

Chapter 1: The Forty Yards You Did Not Lose to Age

The playing partner who never swings hard

You know the man. Every club has one. He is seventy-one, he walks nine holes with a pull cart, and his backswing looks like he is reaching for a jar on a high shelf. There is no grunt, no lunge, no shoes twisting in the turf. The ball leaves the face with a sound you would describe as polite.

And then you walk to the balls. His is forty yards past yours.

You out-drive him in every measurable way that should matter. You are twenty years younger. You are stronger. You swing at what feels like ninety-five per cent of everything you own. You bought a driver last spring with a shaft that cost more than your first set of irons. None of it shows up on the ground.

The forty yards between you and that man is not a strength gap. It is an ordering gap. His body arrives at the ball in sequence. Yours arrives all at once.

I have been that younger man. Some years ago I played behind a retired schoolteacher at a nine-hole municipal track near my home, and I spent the back nine quietly furious. I hit two drives that felt enormous and finished short of his lazy little fade. On the walk to the car I asked him what he was doing. He said, "I let the club get to the top before I start down." I thought it was a throwaway line. It was the whole book.

What actually left your swing between forty and fifty-five

Something did leave. Let us be honest about that first, because a book that tells you nothing changed after fifty is a book that will waste your Saturdays.

The tracked data is unsentimental. Across millions of on-course tee shots, golfers aged fifteen to nineteen average about 241.6 yards of total driver distance, while those over seventy average roughly 190 yards¹. That is a real decline and no amount of rhythm erases all of it.

Tracked total driver distance, amateur golfers



Tracked total driver distance, amateur golfers

But look at the size of that decline again. From a teenager to a man past seventy, the whole curve is about fifty yards, spread across five decades. You did not live five decades between forty and fifty-five. If you have lost forty yards in fifteen years, age accounts for a slice of it. Something else took the rest.

Here is the number that should stop you. The same tracking shows that the average male amateur hits the driver about 224.1 yards in total distance¹, and that this figure has barely moved in eight years, shifting by less than a single yard since 2018⁷. Eight years of lighter shafts, bigger faces, adjustable weights and launch-monitor fittings. Less than one yard.

That is not a story about clubs failing. It is a story about the thing that limits amateur distance sitting somewhere that equipment cannot reach.

What actually left your swing is smaller and more specific than "youth". You lost some thoracic rotation, the turning range in your upper back, and we will measure exactly what that should look like later in the book. You lost a little elasticity. And crucially, you lost **the interval** — the tiny stretch of time between the backswing finishing and the downswing starting. That interval does not decline with age. It gets squeezed out by anxiety, and anxiety arrived the year you started losing distance and decided to do something about it.

Why your effort went up while your ball speed went down

Call it **the Effort Tax**. The harder you swing, the earlier you start down, and the earlier you start down, the less of your body is available to deliver speed at the ball.

The mechanism is not mysterious. A golf swing produces speed by unloading in order: ground, hips, torso, arms, hands, clubhead. Each link accelerates and then hands off. When you try harder, the parts you can consciously feel — your hands, your arms, your shoulders — fire first, because those are the muscles you have direct access to. The clubhead reaches its maximum speed somewhere out behind the ball, and by impact it is already slowing down.

Biomechanist Dr. Sasho MacKenzie, who has built a speed-training system on roughly 17 million recorded training swings²⁴, puts it plainly:

