

TEE TO GREEN

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THE art of green reading has been a source of great bafflement to yours truly. I have always been in awe of those self-assured golfers who look over a putt and declare confidently: "It's a ball to the right" - or whatever - and they make their stroke on that basis.

Sometimes the ball doesn't drop and you can see it was hit too hard or too soft, but essentially, it appears to me there are many golfers out there who seem to know what they're doing on the greens or are at least making educated guesses.

And what about caddies? How often do they operate from genuine knowledge or do they indulge in a little bit of hit and hope?

Professionals? Even the Tour pros get a read wrong, although it's not in their nature to admit it.

However, it transpires, many Tour pros have a little 'secret' that they're using and it's now available in Ireland to golfers of all levels.

It's called AimPoint, it was devised by an American named Mark Sweeney and it can help a golfer read any green anywhere in the world.

Sweeney is the guy who devised the fascinating computerised system seen on the Golf Channel where they lay down a virtual coloured line which shows the precise route to the hole of a professional's putt.

You can then see the golfer make his putt and clearly view where he has hit it off-line and the consequences of that or else see him follow the computerised blue line and roll the ball into the hole.

Before going into it further, let me revisit one little cameo at an AimPoint clinic held at Edmondstown golf club in Dublin by the head pro there, Gareth McShea, and teaching professional, Donal Scott.

McShea and Scott are the licensed coaches for the system in this country and they are getting a lot of calls from fellow pros to hold clinics in various clubs as word spreads about its effectiveness.

SLOPE

Anyway, the tutors picked a putt with a bit of slope and asked the participants to read it as they normally would and show them where the golfers would aim a putt and how much break there was in it.

First to go was an experienced teaching pro, followed by a competition-hardened single-figure handicapper. Both of them opted for a right to left fall down the slope and agreed on a point about a foot to the right of the cup.

Gareth and Donal then had them go through the AimPoint procedure they were learning and, lo and behold, the correct line was actually nine inches on the left side.

If two such experienced golfers could be wrong on that one, what chance has the average muggins? Well, muggins could well reduce the odds on missing putts using this system, although it takes practice.

It might help to note that LPGA pro Stacy Lewis, who played in the Solheim Cup here, took six months to totally familiarise herself with it, but top pros including Justin Rose, Juli Inkster, Suzann Pettersen and many others are taking out their AimPoint charts and using them to assist with their green reading.

Closer to home, Donal Scott recounted the tale of a six-handicap who played in a scramble at Edmondstown. "He had learned AimPoint from us and did the putts on the greens and the group had only 20 points in total."

The whole thing began when Mark Sweeney was watching the British Open on television in 2004 and wondered why a succession of players kept missing a particular putt in the same direction.

Sweeney, who works with computers,



Golfers taking part in an AimPoint putting clinic held at New Forest Golf Club recently. The system is designed to aid in accurate reading of greens for putting

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Green revolution can help players read between lines

believes in the laws of physics, and doesn't hold with notions that a golf ball is influenced by the nearest body of water or anything mystical.

He devised a computer programme that was eventually adopted by the Golf Channel that adds an informative and entertaining feature to TV viewing, but for golfers in the real world, his other AimPoint innovations have opened up new horizons.

Donal Scott became aware of it through contact he made with John Graham, one of the most highly qualified AimPoint instructors.

Scott and McShea, both from Ballyshannon, Co Donegal, attended a clinic held by Graham and were amazed.

"What blew me away was that in my entire career in golf I have been guessing how much break there was on putts. For the first time ever I had a way where I could accurately predict break to within half an inch," said Scott.

The two golf pros availed of the

opportunity to become licensed AimPoint coaches and have been holding clinics in the country since September.

"It's like having a range finder on the greens. The range-finders give you yardages and AimPoint gives you reads.

"If you want to know whether you've got 87 yards or 100 yards to the pin, you should also want to know whether you've got to play two inches or six inches of break on a putt.

"That's the way most people have received it. They're just shocked that you can learn accurately how to predict break on any putt," said Scott.

Participants at an AimPoint 'Fundamentals' clinic will learn which factors control the break of a putt, how to identify them, and how to begin reading putts based on position.

The Fundamentals clinic lasts two and a half hours and costs €100. At the end, each participant receives an AimChart which is essential to the system and class notes for refreshing the memory afterwards.

AimPoint is approved by the R & A and by

the USGA, so no problem there.

How hard is it to learn? Scott replied: "It's like anything. You're learning a new skill and skills have to be practised.

"But for example, last weekend after two hours of a clinic, Danielle McVeigh (ex-Curtis Cup player, now a professional) read a 50 foot, triple-breaking putt within about 30 seconds.

"In the clinic we gave at New Forest recently, one of the pros that attended said to us afterwards: 'It's great lads, but it's so simple,' and I said: 'Bingo, that's what we want to hear.'

"What we've found is that if somebody can have the read straight away, they're mentally so clear on what they have to do with their putts.

"It clears away any doubts or confusion about what they're trying to do or what they're trying to achieve on putts."

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