Fairway: Golf Improvement Platform

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Fairway | golf improvement platform

Helping golfers understand, practice, and improve their game.

Project Type: UX/UI Platform, AI, Personal Project

Role: UX/UI Designer

Industry: Sports, AI, Self-Improvement

Tools: Figma

Methods: Informal interviews, Competitive analysis, Usability testing

Overview

Fairway is a personal concept project exploring how digital tools can better support improvement in complex, skill-based activities. As a golfer, I experienced firsthand the disconnect between having performance data and knowing how to actually use it. While modern players track more metrics than ever, they frequently finish a round feeling less clear about how to actually improve.

This project focuses on moving beyond simple tracking to help people interpret and act on their performance.

"What would it look like to design a golf platform that integrates tracking, interpretation, practice, and social play into a single, coherent learning system?"

Why This Mattered to Me

I wasn't drawn to this problem just to design a golf app, I was interested in how people learn and improve within complex systems. Across many domains such as education, fitness, and work, people are surrounded by metrics but rarely supported in their interpretation.

Golf made this disconnect especially visible. Players track every statistic, yet often finish their rounds feeling frustrated or stuck. This project became a way for me to explore how UX can bridge that gap, not by stripping away complexity, but by translating it into something usable and human.

Problem

Through my own experience and informal conversations with other golfers, I identified a recurring pattern where players are collecting vast amounts of data but feel paralyzed by the lack of direction. One golfer summarized the frustration clearly: “I have all these stats, but I don’t really know what they mean or what I’m supposed to do with them.”

This revealed a critical gap between measurement and understanding. While existing tools were technically functional, they weren't working together to support a learning journey.

Key Insights

- **The Interpretation Barrier:** Golfers are proficient at recording data, but most lack the experience to translate those numbers into a plan. Without a translation layer, the data remains a record of the past rather than a guide for the future.

- **Practice Without Purpose:** There is a massive disconnect between the round and the range. Most golfers practise without a specific goal because their tracking tools don't communicate with their training routines.
- **The Social Pressure Trap:** Existing social features often focus on public leaderboards, which can increase anxiety and lead users to stop tracking their data during poor rounds, which is when it's most important to track data.

Discovery

Methods

To understand the disconnect between tracking and improvement, I used a combination of interviews with golfers across various skill levels and a competitive analysis of current tracking, coaching, and social apps. I also reflected on my own usage patterns to identify where the friction typically occurs during a round.

Identifying the Tensions

My research revealed that the core challenge wasn't just about complexity, but unstructured complexity. Several pain points emerged:

- **Detail vs. Cognitive Load:** Golfers wanted deep, detailed statistics but didn't want the app to demand constant attention while they were playing.
- **Guidance vs. Autonomy:** There was a desire for professional insights, provided they weren't prescriptive, intrusive, or distracting.
- **Social Motivation vs. Pressure:** Players wanted to stay connected with friends, but without the added ego of public leaderboards and constant comparison.

- **AI Curiosity vs. Skepticism:** While users were interested in AI-driven insights, they were skeptical of opaque recommendations that didn't explain the why behind the advice.

What I was Unsure About

I didn’t start this project with a fixed solution in mind. Instead, I let three main questions drive my prototyping. I wanted to see if people actually needed another "everything app," or if they preferred keeping their tools separate. I was also wary of AI. I wasn't sure if it would feel like a useful co-pilot or just an intrusive gimmick that got in the way of the game.

Most importantly, I questioned the social aspect. I wanted to find out if social features would actually motivate people to improve, or if they would just add a layer of performance anxiety that made golfers want to hide their scores. By staying skeptical of my own ideas, I was able to test these concepts rather than just building them on a hunch.

