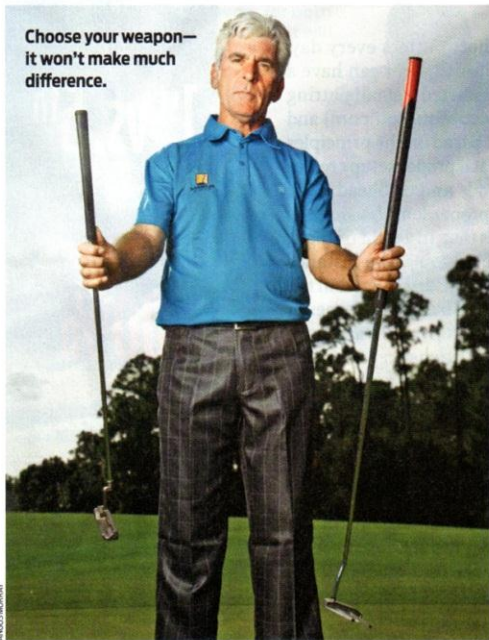


THE CASE AGAINST THE BELLY: MY RESEARCH SHOWS THAT YOU'LL MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES REGARDLESS OF THE PUTTER YOU USE

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Co-inventor: SAM PuttLab

I've been watching the belly putter trend grow on Tour just as you have, and while I've always held my own theories on the pros and cons of anchored putters, I couldn't say for sure if they improved or worsened players' strokes across various handicaps. So I put them to the test, comparing 1,600 strokes made with a belly putter with 1,600 strokes made with a conventional putter. Study participants included 20 Nationwide Tour professionals, 20 0- to 6-handicappers, 20 6- to 12-handicappers and 20 12- to 18-handicappers. Each player stroked 20 10-foot putts on a flat section of a putting green that was running at 11 on the Stimpmeter. We used the SAM PuttLab to measure 18 different stroke parameters on each and every putt. **What I found enforces one of the foundations of my long-standing teaching philosophy, which is that every golfer has a signature stroke pattern that's so hard-wired it's impossible to change it with a simple putter switch.**

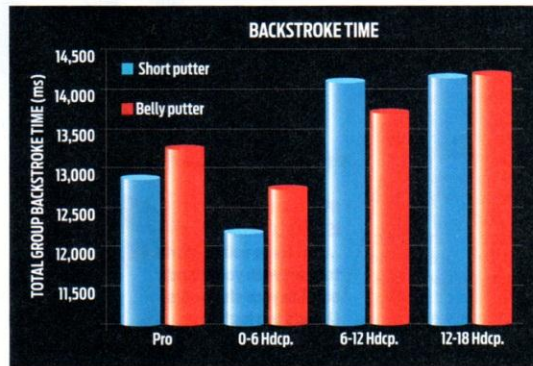
Choose your weapon—
it won't make much
difference.



COVER STORY: BELLY OR BUST

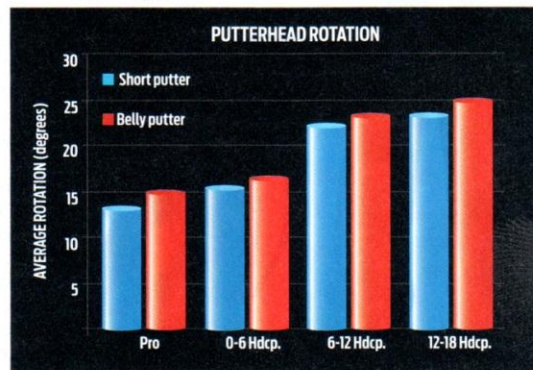
TEST RESULT No. 1 IT'S NOT THE HAMMER—IT'S THE CARPENTER

The results prove that a belly putter won't improve your stroke. Of the 18 parameters measured, 16 failed to show any statistically significant difference between strokes made with a belly putter and strokes made with a conventional putter across all skill levels. What we did find is that every parameter measured by PuttLab got worse as handicaps increased. The backstroke time results below were typical of the entire study—pros make better strokes than amateurs, and a stroke you make with a short putter will be similar to the stroke you make with a belly putter, and vice versa.



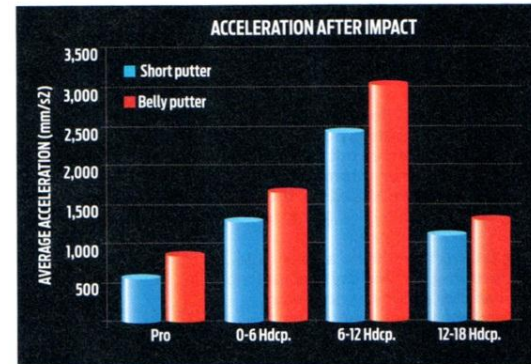
TEST RESULT No. 2 BELLY PUTTERS FUEL MORE ROTATION

Players tend to rotate the putterhead more with a belly putter than with a short model, and higher handicaps rotate more than low-handicaps and pros. Keep in mind that rotation is a good thing as long as you rotate the putterhead in relation to the target line and refrain from twisting it around the shaft. But the test data below shows that the majority of handicaps rotate the putterhead too much (most PGA Tour pros rotate the putterhead about 10 degrees on a 10-foot putt). So while anchoring a belly to your abdomen can certainly limit the amount you twist the putterhead, it won't stop a poor putter from over-rotating the head in relation to the line (a likely reaction to the extra head weight and longer stroke length). Putting is a craft, and to be good at it you need to control your tool, regardless of putter design and weighting.



TEST RESULT No. 3 EXTRA WEIGHT MEANS EXTRA ACCELERATION

The biggest difference between belly putters and short putters is that a belly model leads to extra acceleration after impact. It's also the biggest difference between pro strokes and amateur strokes. This is important because the putterhead should accelerate into impact and then slow down. Although the numbers below suggest that even good putters accelerate more after the ball with a belly putter, this certainly can be explained by weight. Many belly putter users on Tour tell me that they feel like they have to accelerate more with a belly because it feels heavier (which it is).



TEST RESULT No. 4 BELLYS ARE GOOD FOR SOMETHING

All golfers add loft at impact regardless of handicap and putter type. In other words, nobody delofts the putterface. Check the graph below—not a lot of delofting going on here, which makes it difficult to understand why it has become a popular method on Tour. In studying the best putters in the world, I've found that the vast majority point the grip in the same spot near their abdomen from start to finish, which you can't do if you lead with your left wrist and try to deloft the face. Here's where a belly putter can do you the most good: Because you anchor the grip to your abdomen, you're almost assured of making a pure pendulum stroke and adding loft at impact. It'll be interesting to see what happens if Phil Mickelson—a deloft proponent—actually makes the switch to a belly putter while using his signature stroke.

