

See Straight - by James Achenbach - [ww.golfweek.com](http://www.golfweek.com)



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James Achenbach - [GolfWeek](#)

PACIFIC PALISADES, Calif. - Other than the fact that I uncovered the Orator of the Year on the PGA Tour and learned how to sink 10-foot putts like some kind of putting fool, it was an uneventful day at Hollywood-friendly Riviera Country Club.

Movie stars used to frolic here at Riviera, which opened in 1926. Now, 83 years later, the Northern Trust Open, starring Phil Mickelson as the boy who lost his golf game, begins with a Thursday matinee.

But, what the heck, I was too busy pursuing my practice day adventures to think about the actual start of competition. Orator of the Year, I said to myself, should be a title bestowed on some worthy golfer.

And suddenly there was D.J. Trahan, winner of the 2008 Bob Hope Classic and a tall, intimidating young man of 28 who polished his oratory skills at Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina, where he earned a sports management degree in 2003 despite terrorizing his teachers for four years.

OK, I made that up. There is a rumor that Trahan didn't go to class enough to scare his teachers, although I know for a fact that his college golf coach, Larry Penley, insisted on his players going to class and preparing diligently for final exams in demanding subjects such as "How to hit lob shots" and "How to tell the difference between a steel shaft and a graphite shaft."

Just kidding, Clemson fans. Those Tigers are fine academic animals. Sorry, I mean students.

As I followed Trahan on the course, along with his playing companions Vaughn Taylor and Jeff Quinney, I heard him utter a statement that immediately moved me to declare him PGA Tour Orator of the Year.

After Quinney raised the subject of Alex Rodriguez, the drug-pumped and universally disgraced slugger of the New York Yankees, Trahan called A-Rod a “stone cold betrayer of the trust of youth.”

Nobody, not even a twisted journalist, could invent such a statement.

Trahan’s declaration got my attention, because the last thing any athlete wants is to be called a “stone cold” anything by someone from the state of South Carolina. Tommy Bowden was the Clemson football coach until October 2008, at which time he was accused of being a stone cold betrayer of a winning gridiron tradition, prompting him to quit in the middle of the season.

“There wasn’t a gun to his head,” said athletic director Terry Don Phillips, although nobody really believes a man with two first names.

All things considered, I don’t expect Rodriguez to register for the D.J. Trahan Fan Club, although stranger things have happened.

Strange, like my newfound ability to make putts. I owe it all to Pat O’Brien, one of the most intriguing golf instructors who ever attempted to read a triple-breaking putt.

The 39-year-old O’Brien, who teaches at Lakewood Country Club in Dallas, Texas, has what he calls a “dream job.” He teaches Lakewood members, yet he is free to travel to PGA Tour events and teach touring pros as well.

Here at Riviera, O’Brien was performing a 5,000-mile checkup on prize students Zach Johnson (pictured) and Vaughn Taylor. It is no coincidence that Johnson and Taylor are longtime users of SeeMore putters, while O’Brien is a spokesman for SeeMore.

SeeMore, of course, is the putter brand with the red dot on the heel of the putter. At address, by covering the red dot with the putter shaft, a golfer knows the putter blade is square to the line of the putt.

O’Brien is a putting specialist. Technically he is called a short game coach, but putting is his passion.

There is a wonderful story about O’Brien’s involvement with SeeMore. As a high school senior, he was asked by Nathaniel Crosby, the former U.S. Amateur champion and son of entertainer Bing Crosby, if he would like to caddy for Nathaniel’s brother, Harry, in the Bing Crosby National Pro-Am.

O’Brien jumped at that opportunity, and Harry ended up being paired with Payne Stewart. Over the years, O’Brien stayed in touch with Stewart, who eventually put a SeeMore putter in his bag and won the 1999 U.S. Open with it. That was good enough for O’Brien, who joined up with SeeMore himself.

O'Brien is a putting fundamentalist. Place the ball, club and your body in what he considers the proper position, and you have a much better chance of making putts. An overly dominant right hand is not allowed. Open shoulders are not allowed. Eyes that are tilted outside the target line are not allowed.

How about this gem from O'Brien?

"Television commentators always say the putter head should be low coming back and low through the ball. That's not the natural arc of the putting stroke. What do they know? The reason they are commentators is that they couldn't make enough putts."

Or this one?

"Just about every one of the great putters in the world uses a toe-down putter. You don't see [Tiger Woods](#) using a face-balanced putter, do you? Face-balanced putters do a great job of compensating for mistakes in the putting stroke, but the best putters with the best strokes prefer toe-down putters."

Note to the players in my regular foursome: Watch out, because I will never miss another putt inside 10 feet. I have been O'Brienized.

OK, maybe I lied, but dreaming of a superlative putting stroke is something I like to do when I'm not searching for Orator of the Year on the PGA Tour.