

By Jeff Rude

**S**tan Utley's career as a renowned putting instructor was launched in the dark of night on a gravel driveway. It was springtime 2001 in Greenville, S.C., and his pupil, Jay Haas, held a 6-iron instead of a putter during that impromptu lesson after dinner because it was the only club available. In the coming years, the student's improved stroke would greatly elevate the earning power and professional lives of both men.

"Both of us are smiling because of the relationship," Haas says now.

Haas, then 47, would break out of his only pronounced slump and transform into one of the world's best players around the unlikely age of 50. He rose to 15th in PGA Tour earnings and made the Presidents Cup team in 2003, the year he hit the half-century mark, and played in the Ryder Cup the next season. He has ranked 1-1-2 in income during his three full-time Champions Tour seasons (2006-08). Such success, he says, merits a "big attaboy" for the mentor.

Appreciation is mutual. A short-hitting, low-key journeyman known for a spectacular short game, Utley then was trying to scratch out a living on the 2001 Nationwide Tour and contemplating a shift to teaching more than just a few buddies on the side. He since has become a short-game marvel with a lucrative practice that commands handsome retainers from several touring

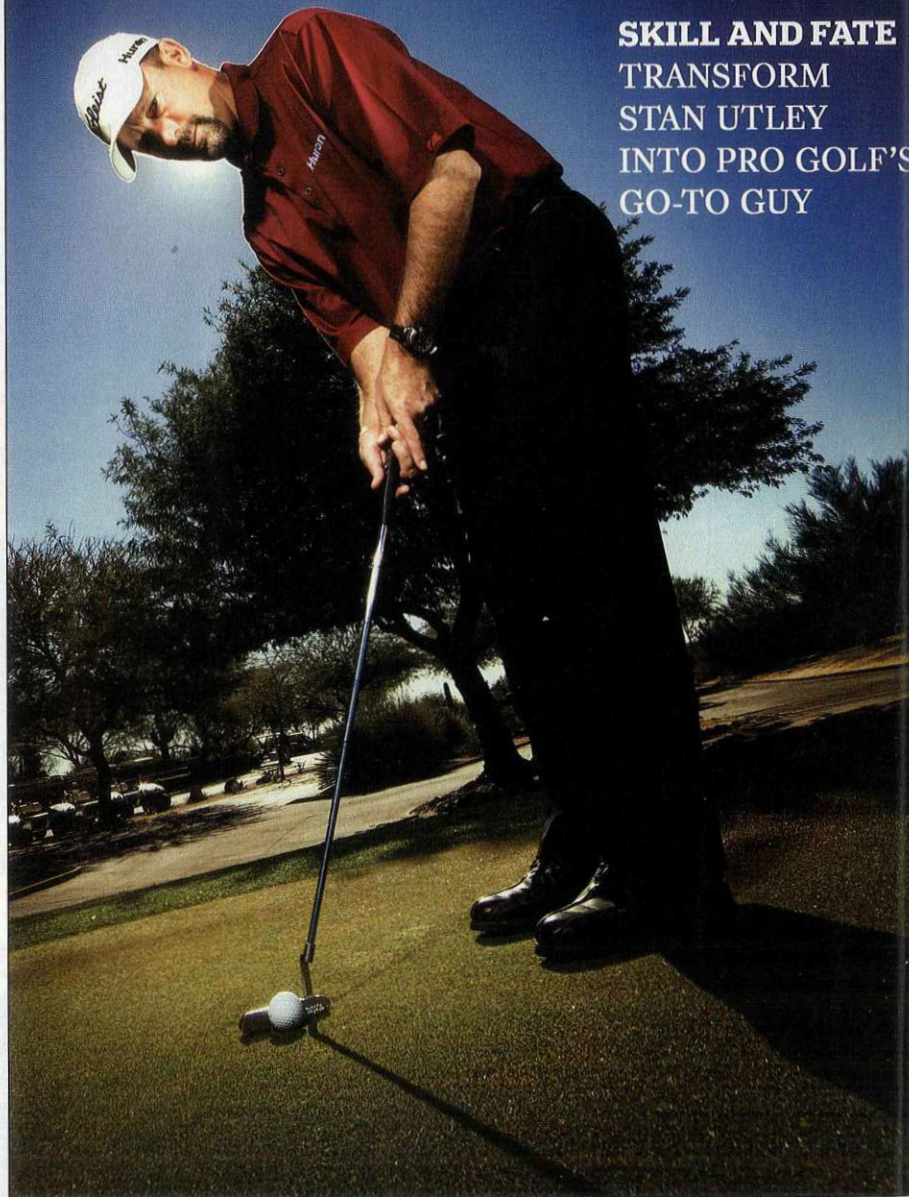
professionals, most notably world No. 2 Sergio Garcia, and \$1,500 for a three-hour, one-on-one lesson with amateurs at Grayhawk Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz.

