

Spears on Golf

Weeks, Johansen Make Chicago the Putting Capital of Golf

THANKS TO TWO Illinois PGA (IPGA) professionals—Kevin Weeks and Chad Johansen—Chicago's southwest suburbs often come to mind when the biggest names in golf think about putting.

Weeks is one of two pros to win the IPGA Teacher of the Year Award three times (Dr. Jim Suttie is the other), in 2005,

Dave Pelz theory of straight back and straight through, but I wanted to know more than that.”

This insatiable thirst for knowledge is why the putting lab will continue to grow.

“I am about to increase to 15 cameras,” Weeks said. “The [weight balance] plate now has 4,500 sensors in it, and people don't even know they are standing on it. Adding that was one of the biggest things I have done. I have helped people simply by moving their weight around.”

Wheaton native Kevin Streelman—who is having a great 2013 season on the PGA Tour with a win and a second-place finish at The Players Championship—told me last year that he visited Weeks' putting lab, prompting changes to his weight balance. Those alterations are obviously paying dividends.

Weeks is even bringing his watchful eye and his data on the road. He has flown to PGA Tour stops about every other week in 2013 after going to 14 events last year. He also has been called out to a couple of Buy.Com events and worked the U.S. Women's Open last year in Kohler, Wis.

“The people at Southwest Airlines are getting to know me very well,” said Weeks. “I'm getting my share of frequent flyer miles.”

If you'd like the chance for Weeks to dissect your putting, you can call him at Cog Hill at (866)-COG-HILL.

Meanwhile, Johansen, the head professional at Blackberry Oaks in Bristol, has been on his own putting crusade.

“I was always a good ball striker, so I hit plenty of greens,” said Johansen. “But I never made many putts, so I focused my energies on how to improve in that area. I had

one round where I made a bunch of putts and shot in the low 60s. I knew then that I had to find a way to be a better putter.”

Some years later, Johansen is the inventor of a device called the Perfect Putting Aid, which is used by more 100 PGA Tour players. Pekin's D. A. Points picked one up earlier this year, and he wound up winning the Shell Houston Open on the PGA Tour that very week.

“Many golfers seem to practice with their driver, a club they only hit at most 14 times a round,” said Johansen. “Since you're putting on every hole, it pays to spend time practicing your putting.”

Johansen started his putting studio in the corner of the Blackberry Oaks pro shop in 2005, and every year he has further refined his craft. This year after golfers have taken a putting lesson from Johansen, he puts them through a game. The high score each month will be a finalist in a putt-off, to be held in the pro shop early in 2014. The winner of that contest will win a free trip to the Masters with Johansen in April.

The putting studio at Blackberry Oaks has multiple cameras, and Johansen also uses a laser to check putter alignment. While using a chalk line or poking a couple of tees in the green have been traditionally good ways to practice putting, Johansen wanted an even better technique for providing feedback.

“I have given a bunch of putting lessons, and students would say they will start using a chalk line,” said Johansen.



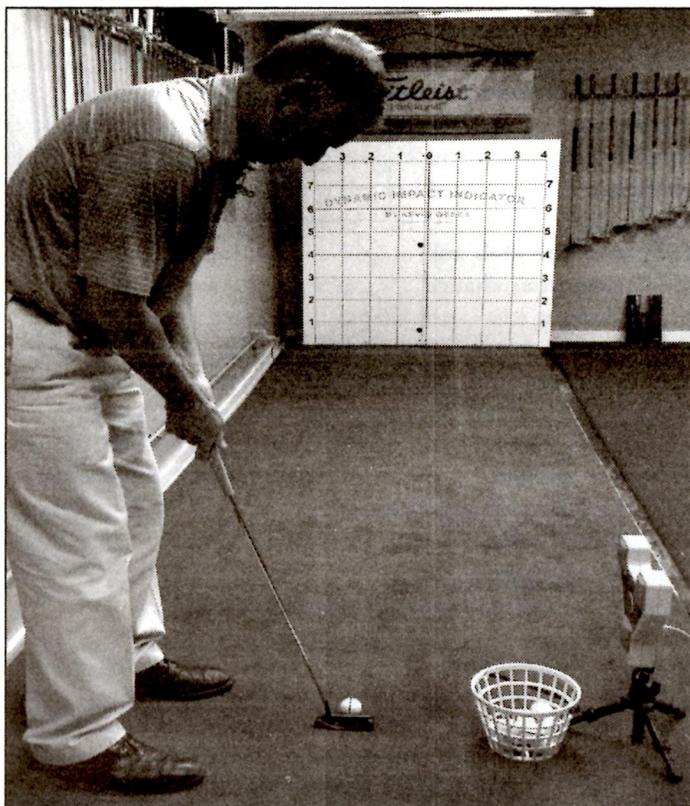
RORY SPEARS

“But I would never see any chalk lines on our putting greens. I had to find a way to putt a chalk line in people's golf bags.”

