BILL'S HOME TECH

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Golf GPS Watches and Apps: Yardage, Shot Tracking, and Handicaps

Know your yardage from your wrist — distances, shot tracking, and handicaps

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole idea in a minute.

A golf GPS shows you the distance from where your ball sits to the green, so you can choose the right club instead of guessing. You can get it two ways: as a watch on your wrist, which you glance at between shots, or as an app on your phone, which costs little or nothing to start and shows a bigger map of the hole.

Both do the core job well. The fancier ones also track your shots and keep your handicap automatically, but you don't need any of that to get the main benefit — knowing your number before you swing.

- The core job: distance to the green, so you pick the right club.
- A watch is quick and hands-free; a phone app is cheaper and bigger.
- Free app versions cover distances for most golfers.
- Shot tracking and handicaps are nice extras, not necessities.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Before you spend a penny, download one free golf app — 18Birdies, Hole19, or Golf Pad — and use it for a round or two. You may find the free distances are all you ever wanted, and you'll know exactly what a paid version or a watch would add before buying.

THE NUMBERS

2 Front, Center, and Back Yardage

The three numbers you'll use most.

The single most useful thing a golf GPS tells you isn't one distance but three: how far it is to the front of the green, to the center, and to the back. Greens are deep, so the difference between the front and back edge can easily be a club or two. Knowing all three lets you aim smartly rather than firing at a single guess.

How to use the three numbers

- Center is your everyday number — aim for the middle and you're rarely badly wrong.
- Front matters when there's trouble short of the green and you want to be sure you carry it.
- Back matters when the pin is deep or there's trouble long you mustn't reach.
- The gap between front and back tells you how much green you have to work with.

Most devices also show distances to hazards — bunkers, water, the start and end of trouble — and a 'layup' number telling you how far to a safe spot short of it. You can ignore all of that at first and just use the center-of-green number; the rest is there when you want to play a smarter shot.

> **TIP**
> When in doubt, play to the center of the green. Amateurs lose far more shots by firing at a tucked pin and missing than they ever gain. The center number from your GPS is the single most valuable piece of information it gives you.

WATCH OR APP

3 A Watch or a Phone App?

The two ways to carry it.

A golf GPS comes in two main forms, and the right one depends on how you like to play rather than on which is 'better.' Both give you the distances; they just differ in convenience, screen size, and cost.

	GPS watch	Phone app
Cost	Buy the watch ($150–$600)	Free to start; paid tiers optional
Using it	Glance at your wrist	Pull the phone out each time
Screen	Small, simple numbers	Big, with a map of the hole

Battery	A full round or more	Can drain your phone over a round

A watch is the glance-and-go choice: lift your wrist, read the number, swing. It never leaves your arm and won't drain your phone. A phone app is the budget-friendly, information-rich choice: it's free to begin with and shows a lovely map of the whole hole you can tap and zoom, at the cost of pulling the phone out and keeping it charged.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Many golfers start with a free phone app, decide they love having the numbers, and then buy a watch later for the convenience. There's no wrong order — and no need to own both.

THE APPS

4 The Popular Apps, Compared

Free starts, paid extras.

A handful of apps dominate, and the good news is that their free versions all handle the core job — distances to the green — at no cost. They differ mainly in the extras their paid tiers add, and in how much those cost. Pricing changes, so confirm the current figures in your phone's app store before subscribing.

App	Free version	Paid (per year, roughly)
18Birdies	GPS distances	About $100 for premium stats
Hole19	Generous — a lot included free	About $80–$100
Golf Pad	Generous free tier	About $30–$50
Garmin Golf	Pairs with Garmin watches	Membership extra

- All the free tiers give you the distances most golfers want.
- Paid tiers mostly add shot tracking, detailed stats, and club suggestions.
- Before paying, play a few rounds free to see if you'll use the extras.
- Prices shift — always check the current app-store price first.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Don't subscribe on day one. The paid extras only pay off once you've tracked a season of rounds, and many golfers are perfectly happy on the free tier forever. Try before you buy.

THE WATCHES

5 Choosing a GPS Watch

If you'd rather glance at your wrist.

If you decide a watch suits you, the range runs from simple, affordable models that just show distances to premium ones with color maps, shot tracking, and everyday smartwatch features. Garmin's Approach line is the most widely recommended, but it's not the only good choice, and the cheaper models do the core job just as well.