Design Strategies

Integrating Performance and Practice

One of my early decisions was to stop treating performance data as a destination. Usually, golf apps give you a bunch of stats and leave you to figure it out. I wanted to turn those numbers into signals that actually point toward action. Instead of just showing a high penalty stroke count or poor shot dispersion, I paired those patterns with specific drills and strategy adjustments. It was a response to a simple, recurring frustration I heard: “I don’t need more numbers. I need to know what to work on next.” This shift in focus reframed Fairway. It stopped being just a tracker and started functioning as a learning system. A way to ensure that what happens on the course directly informs how a user chooses to practise.

Pivot: Automation vs Understanding

Early in the conceptual phase, I explored a smart round mode where the system would automate the majority of the user's decisions. While this was an interesting technical exercise, it felt disempowering during the design process. I realized that if a user doesn't understand why a suggestion is being made, trust in the system disappears. I decided to pivot the design logic. Instead of a black box that handles everything, I moved toward a model that explains its reasoning and invites the user into the decision making process. I intentionally traded seamless automation for user agency. By designing a system that shows the why behind a recommendation, the concept shifted from being an intrusive coach to a collaborative partner prioritizing trust.

AI Caddie

Instead of designing a central, dedicated AI screen, I chose to embed the caddie as a subtle layer accessible throughout the conceptual experience. This allowed assistance to appear exactly when it was needed while remaining entirely optional and dismissible. By shifting the assistant from a standalone feature into a fundamental part of the interaction model, the AI becomes a quiet partner in the game. This approach ensures that the user remains in control, allowing the technology to support their decisions without ever becoming a distraction from the sport itself.

Supporting Depth Without Overwhelm

Golf improvement is inherently complex. Hiding that complexity would limit serious users, but exposing it all upfront created friction. Progressive disclosure allowed clarity first and depth second, helping users feel oriented before feeling advanced.

Prototyping & Iteration

My early conceptual versions often swung between two extremes: they were either too sparse to be useful or so dense that they became overwhelming. Through repeated iteration, I focused on three core areas to find a more supportive structure:

- **The Home Dashboard:** I worked to balance immediate motivation with the clarity needed to know what to focus on next.
- **The Round Tracking Flow:** I focused on minimizing friction to ensure the user could record accurate data without it interrupting the rhythm of their game.
- **The AI Caddie:** I refined how and when the caddie appears, ensuring it felt like a seamless part of the interface rather than an intrusive feature that demanded attention.

Through this process, the interface moved from being a simple data collector to a structured, explanatory system that supports the user's growth.

Outcome

The final concept demonstrates how a complex system can feel approachable when it is organized around user understanding rather than feature accumulation. Fairway avoids fragmenting into separate, disconnected tools and instead integrates the entire experience into a single, adaptive system.

- **Integrated Tracking & Analysis:** Recording data is no longer a chore, it is the foundation for genuine insight.
- **Interpretation & Guidance:** Moving beyond raw metrics to provide actionable why behind every suggestion.
- **Practice & Learning:** Ensuring that what happens on the course directly informs how a user chooses to practise and improve.

- **Social Play & Memory:** Shifting the focus from public pressure to meaningful connection and shared progress.

One user summarized the shift in perspective perfectly: “I feel like I’d actually be trying to improve with this.”

Reflection & Next Steps

This project was a deep dive into the theory of structured complexity. It challenged me to move beyond the idea that UX is just about making things simple and instead focus on making things complex and easy at the same time. With high fidelity prototypes now in place, the next phase of this concept is about rigorous validation and refining the underlying system logic.

- **Usability Testing & Viability:** I would conduct targeted usability testing sessions with the existing high fidelity prototypes. The goal is to see if the interaction model actually supports a golfer’s flow or if the data entry points still create friction.
- **Expanding the Learning System:** I would look at future iterations that could deepen the practice component of the concept. Potentially exploring how the system could adapt to different learning styles or physical limitations, making the advice even more personalized.
- **Path toward Actuality:** Mapping out the technical requirements needed to bring this concept to life. This involves looking into how the conceptual UX would translate into a real world build.