

# RISING STAR

John Whitbread finds ex-Wentworth scholar Ross Fisher in good form

**“I have shown I can figure on the final day of a tournament”**

**F**riday lunchtime at the 2006 BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth and a cluster of reporters are interviewing a young golfer who has just finished his second round. A couple of intrigued fans speculate on his identity: “Don’t think he’s one of the big boys,” says one. “Better get his autograph,” says the other. “He could be one for the future.”

A good judge, that spectator, for the young man in question was Wentworth’s own discovery Ross Fisher, who had just made the half-way cut quite comfortably on his debut at the players’ flagship event on his home course. Ross, 25, went on to finish in joint-41st place on one-over par 289. It wasn’t quite the dramatic conclusion he might have dreamed of, but his admiring supporters were in full agreement when he declared: “I could still walk away with my head held high.”

“I was delighted even to qualify for our biggest event of the Tour schedule,” says Ross, who arrived at Wentworth with little time to practise, after finishing fifth in the rain-delayed Irish Open. He also had to compete under the added pressure of having many of his family, friends and fellow Wentworth members in the crowd. “It was only on the Saturday that everything really caught up with me. The pressure finally got to me a bit, but at least I kept playing some decent golf.”

The BMW PGA Championship was just part of the story as Ross came flying out of the blocks in his rookie 2006 season. In the China Open, his first event after qualifying for the European Tour, he claimed a superb joint-fourth place. With joint-third place in the OSIM Singapore Masters, plus another top-five finish, Ross finished in a highly respectable 66th place in the end of season Order of Merit. He also picked up a Jaguar into the bargain for winning the nearest-the-pin competition at the Quinn Direct Masters at The Belfry.

It has been a remarkable rise to fame for Ross. His step-dad Keith first introduced him to golf when he was just three and then, crucially, spotted a story in the local *Herald* newspaper asking for candidates for the then fledgling Wentworth Foundation Scholarship. It wasn’t long before Ross began making a name for himself.

“I had a great time as a scholar and I owe everyone at Wentworth, including Richard Caring, a great deal of gratitude for the continued sponsorship,” says Ross.

And it’s to Wentworth that Ross still comes to hone his craft under the gaze of his coach and Wentworth teaching pro Kristian Baker. During a snowy week in January, Kristian helped Ross restore his swing and his confidence after he missed the cut in Abu Dhabi.

“We worked really hard that week and Kristian gave me a lot of positives to work on,” says Ross. They certainly did. For the next week Ross snatched the limelight from a host of world stars when he led the Dubai Desert Classic at the half-way mark, having posted two superb seven under-par rounds of 65. Ross partnered Wentworth’s own South African ace Ernie Els and Ryder Cup star Henrik Stenson in the third round, where he scored a solid one-under par 71.



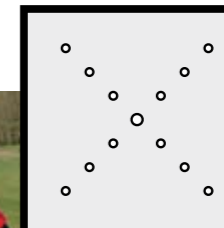
Ross and Tiger in Dubai

## Professional Masterclass

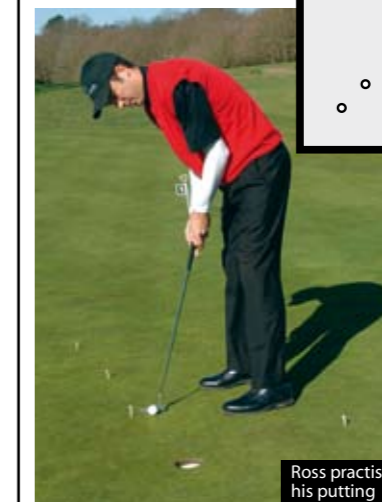
**Kristian Baker shares the tips that have helped Ross Fisher improve his game. Watch out for more in future issues...**

### PUTTING

Take 12 tees and place them in a cross shape –



three, five and seven feet from the hole (see diagram, left). The aim of the exercise is to hole all 12 putts in a row working clockwise from the inner tees. Should you miss one, you must start again. This



creates a realistic pressure, as each putt matters, and so it improves your confidence when you are successful. Plus, it is mentally positive to see and hear your ball going into the hole.

Ross Fisher has been doing this exercise now for two years, using this routine on the Tour. It has helped him immensely as Ross now holes 90 per cent of his putts from six feet, which is world class.

This left Ross, ranked 294 in the world, partnering world number one Tiger Woods in the final round. The nearest Ross had been to Tiger previously was collecting his range balls during the 1998 World Match play at Wentworth. But even in the heat of that final round, Ross kept his nerve, even regaining the tournament lead at the 13th, only to suffer two bogeys at the 16th and 17th. He then birdied the 18th to finish in fifth place, behind winner Stenson, Els and Woods. But it was the words of praise from Woods that Ross says will live with him forever. Having asked Ross if he had hit a three-iron shot to the last green, only to be told it was a five, Tiger exclaimed: “Wow! That is some hit. You are young and strong. You just need to keep plugging away and you’ve got a big future.”

Looking to that future, Ross says: “I just want to keep learning and improving my game. Kristian and I have a long-term plan for gradual improvement, rather than trying to force the issue.” Their plan includes a more intense fitness programme than Ross has been used to in the past. “I work out four or five times a week now, in the gym or even in the hotel room if I’m on tour.”

Ross has some key tournaments coming up where he can flex his new muscles, including the BMW PGA, and if his current good form continues, the US Open in June. “I have shown I can figure on the final day of a tournament,” he says. “The next stage will be to win.”