What the price buys

- Entry models (around $150–$300): clear distances, long battery, simple screen — all most golfers need.
- Mid-range: color maps of the hole, basic shot tracking, more course detail.
- Premium (up to about $600): full color maps, swing sensors, and everyday smartwatch features off the course.
- Battery in golf mode ranges from a dozen-plus hours on simple models to a single round on fancy color screens.

The honest truth is that a modest watch that shows front, center, and back yardage gives you ninety percent of the benefit. The extra money mostly buys a prettier screen and off-course features. Buy for how you actually play, not for the spec sheet.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you already own an Apple Watch or a Wear OS watch, you may not need to buy anything — a golf app installed on the watch you already wear can show the same distances, often for free or a small subscription.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

SHOT TRACKING

6 What Shot Tracking Really Does

The quietly useful extra.

Shot tracking is the feature that logs where each of your shots started and ended, so that over time the app learns how far you actually hit each club. That's genuinely valuable, because most golfers overestimate their distances — knowing you truly carry a seven-iron 140 yards, not the 160 you imagine, fixes a lot of missed greens.

How it works

- Some systems use small sensors that screw into the end of each club grip.
- Others let you tap the app after a shot, or detect shots automatically from the watch.
- After a few rounds the app shows your real average distance per club.
- You can then trust those numbers instead of guessing.

It takes a few rounds of data before the numbers mean anything, and it's entirely optional — plenty of golfers never bother and still enjoy the distance readings. But if you like a bit of self-improvement, it's the extra most worth having.

TIP

Shot tracking's real payoff is a 'gapping' chart — your true distance for every club, in order. It shows you which clubs overlap and where you have a gap, which is far more useful than any single round's score.

HANDICAPS

7 Keeping a Handicap

The number, made painless.

A handicap is a number that represents your playing ability so that golfers of different levels can compete fairly. Keeping one used to mean paperwork; now an app can do nearly all of it. You post your scores, and it handles the arithmetic.

What the app does

- You enter your score after each round (many apps make this part of saving the round).
- The app applies the official formula to figure your handicap.
- It updates automatically as you post more rounds.
- Some apps tie into the official handicap system for a small fee, so your number is the real, recognized one.

For a friendly game among friends, an app-kept handicap is plenty. If you want an official handicap for club competitions, you usually need to join your national or state golf association, which the app can often connect to. Either way, you're spared the math.

GOOD TO KNOW

You don't need a handicap at all to enjoy golf or to use a GPS for distances. It's purely for fair competition — handy if you play matches, entirely skippable if you play for the walk and the fresh air.

GETTING GOOD READINGS

8 Getting Accurate Distances

Two small habits.

A golf GPS is accurate enough for club selection — typically within a few yards — but a couple of simple habits keep it at its best. A huge share of complaints about golf GPS come down to one of these two things, both easily avoided.

- Stand still for a moment when you read it. The device settles on your position best when you pause; a reading taken mid-stride can lag a step behind.
- Let it find the course and hole first. Give it a few seconds after you reach your ball before trusting the number.
- Keep the maps updated so a recently changed course reads right.
- Remember it measures to the green, not to the exact pin, unless you've moved the pin position in the app.

Used this way, a GPS is reliably good enough to choose a club with confidence. It won't replace judgment about wind and lie, but it removes the biggest variable — not knowing how far you have to go.

WATCH OUT

A GPS tells you distance, not everything. Wind, elevation change, and how the ball is sitting all still matter. Treat the number as the solid starting point it is, then adjust for the conditions in front of you.

KEEPING IT READY

9 Charging and Updating

So it works when you tee off.

The only routine care a golf GPS needs is keeping it charged and its course maps current. Both are quick jobs done at home, and doing them the night before a round saves the frustration of a dead device on the first tee.

1. Charge the watch, or make sure your phone is well charged, the night before you play.
2. Open the app on Wi-Fi at home and let it update itself and the course maps.
3. If you're playing a course for the first time, confirm it's in the app before you leave.
4. On the course, close other phone apps to save battery if you're using a phone app.

A phone app can drain your battery over a four- or five-hour round, so if you rely on your phone for the GPS, consider a small battery pack in the bag — or let that be the nudge toward a dedicated watch, which lasts a full round easily.

TIP

Before any trip or special round, open the app at home and search for the course by name. On rare occasions a very new or very small course isn't in the database yet, and it's far better to find that out in your kitchen than on the first tee.

A HAND

10 If You'd Like a Hand

Set up once, enjoy for seasons.

Picking between a watch and an app, choosing which app, getting it installed and signed in, and learning to read the distances and set up shot tracking are exactly the sort of thing that's easy and pleasant to do together once — and then it just works, round after round.

