

Faxon, psychologist support idea putting is more attitude than technique

Brad Faxon was the best putter on the PGA Tour last year.

He ranked No. 1 by averaging 30.7 putts per round and finished eighth on the tour money list. This was despite the fact he ranked 170th in driving distance, 142nd in driving accuracy and 134th in hitting greens in regulation.

How's that for evidence of the importance of putting on the tour?

Faxon was asked at the U.S. Open this month if it was talent or practice that made him a great putter. He gave a surprising answer: neither.

"To me, it's more attitude than anything else," Faxon said.

"Teachers always want to tell you that there is absolute fundamentals in putting. Then I look at strokes like Bobby Locke, Isao Aoki and more fundamental guys like (Jack) Nicklaus, (Ben) Crenshaw and (Phil) Mickelson.

"I see they have great attitudes and confidence," Faxon said.

"They know they are going to make them when they hit them. When they don't, they act like they did go in. It's hard to turn putting into a science. I don't spend a lot of time practicing my mechanics on the putting green. I just think about making putts."

Nowhere on the golf course is confidence more of a factor than on the putting green.

This is the subject of extensive research by Patrick Cohn, an East Aurora native and sports psychologist who works with



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numerous tour pros.

Cohn has a video out titled "Make Your Most Confident Stroke: A Guide to a One-Putt Mindset" in which he details how average players can putt better by thinking more positively.

Some of Cohn's significant points:

■ Great putters trust their stroke. "All good

putters focus on their line, not the mechanics of their stroke," Cohn said. Likewise, Cohn says it's wrong to obsess about trying to line up the face of the putter perfectly before the stroke. Try to get the face square to the line. But focus more on the line of the putt and hitting it on that line.

"Trust your ability to line the putter up," Cohn says.

■ Great putters trust their decisions. "Indecision and doubt are the putter's worst enemy," Cohn said. Pick the line when you're standing behind the putt. Visualize the ball going along that line and into the hole. Once you step up and address the ball, do not second-guess yourself.

■ Don't label your putts. Don't think about it as a par putt. Or, "I need this to save bogey." Look at every putt as just another routine putt. The fact it's for par doesn't change the way you have to hit it.

■ Forget about the result. Don't let your mind slip ahead and think about missing or three-putting. Worrying about the result creates tension. This is a big factor on short putts. Golfers stand over a 3-footer and label it as a "should make" putt. You

make putts by sticking to the task — getting a good read, picking a line, feeling the speed.

■ Accept the results and move on. If it doesn't go in, so be it. "Be positive," Cohn said. "Walk off the green telling yourself one thing that you did well."

Tour player Grant Waite, one of Cohn's students, says he likes to take one or two practice strokes before hitting a putt and both practice strokes are made to try to feel how hard to hit the putt, to get the right touch.

One of the drills Cohn recommends to develop better feel is a four-tee drill. Place four tees on a line from 10 to 40 feet away. Try to hit the first putt to the tee but no farther than 2 feet beyond. Don't worry about accuracy, just distance. Then aim for the second tee in the same fashion and so on.

Cohn's video as well as his book on putting are available by calling 1-888-742-7225.

Around the greens

■ Here are two tips from Fuzzy Zoeller's private clinic before the Children's Hospital Pro-Am tournament:

Knockdown shots — "The magazines tell us to play the ball back in the stance, move the hands forward, move the head forward, weight on the left side. By the time you do all that you've forgotten what you're trying to do. The secret to the knockdown shot is don't hit the ball hard. Back down two or three clubs. If you're 120 yards away, take a 5- or 6-iron. Play the ball in the middle of the stance, maybe back a little. Swing easy. Let the loft of the club keep the ball low."



Associated Pr

PUTTING AROUND: Not concentrating on every putt can be costly as Tom Wargo floundered out Saturday during the U.S. Senior Open. Wargo double-clouted on a backhand tap-in putt and was charged with an extra stroke.

High loft shots around the green — "The pros lay the blade open on this shot but then they re-grip the club. Lay the blade open, then weaken the left hand. Put the left hand under the club a little bit and use a light grip. That way you get a softer hit off the clubface."

■ Jim Smith won for the fourth time at the Bert Nash Scratch In-

vitational at Crag Burn. Smith, ranked No. 6 among area men's amateurs in '96, teamed with partner Wayne McDonald of Atlanta GC to shoot 65-69 in the best-ball event. Bob Battaglia, a two-time winner of the event, teamed with Sandy Bilyard of Lookout Point (Ont.) GC to shoot 67-69 and finish second.