

Nathan Crace's

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## The Curse of the Golf Gods

By: Nathan Crace    Date: July 24, 2007

Like most sports, golf has its fair share of superstitions and strange beliefs. We all have the little quirky things we do and don't do in any given round of golf. From the standard things like only using white tees and certain numbers on golf balls to lucky ball markers or the special putter you keep coming back to year after year, the permutations are endless. We even have superstitions and beliefs about other players.

Years ago, I opined that the golf gods would never allow one of the four men's majors (The Masters, The US Open, The British Open, and the PGA Championship) to be won with a long putter. I rationalized that it was just too non-traditional and that the four pillars of the game's upper echelon would be tainted if such a noxious instrument were to be used to win a major. To bolster my argument, simply do a little research. Most are quick to disbelieve me and usually point to Vijay Singh's run a few years ago. But if you go back and look at photos of his wins at The Masters and PGA Championship, you will see that he had a traditional length putter in his bag for those wins. He has switched back and forth between the long stick and the short stick through his career, but no major championship hardware has found itself on Singh's mantle at the hands of a long putter. I also tend to think that putting styles such as "The Claw" grip are likewise frowned upon by such higher powers (see Chris DiMarco's runner-up finishes at the PGA and Masters), but feel that they have a better chance of breaking through than a long putter.

There are some major champions such as Ernie Els who believe that "belly" putters that are braced against the player's stomach as a means of anchoring the putter should be banned. I for one tend to agree with him. Why should a player be allowed to anchor the club against his or her stomach to help take the stress out of those testy three and four footers for par? A considerable part of the mental aspect of the game of golf is being able to convert those putts when you're hands are shaky from nerves. Got the yips? Get over it! It's part of the game. And the fact that a 36-inch putt counts for the same number of strokes as a 320-yard drive is part of what makes golf so much more than other games such as football and baseball. Sure you have to know what you're doing to excel at any sport, but if Peyton Manning starts getting shaky in the pocket, the offense can start running the ball instead of passing it. They don't bring in a brace for his arm so he throws better. Why then do the best golfers in the world get to do so?

When I saw Sergio Garcia finish up the third round of the 2007 British Open with a three shot lead and his belly putter, I could not help but cringe. Had my theory been disproved? Was I about to see my declaration for so many years be blown from the water by the world's current "best player not to have won a major?" In the end, of course, Garcia would falter and lose in a four-hole playoff, thus preserving the theory. Bad news for Sergio, good news for Nathan's proposition. And as a side note, a friend of mine actually used said theory to win a gentleman's wager for \$100 from another viewer as late as Garcia's 72-hole of regulation play.

Whether or not you believe in my idea or in superstitions at all for that matter, consider the deeper meaning behind my idea. Do I believe that there really are "golf gods" that will not allow a long putter to win a major? Of course not. But I do believe that the very reason a player puts such a club in his or her bag is because they have a problem with short putts that is tied to an inherent weakness in the player's mental game. This same mental weakness is what prevents said player from holding up under the pressure of winning a major. Even those who have won majors and now have long putters in their bags are doing so because they are once again battling the demons of yips and nerves on short putts. So even if you won't be playing in a major any time soon, if you have a long putter in your bag for any reason other than a bad back, do yourself and your game a favor and get rid of it. Go back to the traditional length putter and learn to overcome your nerves. You'll enjoy the game so much more, even if you have to use your driver again for those free drops from landscape beds.

*Nathan Crace is a golf course architect and member of the Golf Writers Association of America whose freelance "Lipouts" column appears in a number of regional and national golf publications. If you would like to read past columns from the archives, log on to [www.lipouts.com](http://www.lipouts.com). Copyright 2007.*