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## Sports

# New Gadgets for Golfers

By Dan Whipple

**Hackers are turning to technology to bring their games up to par.**

**T**hey'll try driver heads the size of softballs and fairway woods shaped like a crooner's microphone to cure their hooks and slices. Duffers will do anything to knock the ball farther and straighter — except maybe practice at the driving range or use the weight room.

Some of these gadgets even work. During the last decade or so, golf-ball physics have increased carry and roll, clubheads have gotten larger and lighter and shafts can be crafted to fit individual swings.

Now two companies are applying space-age materials and technology to the age-old attempts to outwit the gods of golf: Rhode Island-based Quadrax is producing a thermoplastic composite putter that promises straighter, stronger putts, while California's Dynalaser Technologies is offering the Stabilaser Interactive Training System, or SITS, which uses lasers to teach golfers to keep their heads steady.

Quadrax is a longtime defense contractor that turned its expertise to sporting goods with the end of the Cold War. The company makes tennis rackets, hockey sticks and other gear in addition to the putter. "Thermoplastic is very much like steel or aluminum," says John McQuade, company vice president for administration. "You can forge it or shape it."

The Quadrax putter helps golfers several ways, he says. "The material in the center is very, very light. But the weight distribution is to the outside, which tends to square up the face and keep it square. What you get is a very

stable putting platform."

Golfers get a lot of ball speed with this putter, forcing them to slow down and shorten their backswings. "When you put those two factors together — a short backswing and stable weighting — you don't get the head changing direction," says McQuade. "The net result is that the putter stays very straight." The Quadrax putter retails for \$99.

All golfers, from beginners to professionals, are aware of the importance of keeping their heads still during their swings. It is a fundamental technique but one difficult to master. A number of jury-rigged training tools have been developed by golf instructors to teach the concept. SITS uses laser technology to assure proper head position.

The laser is in a 3-inch square box that clips to the visor of a cap and projects a red dot onto the ball. If the golfer's head moves during the swing, the dot moves off the ball. "It's like holding a flashlight on your head," says Dynalaser President Al Tweedie.

Dynalaser has been researching swing techniques and analyzing how athletes learn. "We conducted two years of study," says Tweedie. "This is territory that had not been traveled." One advantage the laser has over mechanical techniques: The visual feedback is so immediate, a golfer can correct his or her swing in progress. The disadvantage is it requires practice. "Most golfers want to buy their way to success," Tweedie admits. "Everybody



**Quadrax:** Let the good putts roll.

really knows that the only way you're going to improve is by improving your skills."

SITS' prize student has been PGA Tour golfer Nick Price, who began using a prototype of the Stabilaser in November 1993. He trained with it and had it "in his bag," as they say, during the 1994 season, one of the best by a single golfer in the modern history of the game. Price credited the device with improving his putting. Since then, the company has worked with more than 100 touring pros.

The Stabilaser could be used in other sports that require a steady head position, including baseball, basketball and tennis. The consumer version of the Stabilaser will become available in September, retailing for \$99. ●