As Utley's fame has grown, his fee

has more than tripled during the past five years. His corporate outings reached nearly 30 last year, even though he operates without an agent. Income from his current gig dwarfs that of his two-decade competitive

# On a roll

SKILL AND FATE  
TRANSFORM  
STAN UTLEY  
INTO PRO GOLF'S  
GO-TO GUY



career, during which he never finished better than 108th in PGA Tour season earnings and posted only six top 10s.

Other than winning the 1989 Chattanooga Classic, held the same week as the NEC World Series of Golf, and three Nationwide titles, Utley's competitive highlight was a nine-hole feat linked to brilliant chipping and errant full shots. He set the PGA Tour record for fewest putts for nine holes (six) in 2002. That would serve as another wonderful piece of marketing.

"I didn't set out to have this great teaching career," says a grateful Utley, 47. "At first it was just helping friends. Then Jay Haas put me on the map. He gave me credibility and drove others to me."

Utley has taught more than 100 Tour players, usually about a dozen annually, and last year traveled to 18 tournaments as an instructor. His star rose initially with the resurgence of aging students. Besides Haas, in 2003 Craig Stadler became the first Champions Tour player to win on the PGA Tour, and Peter Jacobsen won in Hartford at age 49. Last year, the likes of Garcia, Henrik Stenson, Joe Durant, Dudley Hart and Kevin Streelman paid him retainers, and Corey Pavin and another current player with double-digit Tour victories were among those visiting.

Utley's philosophy with putting, chipping and pitching is the same: Swing the club on plane, like a miniature swing. He teaches keeping the face square to the arc, meaning the clubhead travels inside the target line going back and releases inside the target line following through. The image is of a door opening and closing. That opposes the shoulder-rocking, straight-back, straight-through motion taught by Dave Pelz and used by highly regarded short-game player Loren Roberts.

Utley also advocates holding the shaft in the lifeline of both hands, positioning the eyes slightly inside



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*Stan Utley's tutelage is in high demand, from Sergio Garcia to Wisconsin freshman Jessica Gerry.*

the target line, starting the clubhead away first, having soft elbows that hinge (the left releasing back after impact) and leaning the shaft forward through impact.

"There are a few exceptions to everything," Utley said. "I would never, ever change Loren Roberts' stroke, but I wouldn't teach it. I don't think Loren would want you to."

Utley maintains that substandard putting stems from poor technique before becoming mental. Last February in Tucson, Ariz., during the first of a half-dozen 2008 sessions with Garcia, he deduced the Spaniard had lost the natural putting stroke of his teens after trying five or six methods. Utley noticed Garcia was striking the ball too low on a sometimes open face. Utley says moving the hands forward and ball position back led to a square face and a better roll.

"A few solid putts changed his attitude," said Utley, who visited Garcia in Spain for the first time earlier this month. "He got the feeling back, and golf was more fun.

It's usually not until (Tour players) free up and don't worry about being so precise with the putter that it becomes easy."

Three months after that initial meeting in Arizona, Garcia won The Players Championship after, remarkably, making seven putts of 7 feet or longer on the last 14 regulation holes. That further brightened Utley's star. Though the Spaniard's putting statistics for '08 were worse than the year before, his results, world ranking and mind-set improved. He expressed increased confidence and demonstrated that he's more equipped to win a major championship than ever.

"At least now I have some rounds where I come out and say I actually shot what I should have (instead of saying) I should have been four or five shots better," Garcia said months after his first session with Utley.

Utley discovered he liked teaching when, in the late 1990s, he dabbled at it out of financial necessity and to fill time during the offseason. He started charging Tour players in 2001 at his wife's urging, and that billing made it "OK for guys who weren't my buddies to ask for help."

Such as Haas. Under Utley's watch, Haas strengthened his left-hand grip, arced the putterhead instead of hooding it, and felt his shoulders moving around his spine instead of up and down. He listened largely because he had likened Utley's smooth putting to a "fish swimming." The result for Haas was putts that tended to roll instead of skid.

A few months after they started, Utley watched Haas play nine holes at the Greater Milwaukee Open. By Haas' count, he made four putts outside 20 feet on that side. Little wonder then that, some 7-plus seasons later, Haas still visits Utley a couple of times per year and continues to send him business.

"I still have players come up to me and ask if I have Stan's number," Haas said recently. "I smile and tell them, 'I sure do.' "