

## THE POWER OF ONE—THE 1-IRON, THAT IS

I'VE BEEN RELUCTANT to write about golf equipment, feeling that should be left to experts on new technology or championship-level players. Occasionally, though, I make an exception, and this is one of those times.

Joe Jung, a Chicago guy, is a big reason for that. I met Jung at last month's International Network of Golf (ING) spring conference in Sebring, Fla.



Ziehm interviews Papadourakis of Sacks Parente putters.

While Chicago's major golf equipment manufacturers Wilson and Tour Edge were also represented, the demo day portion of the annual four-day event produced an excellent opportunity to get acquainted with more unusual products. Golf always has plenty of those, but Jung has done the unthinkable. He's co-founder of a company that is bringing back the 1-iron.

Remember the old saying, "Only God can hit a 1-iron"? I believed it, but Jung disagrees—even though the manufacturers of that club are almost nonexistent.

"It's only us," said Jung, who grew up in the Rogers Park section of Chicago and now lives in Lindenhurst. His company, New Ground Golf, was established last year in Lombard.

Jung started as a caddie at North Shore Country Club in the 1970s. He played college golf at Northeastern Illinois and then managed a Strictly Golf retail store in the Chicago area. Later on, he held jobs with—among others—club manufacturers Callaway, MacGregor, Zero Friction and Volvik.

His partners in New Ground Golf include Lon Varchetto, who spent more than two decades at the longtime Chicago club manufacturer Northwestern.

One-irons haven't been much of a factor in golf since the 1980s, much to Jung's chagrin.

"A lot of us—those of us with steep swings—were disappointed when hybrids came out and long irons went away," said Jung. "We have iron swings. You can't get steep with a hybrid because the hybrid will go right under the ball and the ball goes straight up in the air."

In addition to 1-irons, New Ground produces 2- and 3-irons.

"They're all very easy to hit and affordable," said Jung. "The whole idea is to have clubs you can hit high or low out of bunkers. You don't have clubs like that anymore."

Maybe Jung is right. Maybe the time is right for the 1-iron to make a comeback. As always, it'll be the recreational players like you and me who will determine whether such a club works or not.

Jung wasn't the only Chicago guy to show off his wares at the ING event. An old friend, Angelo Papadourakis, was there with the new Sacks Parente putter line. Angelo's a Merit Club member who invented the Swing Smart, a club attachment that intrigued me a few years back.

While he remains involved with Swing Smart, Papadourakis' putter line is much different. He is executive vice president of Sacks Parente Golf, based in San Pablo Camarillo, Calif.

"I started a consulting business in golf technology, and those guys told me they were bringing some technology to putting," said Papadourakis.

The key to the new Sacks Parente putters is their balance point.

"We're coming out with mallets and blades, and they all have ultra-low balance points," said Papadourakis. "So, when you putt with one, the putter always wants to get square and release. You don't have to fight it or steer it. It feels different, very unique. It has a really nice feeling."

These putters don't come cheap, though. The starting price point is \$600.

"Because of the metals we use, it's premium product," said Papadourakis. "We call it a performance tool."

Choose a Sacks Parente putter with a carbon fiber shaft, and that means an upgrade. The price goes up to \$900. The top-of-the-line Tour Head model, which is milled in Texas, is \$1,200.

One other product on display, the Golf Skate Caddie, had a Chicago connection. Ken Koldenhoven, president for the company with exclusive rights to sales in the United States and the Bahamas, grew up in Orland Park and attended Carl Sandburg High School. While the bulk of



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his family still lives in the Orland Park area, Koldenhoven now resides in West Palm Beach, Fla.

The Skate Caddie also merits attention, and that was particularly evident after the PGA of America allowed John Daly to use a traditional power cart in this year's Senior PGA Championship. Using a Skate Caddie would have been a better option than the standard power cart, Koldenhoven believes.

"With a Skate Caddie, he'd be able to stand and see what's going on," Koldenhoven said. "They'd also be good for officials to use because they'd be up higher and could see more."

The Skate Caddie is one of the latest modes of on-course transportation. There were two previous versions before the present one was introduced.

"The others had a motor in the front and a motor in the back," said Koldenhoven. "We moved both to the back to free up the steering motion in front. That makes it a whole lot easier to steer."

That's in sharp contrast to the GolfBoards, which have made inroads at many Chicago area clubs as well as nationwide. I tried a GolfBoard and found it fun, but perhaps because I was never much into skiing, I needed more time to learn how to use it. Koldenhoven has no issue with GolfBoards.

"They're safe, too. We're both safe," he said. "We're both all about making golf a better game."

While we gravitated to the Chicago products, there were a couple other interesting ones. The Putting Arc is an elaborate set of training aids designed to encourage better performance on the greens. Its product line has items ranging from \$7.95 to \$79.95. Dave Hamilton, president and co-inventor, is from Shannon, Miss.

And then there was the 4YardsMore golf tee. It's produced by Greenkeepers, Inc., of Philadelphia and is billed as "the first and only tee proven in both robotic and field tests to improve distance."

I tried that tee and had trouble finding those extra four yards, but then again that could be just me. All the products were worth a try, but making a purchase? That's another matter.