *Keep your head down. Watch the ball. Slow down. Stay behind it.* Each tip came from someone who meant well, and each one treated the symptom as the cause.

Consider what the people who see the most swings say about the most famous of those tips. Nick Clearwater, Senior Vice President of Player Development at GOLFTEC, put it plainly:

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"Our coaches will teach about 1.8 million golf lessons in 2023, and about a million of those will start with a player blaming their topped and chunked shots on not keeping their head down."⁶

A million lessons, all starting with the same wrong diagnosis. Clearwater goes further: "Your bad shots are literally never caused by this 'problem.'"⁶. Both Golf Digest and GOLF.com describe "keep your head down" as advice that restricts body rotation and slows the arm swing (GOLF.com). We will take that tip apart properly in Chapter 16. For now, notice how long it has survived without anyone checking it.

Well-meant fixes can also pull you in the wrong direction. On The Sand Trap forums, one golfer described trying a stronger grip because a friend suggested it. It stopped his slice, but it sent his shots starting left and staying left (The Sand Trap forums). The advice fixed one miss by creating another. Nobody had looked at why the first miss happened.

Case: A golfer on The Sand Trap forums followed a friend's tip and strengthened his grip to cure a slice. The slice disappeared, and shots began starting and finishing too far left instead. One change, applied without a diagnosis, swapped one miss for its opposite.

That is the quiet insult. For years, people have handed you fixes without first looking at what you actually do. You deserve a diagnosis before a prescription.

The Two-Inch Truth: every fat shot has an exact address on the ground. Find where your club bottoms out and you have found the cause, without guessing and without a rebuild.

What this book will ask of you, and what it never will

Let me be direct about the deal, because I know what you are afraid of. You fear that fixing contact at your age means tearing down a swing you have spent decades building. You fear months of awkward positions and a body that won't cooperate.

This book will not ask for that.

What it will never ask

- ▶ **It will never ask you to rebuild your swing.** Your motion has flaws, and it also has thirty years of timing in it. That timing is an asset.
- ▶ **It will never hand you a new list of positions** to check at the top, at halfway down and at impact.
- ▶ **It will never demand speed or flexibility** you don't have. Later chapters deal with a body past fifty honestly and safely.

What it will ask

- ▶ **Honest looking.** You will learn to read what the ground tells you, starting with a simple ten-ball test in Chapter 10.
- ▶ **Removal before addition.** When we find the flaw, the job is to take it out and leave the rest of your swing alone.
- ▶ **A little patience with evidence.** One flushed shot proves nothing, and one chunk proves nothing either. Patterns are what count.

Start now, before you touch a club. Try this short reflection. It takes about three minutes and needs only a pen.

- ✓ Write down the last three fat shots you remember clearly: the club, the lie and the situation.
- ✓ Note what you told yourself afterwards ("head came up," "rushed it," "bad lie").
- ✓ Circle any explanation that came from someone else's tip rather than from something you actually saw.
- ✓ Keep the list. Chapter 11 will ask you to compare it with what your divots actually show.

Most golfers who try this find the same thing. Their explanations are feelings and borrowed phrases. Very few involve a measurement. By the end of this book, yours will.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Treat every fat shot as evidence.** Listen to the sound, check the sole of the club and look at where the turf was disturbed.
- ▶ **Stop blaming "the head."** Retire that explanation until you have real evidence, because the people who teach the most lessons say it isn't the cause.
- ▶ **Refuse any fix that skips the diagnosis.** A tip that changes your ball flight without explaining your miss can trade one problem for another.
- ▶ **Protect the swing you already own.** Your goal is to remove one flaw, not to rebuild thirty years of timing.
- ▶ **Keep your three-shot list.** You will test it against real divot marks later in the book.

Still, one question remains. If the swing is the same and the flaw is the same, why did the last shot come off perfectly? Why does one habit produce a flush on the 12th and a chunk on the 13th? Until you understand why those two opposite results share a single root, every good shot will feel like luck.