

Improving your Putting

How many times have you heard it said that “Putting is a game within a game”? Anyone who plays golf will understand what this means.

Well I’d like to add another part to this saying - “and it’s a game played between the ears”.

Putting presents the golfer with perhaps his or her greatest mental challenge on the course. Yes, of course, someone can have a poor putting technique that causes problems but for the majority of “poor” putters – the problem is mental.

To putt at your best, you have to be relaxed and confident in what you are doing in order to get the ball into the hole. The reason for this is simple – there are so many things to take into account on the green – that at face value – seem to be mechanical in nature:

- Speed of the green.
- The Line of the Putt.
- Lie of the land.
- How you grip your putter.
- Your putting stroke / technique
- Do you hold the putter tightly or gently?
- Type of putter you are using

The list could go on and if you try to consciously cater for all of these variables – no wonder your putting can suffer!

So how can you improve your putting by adopting a more mental and subconscious approach to this part of the game?

Just like all great ball strikers, great putters all have different strokes and techniques. The only similarity among great putters' methods is that they all have a stroke that is repeatable and dependable. Getting the ball to find the bottom of the cup is the goal in putting—not how you get it there.

How many players have you seen holding the putter “cack handed” (Thomas Bjorn for example) or using the “claw grip” (Chris Di Marco) yet they get the ball into the hole? You see it every day.

So let’s begin by discussing the only “mechanical” aspect of putting that I’m concerned with:

When you hold your putter and stroke at the ball does your grip and ball position allow the putter face to return square to your ball and target line at impact?



If it doesn’t – change it. You can never get the ball close to the hole if you send it off in the wrong direction every time. And this will happen – even if you are reading the line correctly – if your grip and ball position are causing problems.

REMEMBER: type of grip doesn’t matter. Getting the ball rolling on the intended line – does!

So practice this on the practice green. Make sure you’re holding the putter in such a manner that allows the ball to set off in the direction you want it to. And may I say, I see many golfers pulling or pushing putts simply because their hands are slightly too strong or too weak on the putter grip. So make sure the putter face meets the ball square to your intended line.

So let’s assume all is OK with your grip and ball position. What can you do to become a more confident putter?

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Initially you should focus on the pace and speed of your putts. What's the point of being ½ inch off line, just missing the cup, but ending 10 feet by the hole? I'm sure it happens. So pace is more important than line (initially, until you get it right!).

A good exercise to improve your pace and speed of putts is to practice putting – WHILE LOOKIN AT THE HOLE - NOT YOUR BALL!

Sounds daft! Well, all I can say is try it. Take a few balls onto the practice green. Give yourself a putt of 15 to 20 feet. Set up as normal, look at the hole and keep looking at it as you take your stroke. You'll be surprised at how close you end up. Keep doing this until you "accept" what your eyes and mind are telling you. "Listen" to them – go with what you feel and sense. Follow your instincts. Eventually, you will get closer and closer. Both your speed and direction will improve. You will also begin to take into account the correct line as well as pace.

Now on the course, I don't suggest you keep looking at the hole as you putt (that would take guts though – especially if your usual partners are watching you "show off"). Instead look at the hole from behind your ball as you take some practice strokes. Get the same feelings going as you did on the practice green and then just let it happen when you take your stroke for real. Don't change the tempo, grip or anything. Just let it happen.

Following this drill will improve your speed and pace of lag putts, leaving you a lot closer to the hole reducing the "three putts" scenario during your round. Also, once you are confident in your ability to get the ball close to the hole – your mind will be free to bring into play all of the processes that will see your confidence on the greens soar.

It's difficult to use positive visualisation or imagery if you don't believe you can get the ball close from 30 feet away. You can't fool your own mind. So practicing these techniques grows your confidence in your "mechanical ability to putt, which in turn allows your subconscious to take over and bring some magic to your putting.

Using your imagination to "see" or "feel" the putt is an important tool in your golf armoury. But which type of putter are you? The Inner Golf Coach Audio programme looks in detail at how our minds work. Some of us are visual by nature, while others are Kinesthetic (touch) orientated. Knowing which one you are is important because when it comes to using your imagination and subconscious mind – they will communicate with you best in the manner that suits you. So please, if need be, look at the sections on visualisation and mental imagery because it's important to identify your predominant style of putting.

However, to briefly keep things focussed on putting specifically, here is a little exercise to try out: Close your eyes and imagine yourself putting. Hit a few putts in your mind's eye.

Now let's analyse what you have "seen".

- What did you notice about the images you used?
- Did you feel the grip and putter in your hands?
- Did you see "dots" or "lines" leading up to the hole?
- Were you thinking only about the speed of the putt, its pace?

The answers you give to the above questions will give you clues as to your dominant mental "style" of putting.

If you can easily see lines or dots (in your mind) when you read greens (I call them the runway landing lights!), you are for the most part a **visual** putter.

If you sense the hole or prefer to feel the pace of the putt, then you are probably a **feel** (Kinesthetic orientated) putter. Feel putters like to focus on pace or speed - instead of visualising lines. Feel orientated putters can also be less specific than visual putters with aiming and targeting - they prefer to trust their instinct as to where to play the ball.

However, you may be fortunate enough to have a combination of both "types" of putting styles. This person can use both images and feelings equally; they can focus on the line and the pace of the putt simultaneously. In reality, most players have some degree of both styles used in putting – both visual and kinaesthetic, they will use all the images available to them to read the putt, feel the speed, and set the ball on a given line.

But you must get to know what suits you. Practice the above suggestions and your putting game will improve.