

Playing Through

- CHRISTIAN SMITH

SPRING EQUIPMENT REVIEW: PUTTERS

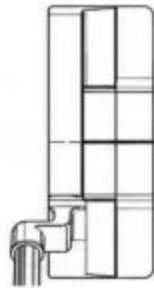
In this month's article, we'll delve into the last of our series on equipment which is the putter. There have been a lot of technical advances in putter design over the last few years, mostly surrounding the new face-balanced putters and the increased usage of the mallet style. I'll address those, but also the other styles and how they work with how you putt plus some nuances

friendly than their predecessors. The mallet has always been considered the most forgiving because of the mass in the head. The trade off is that they don't create the same sort of feel as the other putters. It is typically easier to get a putt online (especially from short distance) with a mallet putter due to the weight and balancing, but long range putts over hills and slopes

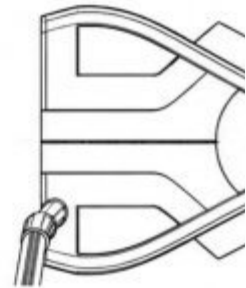
Blade



Modern Blade



Mallet



that affect which ones are most likely suited for you.

Putter Styles: The main three putter styles are the traditional **blade** (rarely used), the **modern blade** (even though the Ping Anser style has been around a long time), and the **mallet** (which Zebra really started).

There are obviously different variations and brands of these, but they all have similar attributes. The blade putter was the most original design in the modern era. Players like Ben Crenshaw and Arnold Palmer used these to perfection. They are very feel friendly, but mis-hits are very unforgiving because the head of the putter extends outwards from the shaft and has very little backing. This causes this putter to twist when a putt is hit off center. To combat that, Ping came out with the Anser putters (like the modern blade above) because it had some of the attributes of the original blade but had more stability due to the increased depth of the blade (more backing). Nicklaus, Watson, Woods did OK with these! These putters now contain some face weighting options that make them a little more

can be more challenging because it doesn't tend to swing as smoothly.

The MOI (Face-Balanced) Trend: In the last few years, the new face balanced putters have become in-vogue. This technology, mostly used in mallet style putters counteracts any mis-hit to direct the ball in a straight line. If you hit the ball on the inside of the putter face, these new putters through weight balance technology will tend to correct that by having the toe (outer end of the putter) twist slightly to correct. It is unnoticeable to the eye but really does happen. This design encourages more of a straight back – straight through stroke. It also removes a lot of feel from putting because this auto-correct feature doesn't give you feedback if you mis-hit the putt.

Shaft Orientation to the Putter Head: Another factor is where the shaft is anchored into the head of the putter. As you could see in the blade, the entire putter head is outwards (toe-hang) to the shaft. There are putter designs used commonly now where the shaft is in the middle of the clubface (center shafted). The

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center shafted design is also meant to reduce twisting at impact if you hit the putt off center.

Offset/Non Offset Putter Design: In the photos above, the shaft is aligned perfectly with the putter face with the blade putter. Conversely, in the other two designs, you can see that the shaft is positioned in front of the putter head (offset). This matters.

Stroke Path & Putter Style: Stroke path is a debated topic but it really revolves around if you try to keep the putter going straight back and through or if you let the putter arc as you turn your upper body during the putt. In all actuality, you have to manipulate the putter path not to have an inside (going back) and inside (after impact) type of stroke. Our bodies are tilted at address so when we turn our upper body, the putter will want to come inside going back and return to the inside as we go through. The degree to which you fight that or embrace it impacts which putter style will fit you best. If you fight it, you will take the putter outside of the arc going back and then keep it going at the hole into your follow through.

Arc Putting Style: If you're like me and let the putter swing on its natural arc you will want a putter with 'toe hang', not 'center shafted'. You would also not want a face-balanced putter because you don't want it to auto-correct based on the path the putter is swinging upon. The downside to this is that you are not getting some of the technology benefits, but you can feel when something is off. Letting the putter swing naturally with my upper body, I don't feel like I am having to manipulate anything.

Straight Back – 'Straight Through' Style: If you are someone that like to keep the putter blade square to the target line the entire time, then the center shafted

and face-balance putters are really a perfect solution. There is very little manipulation to the face angle when you putt this way, and these putters are designed to correct whatever measure you are off. The downside is that there is more of a muted feel due to this auto-correction, and that you are fighting the natural path.

Offset/Non-Offset based on Eye Dominancy:

Knowing which eye is dominant is important! If you don't know, there is a simple drill. Put your hands together in front of your face (about 2") and then create a gap (circle) between the base of your palms and tips of your fingers just wide enough so you can see something small in the distance with BOTH eyes. Once you are focused on that object with both eyes, see which eye you can see the object with when the other eye is closed. The one you see it with is your dominant eye. Here are some tips based on this 'dominance':

Right-Eye Dominant

If you are a right-handed golfer and right-eye dominant, your dominant eye sits further away from the target.

- **Ball Position:** Position the ball slightly back in your stance (closer to the center) so it aligns directly with your right eye.
- **Head Position:** Tilting your head slightly forward can help your dominant eye trace the putting line clearly.
- **Stance:** Some players find success with a slightly open stance to clear their nose and get a better look at the line.
- **Right-Eye Putter Selection:** Players typically prefer center-shafted putters or putters with minimal offset to align their eyes naturally over the ball

Left-Eye Dominant

If you are right-handed and left-eye dominant, your lead eye is closest to the target.

- **Ball Position:** Position the ball more forward in your stance to place your left eye directly over or closely behind the ball.
- **Head Position:** Keep your head slightly further back so your left eye can comfortably see down the entire target line.
- **Lining Up:** Because your lead eye perceives the line differently, it's often recommended to read the putt from behind the ball and trust your initial alignment over the ball.
- **Left-Eye Putter Selection:** Players usually favor putters with some shaft offset (like the classic Newport style) to help frame the ball and create a consistent setup.

As you can see, there is a lot that goes into putting that people don't consider. Path, eye dominance, and feel are huge factors! I know when I addressed the eye-dominance issue, my putting got incrementally better. I was no longer fighting myself.

I hope this helps and let's go hole some putts!!

- CHRISTIAN

- GRAPHICS: EDITOR