“

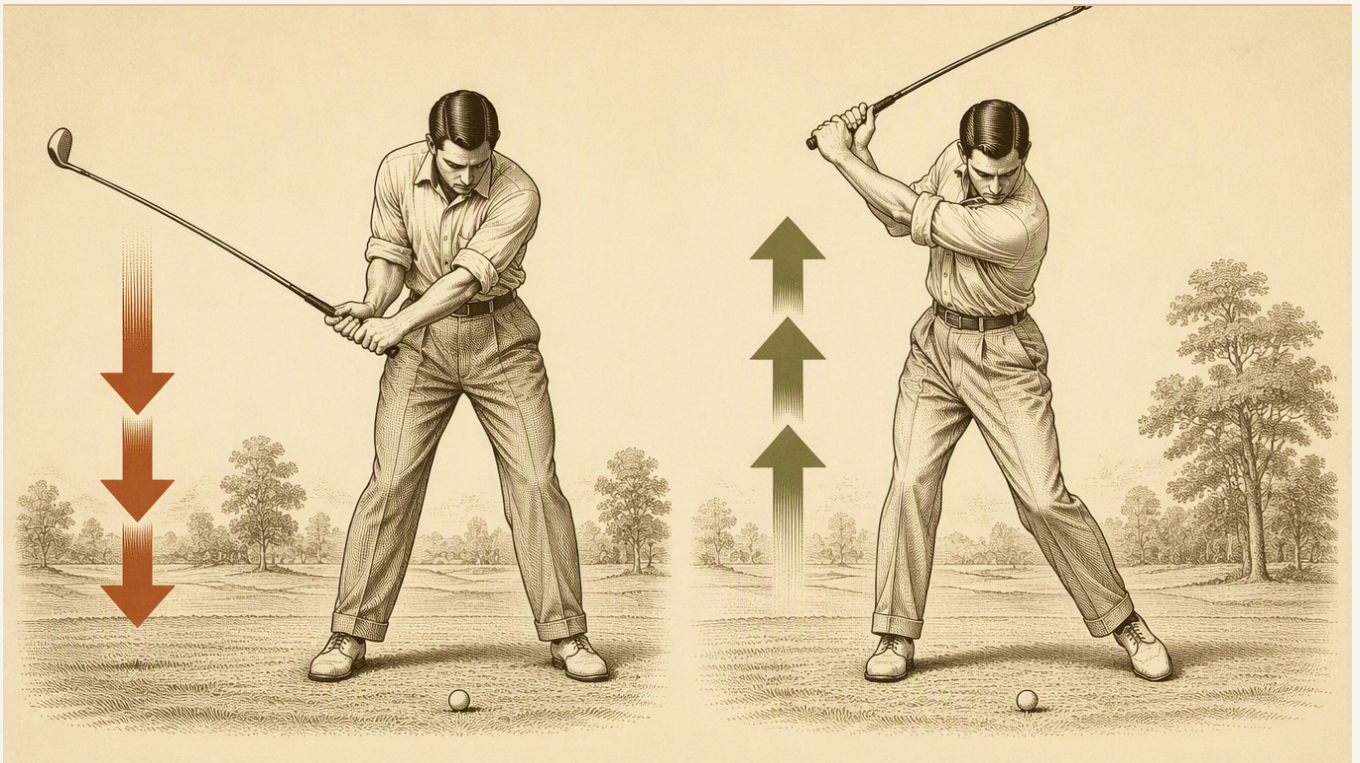
"If you decide to uncock your wrists and get that clubhead going really fast before your lower body does anything, that's a speed killer." — Dr. Sasho MacKenzie⁹

A speed killer. Not a shape problem, not an accuracy problem. The thing that feels like maximum effort is the thing draining your yards.

This is why the seventy-one-year-old wins. He physically cannot generate enough force to break his own sequence. His body long ago stopped offering him the option of swinging hard, so he swings in order by default, and order beats force.

Community voice: On a GolfWRX instruction thread, a player measured his own swing timing and reported ratios that looked nearer 2:1 than the 3:1 he had been told to expect, sparking a long argument about how backswing and downswing are actually timed. The thread matters less for its conclusion than for what it reveals: an amateur who bothered to measure discovered his downswing was starting sooner than he believed.

That gap between what you believe your swing does and what it actually does is where your forty yards are living.



What this book will and will not ask of you

Let us set the terms now, so you can stop bracing.

This book will not ask you to join a gym. It will not ask you to buy a driver, a launch monitor, or a subscription. It will not rebuild your swing, because you have already paid three professionals to do that and you are still reading books about distance.

What it will ask for is **ten minutes a night, without a ball**. That is the entire cost. The method comes from a practice tradition called *suburi*, the Japanese term for repetitive practice swings, used in martial arts such as kendo and iaido as well as in bat-and-club sports including baseball and golf³⁰. In kendo, daily suburi is treated as the foundational conditioning drill, done in fixed daily counts before any contact practice at all¹⁷. We will look properly at why swinging with no target trains something that hitting balls cannot.

And it will ask you to accept a target that is honest. If you are a fourteen-handicap man in your fifties currently carrying the driver somewhere short of 200, the realistic prize here is not 300 yards. It is getting back to and past the 224-yard average¹ with strikes that come off the middle. For reference, golfers with handicaps of 30 or higher average around 184 yards off the tee and find about 40% of fairways¹. Most stalled mid-handicappers are hitting closer to that number than they admit.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Stop attributing the whole forty yards to age: tracked data shows only about fifty yards separate teenagers from over-seventies across five decades of ageing¹.
- ▶ Stop expecting equipment to solve it: the male amateur average has moved less than one yard since 2018⁷.
- ▶ Name your real enemy the Effort Tax: extra force makes your hands start before your ground does, and that order costs speed at impact.
- ▶ Commit to ten minutes a night with no ball, in the pattern of daily suburi, before you book another lesson or hit another bucket.
- ▶ Write down, tonight, what you honestly believe you carry with a driver. You will test that number in the next chapter and it will probably be wrong.

Which raises the uncomfortable question. If your swing has been leaking yards for fifteen years, why has nobody told you where the leak is? The answer is that your ball has been telling you every weekend, in a language nobody taught you to read. So what exactly is that high, weak, wounded-bird fade trying to say?