

*What you can learn  
from an advanced  
putter-fitting session  
with Hunter Mahan,  
one of the world's  
best young players*

# Putt Options

By Jody Olson  
Photography by Michael Taft

IF THE PING PUTTER LAB LOOKS, SOUNDS AND FEELS HUSH-HUSH, it's literally by design. The lab is cloistered in a central room amid some two dozen buildings at the club manufacturer's world headquarters in Phoenix.

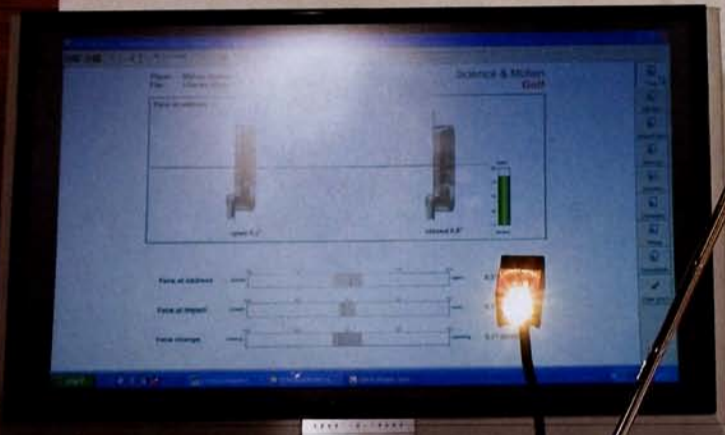
The lab is equipped with two high-speed cameras, a 72-inch high-definition screen on which technicians analyze the stroke and the ball's roll in microscopic detail, and a computer terminal for comparing and storing results. Center stage is a 45-foot-long platform of solid granite roughly six feet wide and three feet high, composed of five sections, each weighing a ton.

This platform has its own foundation to keep barely perceptible vibrations emanating anywhere in the building or even from passing cars on the street outside from affecting putts on the tabletop surface, which is perfectly flat to within two-thousandths of an inch, according to Dave Jones, Ping's chief putter designer.

This attention to detail allows Jones and his team to make highly precise analyses of the putting strokes of the pros and occasional VIPs granted entry into this putting surface that is less accessible than Cypress Point's 16th green.

Shaking off the remains of sleep and dressed in a pullover, surfer shorts and sandals, Hunter Mahan looks every bit the opposite of precision as he shuffles into the lab for an early analysis on a November morning. That all changes when the 25-year-old Mahan grabs his 2i Anser, steps up to the platform green and starts rolling 10-foot putts.





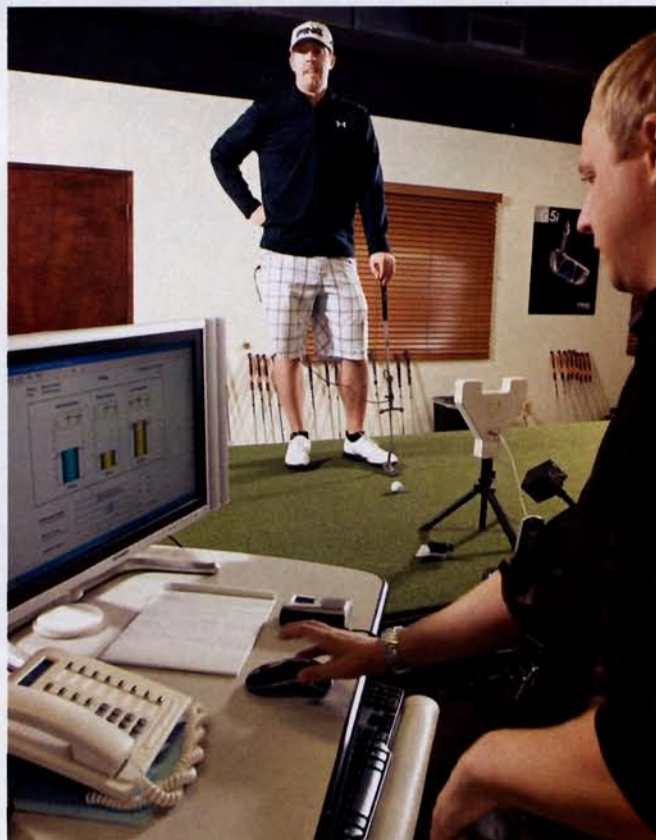


Ping's chief putter designer, Dave Jones, marvels over Mahan's near flawless data and how he is able to repeat the same path each time with 99 percent accuracy.

Through the unflinching eyes of the cameras, which can capture 60,000 frames per second, Mahan's stroke seems perfect. It's hard to believe he ranked 90th in putting in 2007, averaging 1.786 putts per green in regulation. If Mahan's stroke is that good, what must the motion of stat leader Tim Clark look like?

As Mahan strokes putt after putt on the surface measuring 13 feet on the Stimpmeter, Jones studies the motion frame by frame, barely perceptively changing frame as he looks to make adjustments to the club that will produce different results, just as he would if Mahan were wielding a 5-iron.

When you walk into a golf shop, it would appear that outside the shape and size of the putter head, the only other option is the shaft length. But in addition to length, both the putter's loft and lie angle are variables that can affect the ball's roll—and whether your birdie putt rolls into the hole or lips out.



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## HUNTER'S KEYS

- Focus on making one fluid movement; don't think "hit."
- See the ball going in before you hit it. Don't try to force it in.
- Trust your stroke; don't guide the ball.
- Keep your arms, shoulders and hands moving together.

The correct amount of loft at impact lifts the ball slightly off the turf and sends it into a true roll. Too much loft at impact sends the ball hopping before rolling; too little loft sends the ball skidding. Even one degree either way can send the ball off the target line, says Jones.

Additionally, if the lie angle of the putter is wrong and the toe is too high or too low, distance control becomes an issue. Ideally, for most amateurs the top rail of the putter should be parallel to the ground.


Length is the most subjective and personal area of putter fitting. Phil Mickelson's putter is the length of a junior player's, while some pros prefer the long putter. But generally, Jones says, the proper length of a putter allows you to assume the proper posture, arms hanging relaxed from your shoulders and your eyes directly over the ball or slightly inside.

Being fit properly for all those specs will increase your chances of making a consistent stroke, the biggest difference between pros

and average players. "Amateurs don't hit the ball on the same spot of the putterface every time," says Jones. "A pro knows how to repeat the same swing every time."

Repeatability is the theme of Mahan's off-season session. In fact, the only possible flaw Jones can detect is that Mahan adds a little loft during his forward swing, and he suggests delofting the putterface by a degree. Mahan says he will discuss the recommendation with his instructor, Marius Filmalter.

While all that data is important, it takes more than having the correct loft to make putts in bunches the way Mahan did in shooting three rounds of 62 in 2007, including during his breakthrough win at the Travelers Championship.

"Putting is more art than science," says Mahan. "Mechanics can only take you so far. Putting is feel. It's about seeing the line, seeing the ball going in, and believing in what you're doing. It's the shortest stroke, but so much can go wrong that you have to keep it simple." 



## UNSPOILED. UNCROWDED.

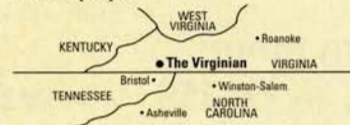
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