

RORY MCILROY

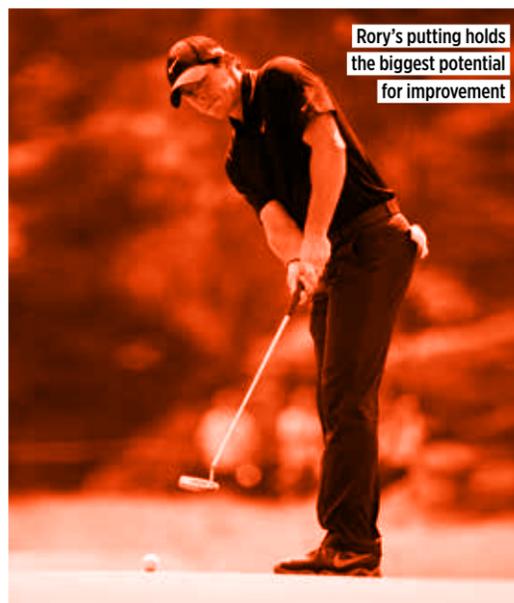
Force of nature

On his day, he's the best in the business, but can Rory get back to the top? *Golf Monthly* Top 25 Coach Barney Puttick looks at the Ulsterman's technical strengths and weaknesses

Rory McIlroy is the most naturally gifted of the three players. He is certainly more streaky than Jordan Spieth, but when Rory putts well, he usually wins. Often by a long way. I'll come onto his putting later, but with McIlroy the most eye-catching element of his game is the fluency and power of his driving. What separates him from the other top drivers of the golf ball is the speed of his hips through impact. This is something you can only really see in super-slow motion, and, even then, it's hard to detect. Halfway through the downswing his hips have cleared and are already facing the target. This rotation creates both speed for the club and room for it to attack the ball. Rory is almost twice as fast in this phase

of the swing as any other player – this is a move he has had since his junior days. The strength and conditioning work he has done allows him to control that speed.

In the past, McIlroy had a tendency for the club to get trapped behind him on the way down, but this is rarely a problem now. The plane of his downswing is much closer to the plane of his backswing and that's enabled him to become a much



Rory's putting holds the biggest potential for improvement

“What separates him from other drivers of the ball is the speed of his hips through impact”

more consistent driver of the golf ball. The immense lag that translates into incredible power, especially for a man of only 5ft 10ins, is still there, but he's added more reliability to his downswing and that's what has made him the best driver of the golf ball on the planet at the moment.

While none of us could copy Rory's unique hip clearance, what we can all

emulate is Rory's balance in the finish. This is something he's done ever since he was a junior and a good finish position usually comes as a result of a good swing.

For me, the area that holds the biggest potential for improvement is his putting. Rory is a very good putter, but, as I mentioned earlier, he's streaky. A close look at his technique reveals why. Rory is clearly a disciple of Dave Stockton. He doesn't have a practice swing, then as he stands over the ball there is a small forward press before he takes the club away. Rory has a very low left wrist through the strike and his action is what I would describe as an old-fashioned 'hit and hold', where the follow-through is a lot shorter than the backswing. It's reminiscent of Brandt Snedeker's 'pop' stroke. These are all good, technically strong elements and Rory is supreme from close range – he holed 99 per cent of putts from inside 3ft last year. But where Rory suffers in comparison to Spieth is from mid-range. The mechanical nature of his stroke, which works so well from short range, prevents him from having the flow and rhythm that is so important.

I would like to see Rory develop a more flowing putting game. Perhaps by making a practice stroke on the line, looking at the hole and then stepping back to hit the ball, he'd alleviate some of the tension in his forearms. Alternatively, he could try what Tiger used to do – make some one-handed practice swings. This is a relatively small adjustment to make, but if it could help him hole more 20-footers, Rory would win more tournaments – his long game is that good!

Covering the ball. Notice how Rory's sternum is over the ball through impact. This is something all great ball-strikers have in common, as they maintain their posture from address through to impact

Weight shift. Rory's heel is off the ground here, revealing a textbook weight shift onto the left side through the strike

Extension. Rory's arms extend fully through impact (unlike Spieth) as he releases the angles in his wrists and elbows. This provides a real explosion of power

Hip rotation. Rory's magic move injects power and helps the club work on a great path through impact. His body rotation leads his arm swing, providing fantastic consistency in his long game



WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

DRIVER:
Nike Vapor Fly Pro 8.5" (Mitsubishi Rayon Diamana 70 X shaft)

3-WOOD:
Nike Vapor Speed 15" (Fujikura Rombax Pro 95 X shaft)

5-WOOD:
Nike Vapor Speed 19" (Fujikura Rombax Pro 95 X shaft)

4-9 IRONS:
Nike VR Pro Blades (Project X 7.0 shafts)

WEDGES:
Nike VR Forged 46°, 52°, 56° & Nike Engage 59°

PUTTER:
Nike Method Origin B20T

BALL:
Nike RZN