

# MAXIMIZING YOUR STUDENTS' PUTTING POTENTIAL

## Blending technology and coaching

BY PRESTON COMBS, PGA

**P**utting finishes each hole, each round and every tournament. The seemingly simple stroke can spark a range of motions from agonizing defeat to joyous exaltation.

Yet use of technology used to coach putting is less common relative to golf's other widely accepted advancements. Perhaps that's because putting has been depicted as simply distance and direction. Or golfers believe it does not require detailed feedback or the use of technology for fear of becoming too complex and technical.

However, by incorporating technology into your putting lessons, particularly the SAM PuttLab, you can help your students maximize their potential on the greens. The coaching process I have developed through Preston's Putting incorporates the technology and allows helps players to "Create, Develop and Own" their putting stroke.



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## Create

As instructors, we must create a level of recognition within our students. We need to give them the skills to recognize issues with their stroke as we establish new concepts. Because putting's complexity extends beyond our surface level observations of distance and direction, recognizing what part of the stroke needs adjusting is often not apparent to the untrained eye.

Employing technology like Science & Motion

(SAM) PuttLab to help the player recognize these subtle movements and see opportunities for improvement is essential. Without it, coaches can be hard pressed to connect with the player and verify whether any new concept has validity.

For example, I worked with a collegiate player who faced speed control issues. But the size, tempo and acceleration of his putting stroke seemed sufficient and consistent. This meant that the underlying issue was



something much harder to see on camera – impact location and delivered loft. We were able to diagnose that using the technology. Impact locations low or towards the toe and too much loft at impact are disastrous for managing speed. Inconsistent impact leads to inconsistent results.

The player admitted that those were areas that he had not previously considered or was even aware of. After a setup change and a new idea for how he was moving the putter, the results were remarkably different. The use of SAM PuttLab 3D Putt provided evidence based results that allowed us to progress into the next phase of coaching with a solid foundation.

## Develop

While technique is valuable, and certainly a focus of the coaching process, even more prevalent might be the skill to adapt to changing conditions. Consider a golfer I worked with who struggled with speed control on uphill putts. After collecting data on a flat 10-foot putt and then a slightly uphill 10-foot putt, the results were apparent. Rather than adjusting the size of the stroke, the player's strategy to accommodate for slope was to simply hit the putt harder. This made it problematic to consistently produce the proper putter head speed. Because the player's method was to just "hit it harder" there was no measurable consistency. Yet again, effective use of technology helped the player recognize the issue and allowed for development of an essential skill.

In my experience, only the coach should be privy to



the in-depth data behind the 3D renderings provided by SAM. The player is only seeing the rendering as verification for the changes. This is the beauty of maximizing putting potential with technology. The session does not need to be complex or require a PhD. The right combination of coaching and technology unlocks the secret to developing technique and skills.

## Own It

Many golfers have asked me: "What is the most important skill in putting?" Social media pundits have proclaimed speed, while others vehemently defend starting direction. Let's not forget, neither is relevant if the player chooses an incorrect line. So which skill is the most important: Read, speed or direction?

The answer is both "None of the above" and "All of the above."

I covet a fourth skill is putting, which I call "The Dynamic Blend." Players need to incorporate their ability to read a green, control their speed and manage their direction under changing conditions to perform better. This allows for the ownership of a player's putting stroke.

## The Wrap Up

This modern approach to coaching putting creates recognition and opportunity, develops skills and helps players own their putting. The tangible proof of improvement that technology provides us needs to be embraced. Through it, coaches can bridge the gap between the emotional attachment players have with putting and start constructing the foundational elements that will give them that moment of joy.

