

SUPER BOWL XLIII PREVIEW
Kickoff: 6:28 p.m. Eastern
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■ Five teams await their first trip to the Super Bowl. Dave Anderson, Page 4.

■ Cardinals defensive tackle Darnell Dockett is a joker with a serious side. Page 5.

■ The party spirit in Tampa is alive, if somewhat muted by the recession. Page 7.

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Selling the Putting Game To Offset the Downturn

By LARRY DORMAN

ORLANDO, Fla. — Though positive economic indicators were few at the annual PGA Merchandise Show, where attendance this weekend was off by an estimated 7 percent, one small segment of the golf industry — upstart putter companies — may be positioned to benefit from aspects of the economic downturn.

With inventory of premium woods and irons mounting on retail shelves and in pro shops, evidence that golfers are unwilling to spend \$599 for a new driver or \$1,800 for a new set of irons, standalone putter companies are hoping consumers will turn the putter into the must-have club for golf addicts craving something

Upstart firms market putters as irons and woods move slowly.

new to feed their habit.



See More Putter's M3 Mallet is among the new products.

Jim Grundberg, the owner and managing partner at See More Putters, agreed. Grundberg was part of the original team that started Odyssey from obscurity to success, and he says there is a window of opportunity for companies like his to mirror Odyssey's success if they can design and create superior products that have a story, preferably about technology, told in an energetic and engaging way.

"Putting really is the one category where average golfers can look at the best players in the world and aspire to be close to as good as those players are," he said. "What we do with the technology in our putters is to give average players a system where they can be confident they are set up properly and lock in precisely

on the target, to eliminate one of the variables."

The variables in the current business climate will be slightly more difficult to eliminate. If the downturn persists into spring, and existing inventory in the shops does not sell through, there will likely be steep discounting that will hurt all companies, regardless of size. That is the sobering reality.