

Belly primer

TOUR TREND OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES BUT RAISES A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS

2011 FedEx Cup champion Bill Haas is one of the many Tour pros finding success with the belly putter.



PGA TOUR FILES/CHRIS CONDON

10 tips for using belly putters

By **James Achenbach**

Tom Stickney, director of instruction at Bighorn Golf Club in Palm Desert, Calif., is known for his insight and candor.



Tom Stickney

Following a 2011 season in which belly putters were used by Keegan Bradley (Odyssey White Hot XG Sabertooth) to win the PGA Championship, Bill

Haas (Scotty Cameron Kombi Mid) to win the FedEx Cup and Webb Simpson (Ping G5i Craze-E B) to finish second on the PGA Tour money list, here are 10 reflections from Stickney.

>> Forget about square-to-square or straight-back/straight-through putting. With belly putting, you have a fixed axis, meaning the putter is always going to work on an arc. That's the beauty of it. It forces you to stay stable. The arc becomes very consistent. With a stable fulcrum, the putter head is going to open and close all by itself. You don't have to think about all that stuff.

>> You absolutely have to get a belly putter that fits properly. Many people use a putter that is too long and a stroke that has too much arc.

>> All golfers need to find the right lie. If the toe is up at address, the ball tends to go left. If the heel is up, the ball tends to go right.

>> Ball position is crucial, and here's how to find the right position. Go out on a green in the morning when there's dew. Watch the way the ball rolls. If the ball is too far back at address, it's going to hop and squirt to the right. If the ball is too far forward, it will hop and be pulled to the left. Find the right position and try to get the ball rolling as quickly as possible.

>> I'm an advocate of having your eyes over the ball. There's an easy way to check this. Get an old CD or DVD. Flip it upside down so you can see the mirrored side. Put the ball in the hole in the middle of the disc. Now set up to the ball. When you look down, you can see exactly where your eyes are located.

>> Because belly putters are longer

than conventional putters, you need more weight in the head. This will result in a heavier feel. If you try to use a regular putter and make it longer, it could be too light, which will sacrifice head feel.

>> If you haven't used a belly putter, give yourself two hours with one on the putting green. After two hours, you'll either love it or hate it. Start by swatting balls everywhere – uphill, downhill, across the hill. The idea is to get a consistent release feeling.

>> What does the belly stroke feel like? It feels like the right hand is flipping a little bit. Some golfers don't like that. Touchy-feely people might have a more difficult transition to belly putting. It feels different, but you'll get used to it. It helps that you'll hit your putts solid almost every time.

>> The idea is to feel that everything in your stance and stroke is square and symmetrical. The more cohesive, the better. You want all body parts to feel connected and synchronized.

>> Your elbows will help achieve this synchronized feeling. They are close to your body, and they create a rock-solid feeling. You want everything in there, locked and loaded, so to speak. ○