

4 Simple Stats Take Guesswork Out of Playing Better Golf

by Eric Jones

Getting better at golf shouldn't be a mystery. Thanks to the introduction of recent technology - and in particular GameGolf - lowering your scores is easier than ever before with the help of four simple stats.

One of the biggest challenges faced by amateur golfers is knowing what to do to improve. And not just in a general sense like "I need to be more consistent." But specifically. Measurably.

Here are four simple stats that will take your game to the next level by focusing on making incremental improvements in each skill area:

1. Fairways hit
2. Greens in Regulation
3. Putts per hole
4. Scrambling

It's a two-part process: Learning what your stats are right now; and then knowing the benchmarks you need to hit to reach the next level.

If you know where you are and if you know where you need to be your range time will be far more focused and productive. Your motivation will soar because you can literally measure your progress, and those improvements translate very quickly into lower scores.

Why is knowing your stats important?

Because contrary to what the popular golf magazines and TV would have you believe you don't necessarily have to change your swing to get better. Most golfers don't really want to change their swing anyway. They just want to play better golf.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret that will put your mind at ease: The Tour pros don't work on their swing any more. They work on their stats.

The old paradigm was to spend endless hours trying to create a better golf swing with the hope that it would lead to an improvement in scoring.

Not any more.

Nowadays if the Pros make a swing change it is with the purposeful intent to improve specific stats. They know that if their stats improve their scores will improve.

The guesswork is gone.

Tour pros are blessed because they have ShotLink tracking every shot and putt they hit. They can drill down into their stats, find areas of weakness, and then focus their efforts on making incremental improvements. Amateur golfers didn't have that luxury - until GameGolf.

How well do stats work?

Let's take one of the hottest players on Tour - Jordan Spieth - as an example. Spieth isn't a long bomber like Bubba or Dustin or a short-game wizard like Phil. He is known, however, as a player who very methodically works on improving his stats.

In 2014 Spieth finished 14th in the world rankings and earned \$4.3 million dollars. In 2015 he climbed to 2nd in the world and earned more than \$5.2 million - less than a third of the way through the season.

What's the secret?

Actually there is no one big secret. There is just a bunch of little secrets, which show up in his stats.

Fairways: In 2014 Jordan's Driving Accuracy (fairways hit) was 58.8%. In 2015 he improved that to 61.2%. That means he hit almost half a fairway more per round. It may not sound like much, but over the course of a 4-day tournament that's two more fairways hit, which means two more holes where he improved his odds to hit a green and make a birdie.

GIR: Improving his driving accuracy helps explain why he did, in fact, hit more greens in regulation - although he probably also spent range time deliberately training to improve his approach accuracy and distance control. In 2014 Spieth hit 62.5% of his greens, and then increased that to 65.7% in 2015. That's an improvement from 11.25 to 11.83 greens per round, or around half a green more per round. Again not a lot. But over four days that's two more chances at a birdie putt.

Putting: Normally you would expect putts per hole to go up when a golfer starts hitting more greens. That's because the average length putt from an approach shot is usually considerably longer than from a pitch shot around the green. But Spieth's putts-per-hole improved - dropping from 1.55 to 1.52 in 2015. That means he dropped almost half a shot per round, improving from 27.8 to 27.4 putts per round. At his level that is a significant achievement because it means saving nearly two strokes per tournament.

Spieth improved by following the Luke Donald formula.

In 2011 Luke Donald was one of the worst drivers on Tour, ranked 147 out of 180. Yet he ended the season ranked as the #1 player in the world.

How did Luke Donald rise to the #1 Position?

By working on specific stats.

Luke Donald trained himself to become the number one golfer on Tour in scoring shots from 50 to 125 yards, and the number one player in putting from 5 to 15 feet. Spieth followed a similar formula. He's #1

on Tour in putts per round, he's near the top in putts from 15 to 25 feet, and he very rarely 3-putts, indicating his distance control is superb.

Scrambling: The last stat - and another one that has probably helped his putting - is Spieth's scrambling. He improved his ability to get up-and-down from 62.4% to 64.7%, which equates to around 1.3 shots saved per round.

The overall net effect of making small improvements in four categories - fairways, greens in regulation, putting, and scrambling - is that Spieth's average score improved from 69.95 to 69.43 per round, which moved him from 14th in 2014 to #1 in scoring average in 2015.

But what about the average golfer?

ShotLink gives Spieth the ability to compare his stats to every other Tour player. Thanks once again to GameGolf we now have similar information for amateurs: the key benchmarks for golfers who shoot in certain scoring ranges. If you want to move from one scoring level to the next, focus on making small improvements in a few key categories.

Let's take a specific example: an average golfer who shoots in the low 90s who wants to break the 90s barrier and shoot in the 85-90 range.

Take a look at the benchmark numbers below. See how the numbers compare and what the golfer would need to improve in each category.

It's worthwhile to note that the GameGolf numbers have a high statistical validity. Mark Broadie, who wrote the excellent book "Every Shot Counts" and popularized the notion of strokes gained, used statistics on 100,000 shots from 200 amateur golfers. The GameGolf benchmark statistics are taken from *tens of millions* of real-world amateur shots.

How to go from a 90s shooter to an 80s shooter

Stat Category	90-95	85-90	Difference
Fairways	43%	45%	2% About 1/3 more, or 1 more fairway every three rounds
GIR	23%	31%	8%, or 1.44 more greens per round
Putts per hole	2.01	1.93	1.4 fewer putts per round
Scrambling	10%	15%	about one more up-and-down per round

To go from shooting in the 90s to shooting in the 80s does not require a complete swing overhaul. Just specific training in a few key areas. If our 90s player goes from hitting 6 to 7 fairways per round, goes from hitting 4 to 6 greens in regulation, drops the number of putts from 36 to 34 putts per round, and improves scrambling from one of 10 to two of 10 tries they will consistently shoot in the 80s.

The good news is that the improvements don't have to be major. A little goes a long way.

And here's the beauty of having access on the range to another relatively new technology: radar systems like FlightScope. With a FlightScope radar you can measure stats like driving accuracy for your

fairway stats and proximity to a target for your GIR stats. You can equate them to your GameGolf playing stats.

And because the radar system keeps a record of each shot it is now possible to engage in a whole new kind of activity at the range: **training**. Training is a heck of a lot more fun than constantly tinkering with your golf swing. When you train the results are visible and measurable. You can literally see when you get better.

It's quite possible you may discover that a swing change is necessary. But the change will no longer be willy-nilly. When you train you'll make swing changes and adjustments to improve your stats. You'll know within a very short time frame if the adjustments are helping or hurting.

As a coach it's my job to help golfers reach their goals as quickly and painlessly as possible. Having game stats plus a way to train on the range gives me the tools I need to be effective. I can take a look at my student's GameGolf dashboard, quickly evaluate their progress, and have a far more specific conversation about the next benchmarks needed to improve their game. These new technologies are helping us move away from an overly-obsessive focus on the golf swing to what really matter: shot making. They are also making the game and the challenge of improving a lot more fun.

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