If you'd like a hand choosing the right option for how you play, or getting a new watch or app set up and understood before your next round, that's a cheerful thing to sort out together, with no pressure and no jargon.

GOOD TO KNOW

Don't overbuy. The happiest golfers with GPS are usually the ones using a free app or a modest watch for the one thing that matters — the distance to the center of the green. Start simple; you can always add more once you know you want it.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to...	Do this...
Know the distance to the green	Read the front, center, and back yardage and pick your club from the center number
Choose a watch or an app	A watch is glance-and-go on your wrist; a phone app is free to start with a bigger map
Start without spending much	Free app tiers (18Birdies, Hole19, Golf Pad) cover GPS distances for most golfers
Decide if paid is worth it	Premium (roughly $30–$100/year) mainly adds shot tracking, stats, and club advice
Track your shots	Let the app log where each shot started and ended to learn your real club distances
Keep a handicap	Post your rounds in the app; it figures and updates the number for you
Get an accurate reading	Stand still for a moment — a GPS lags a step behind if you read it while walking
Keep it ready to play	Charge it and update the course maps on Wi-Fi at home before you tee off
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

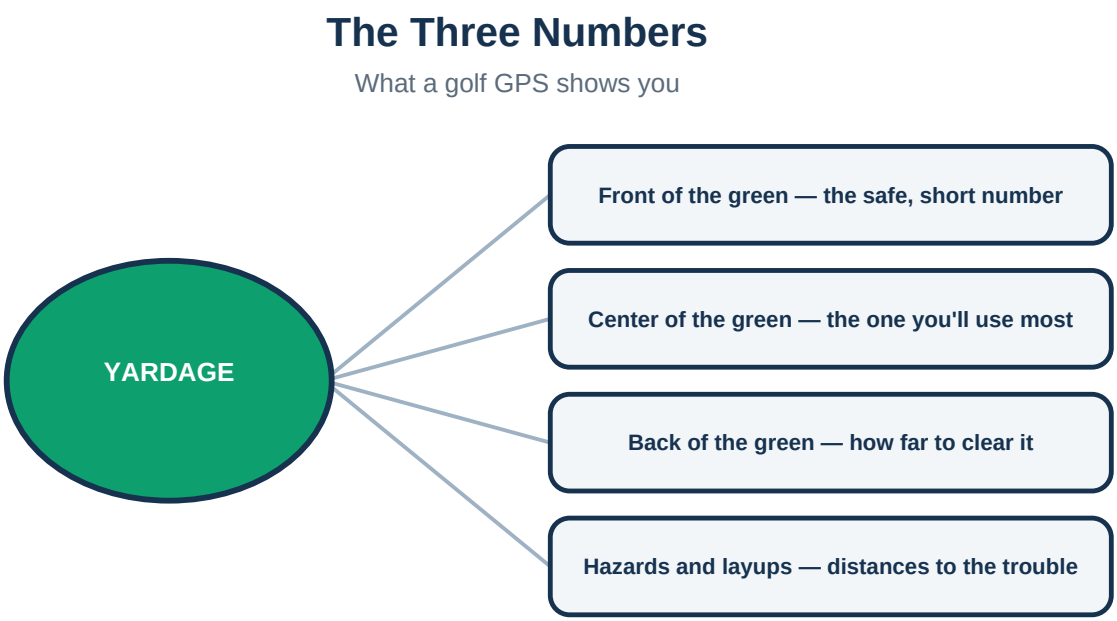


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Out on the Course

How a round goes with GPS

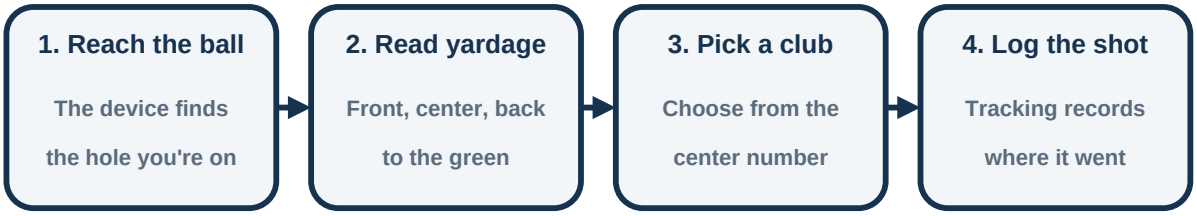


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

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KEY SPECS

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Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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