That led to the Perfect Putting Aid.

“I worked with some engineers on how to build it,” said Johansen. “I went through seven prototypes before it started coming together. Then I met [again] with the engineers. When we put all the ideas together, it came together pretty quickly.”

Chip Beck was the first touring player to see the virtues of the Perfect Putting Aid. A short time later, Johansen made a trip to the Disney PGA Tour stop, where he got 30 minutes with Vijay Singh. By using the



Kevin Weeks

2007, and 2009. “I have always won the award in the odd years,” said Weeks. “Maybe that's a way of telling me something.”

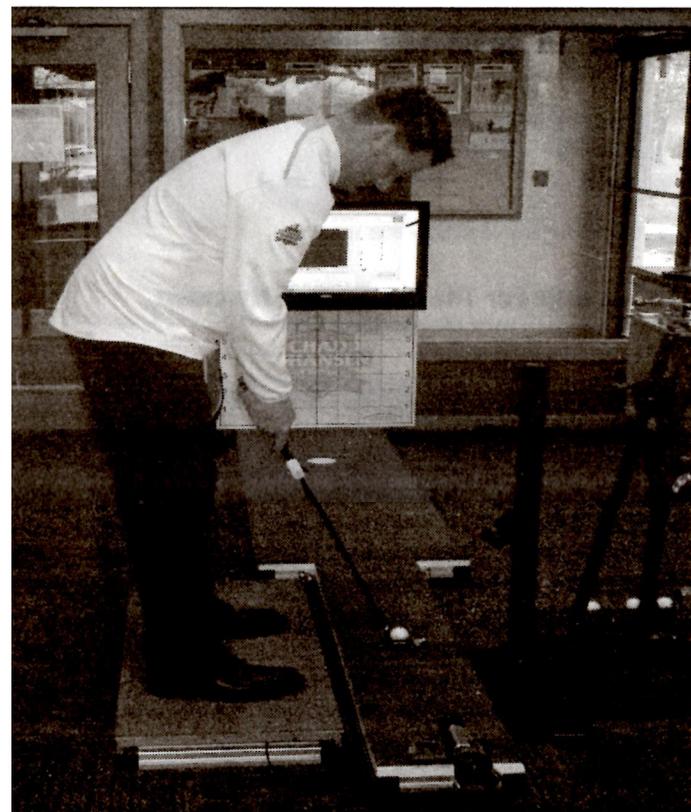
There is nothing odd about what Weeks has created in the top level of a barn that is located at the back of the driving range at Cog Hill in Lemont. It has evolved into a putting lab that has 12 cameras, three computers, a force plate (a device that checks weight balance), more than 60 putters for fitting, and a robot that helps with research. Weeks even has a patent on a laser system that helps golfers see where their putter is aimed, both when they take their stance and at impact with the golf ball. In addition, the system provides information on the loft of the putter at impact.

Feedback and data like this have brought more than 50 PGA Tour players to Weeks' putting lab. Some use the facility simply to provide data on what they are doing when they are rolling it well, but many others have actually worked with Weeks on improving their putting.

The numbers are about the same with top amateurs, such as those on college golf teams. More than 20 players who have played in USGA events over the past five years have worked with Weeks as well. Weeks' students include two Illinois state high school champions and a long list of top-10 finishers.

Weeks came relatively late to the game of golf, picking it up at age 17. He was fascinated by what accounts for the differences in good and great players.

“When I first started to research putting, there wasn't much information out there,” said Weeks. “There was the



Chad Johansen

Perfect Putting Aid, Singh was able to identify some of his putting flaws.

Johansen invested in a booth at the PGA Show in Florida, where he met someone who traveled the PGA Tour every week and who asked Johansen to be his representative on tour. They started in Phoenix last year, and now the Perfect Putting Aid is all over the PGA Tour. When Johansen went to the Masters this year, he saw Henrik Stenson and Nick Watney using it on the putting green.

“I can't put it into words when I saw that,” said Johansen. “To see it being using at Augusta was pretty cool.”

You, too, can utilize the Perfect Putting Aid by visiting the website (www.theperfectputtingaid.com) or by calling Johansen at Blackberry Oaks at (630)-553-7170.

Better yet, go see Johansen for a putting lesson. You could end up joining him at Augusta for next year's Masters.