

The Truth About Lies

By Ron D. Platz, Ph.D.

Master Teaching Professional
USGTF Advisory Board Member

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, one might get the impression this article has more to do with philosophy or religion from the title. Yes, be assured this is a golf article. As golf teaching professionals, we strive to help our students achieve more success with the game of golf, whether that be improved swing mechanics, a particular part of the game, or in some cases proper club selection and fitting.

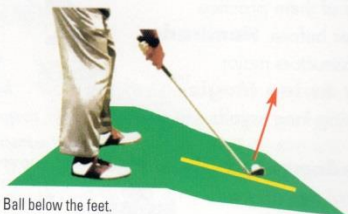
During the past eighteen months I have had the privilege to work with a PCS Class "A" clubmaker on my own equipment. What I learned from this relationship is that certain aspects of proper club fitting carry far more importance than I previously appreciated - so much so that I believe we would do our students a greater service if we incorporated some of these observations into our teaching practices, to enhance their learning and enjoyment.

LIE ANGLE PRINCIPLES

It has been written by equipment experts that lie angle may be the most important, yet overlooked, component in clubfitting. They go on to say an improper lie angle can be a major contributor to misdirection and off-center contact. By definition, lie angle is the angle formed from the centerline of the shaft and the contact point on the sole of the club. It is calibrated in degrees and measured the same for woods and irons.



Ball even with the feet.



Ball below the feet.



Ball above the feet.

To better understand the effect of lie angle on golf shots, I have borrowed an illustration from *Total Clubfitting* by Jeff Jackson. From the following diagram we can see that improper lie angle relates very

closely to hitting from side hill lies. In the case of a lie that is too flat, it is very much like a side hill lie with the ball below your feet. As we all know the tendency is for the shot to drift to the right, often with less than solid contact. The opposite is true of too upright a lie angle; it plays much like a side hill lie with the ball above your feet. Again, experience tells us these shots tend to be pulled left.

Compounding the problem is the relationship between the lie and loft of the club. The lie angle becomes more important in short irons as the loft of these clubs are much higher. The loft of the club compounds the misdirection of clubs with poor lie angle fit. To prove this dramatic relationship to yourself, simply take a piece of shaft and hold it squarely to the face of a short iron (see diagram, page 35). Now rock the club from toe to heel and observe the directional change of the piece of shaft. It also illustrates why lie angle is most important in short irons and wedges as the loft is greatest. Since these are the scoring clubs it seems they would be most important to have proper lie angle adjustments.

The length of a club can also affect proper lie angle fit, and with ever increasing shaft lengths in an attempt to find more distance the old standard lies are no longer appropriate. The good news is many club

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manufacturers and component companies are now offering a variety of lies to provide a custom fit approach. For students with existing clubs that need to be adjusted, a certified clubmaker with a loft/lie machine can make the necessary adjustments for a very reasonable cost. For a few dollars you and your student may be able to dramatically improve their directional control, thereby allowing you to focus on other issues of their game.

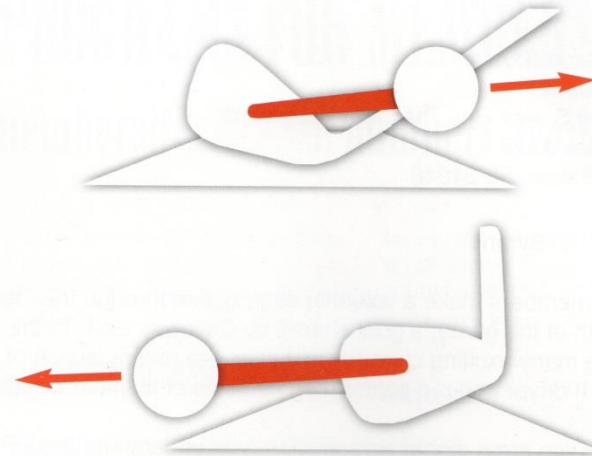
ASPECTS OF LIE IN TEACHING

While lie angle measurement and adjustment may not be that important to the beginner that has yet to develop any consistency in his/her swing, it does begin to yield observable results as the swing develops. If we have students that possess a reasonable swing, but complain of shots consistently moving a certain direction, it may prove beneficial to check their lie angle and make necessary adjustments if needed. I've had several students I've sent to clubmakers for lie adjustment, who call me weeks later to express how much better their shots are, and how surprised they are that such an adjustment could make this difference. It seems the better the player, the more positive the results from proper lie angle fitting becomes.

Perhaps the most important aspect is we provide an additional service for students that was not expected. The student receives a level of attention not offered or understood by other teachers; therefore you become more valuable in their eyes. Whether you have a loft/lie machine at your facility or simply send the student to a qualified clubmaker for adjustments is your decision. The point is to use this important aspect to set yourself apart, a competitive difference from your competition.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

About eighteen months ago I began working with Tim "The Stickman" Kohler, PCS Class "A" member, to develop a set of irons that truly fit my swing tendencies and



maximize my ability. I had several disappointing experiences with factory clubs, supposedly built to my specs. Tim and I worked together to come up with a set of irons that I can now say without reservation are better than any previous set of irons, over my last 25 years of play.

The single most important aspect of our lie angle adjustments have been the narrowing of my dispersion pattern with each club. On days when I possess my "A" swing I am focused on the pin with no fear of missing the target zone. I know on those days I simply will not see a shot mysteriously fly off the intended line. In fact I've had to learn not to hedge my shots on those days, but to be aggressive and trust the clubs.

Perhaps more important has been the affect on days when I have less than my "A" swing. Since my dispersion has been narrowed so dramatically, the results I achieve on less than good days have also improved dramatically. As my misses are much better I get in less trouble, which means I stay in the tournament longer, perhaps long enough to find a game that will yield acceptable results. I believe Hogan or Hagen said the quality of your missed shots was far more important than the quality of your perfect shots. A proper lie angle has a dramatic affect on the quality of missed shots, from personal observation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I do not suggest we make lie angle adjustments for all students. Clearly, beginners do not have enough consistency in their swing path to justify adjustments. I do believe it can prove beneficial for students that possess an ability to put the clubface on the ball with some consistency. If a lie adjustment could improve their direction and dispersion, that would yield better results, and might also lead them to want further improvement. For better players, it is an absolute must to tune their clubs and maximize the potential of good shots while minimizing the adverse affects of lesser shots. As teaching professionals, we are in position to help our students to understand and appreciate the value of this important clubfitting principle.

NOTE OF THANKS:

I want to extend my thanks to Tim "The Stickman" Kohler, PCS Class "A" member, for his craftsmanship and professionalism in helping me better understand the aspects of clubfitting that produce results. I hope Tim will soon become a member of the USGTF; he'll be a fine addition to our membership.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Jackson, Jeff, Total Clubfitting - A Step by Step Program for Fitting Golf Equipment, Dynacraft Golf Products, 1993. ¹