

“Putt like a Pro”

Putting is by far the most individualized part of the game. Watch any professional event on television and very quickly you will see a multitude of putting styles. You will see standard length putters, short putters, “belly” putters, and long putters. You will also notice a huge variance in grips, including “cross-handed”, “split-handed”, and many variations of the all so popular “claw grip”. The percentage of players on the PGA Tour who use a conventional putting grip is quickly diminishing. At times players have actually putted one-handed, with their child’s 12’ putters, and even with their eyes shut! So with all these different putting styles, what is the average golfer to think? Instead of delving into a massively complicated attempt to figure out the secret of great putting, we can make it much simpler than that. Let’s not focus on all the different things that great putters do, but rather on the common denominators. There are only a few things that they all do. If you can do these things well, I know you can greatly improve your putting.

Despite all these differences, there are really only four key things that good putters do. All good putters; 1) Consistently Hit the golf ball in the “sweet spot” of the putter, 2) Start the ball rolling on their intended line, 3) Control the speed at which the ball is hit, and 4) Are proficient at the art of green reading. If you can do these things, you have “carte blanche” to stand, grip or stroke the ball in any way that you are most comfortable. I will take you through the steps that will help you improve in each of the 4 key areas to good putting and this starts with some setup basics.

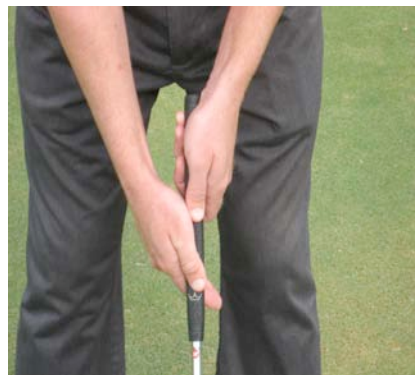
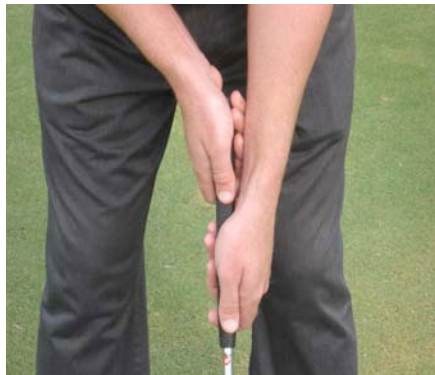
“Setup Basics”

- **Ball position**
It is important to have the ball positioned no further back than the middle of the stance. Most players have the ball somewhere forward of middle. This ensures that the putter will strike the ball as the putter is moving level to the ground, or even slightly on the upswing.
- **Stance width and weight distribution**
This is really up to you. Players vary greatly in this area. A suggestion would be to avoid the extremes of a super narrow or wide stance. Shoulder width is a good guideline. Shoot for 50/50 weight distribution. Having slightly more weight on your front foot is also fine.
- **Eye Position**

Try to align your eyes over your target line or slightly to the inside. Your eyes should never be outside the ball. Simply setup and drop a golf ball from your eyes to check this.

- **Alignments**

There are two types of alignments to focus on. One is body alignment and the second is putter face alignment. Putter face alignment needs to be very specific and accurate, while body alignment can vary. You cannot go wrong with having your hips and shoulders aligned parallel with your target line, and have your feet squared off perfectly. However, there are many players that putt great who do not set up this way. Many great putters have their body aligned open to their target. While the majority of those who do not set up square tend to be open, some players are actually closed to their target. The great South African putter Bobby Locke set up in this way.



Key #1

“Hitting the Sweet Spot”

There are a few things to discuss on this point. First, it is important to understand that the “sweet spot” of your putter is not always in the center of the putter face, nor is it always where the manufacturer paints the line onto the putter. Many times it is more towards the heel or toe depending upon the design of the putter. A simple way to find it is to simply tap the putter face in different areas until you find the spot that the putter is most stable. Secondly, it is not necessarily true to say that the best putters always hit the sweet spot of their putter. However,

what is true is that they consistently hit the same spot on the putter face. Thus, to be a good putter, golfers must consistently hit the same spot, whether it is the exact sweet spot or not.

This is very important for two main reasons. First, when you do not strike the ball in the sweet spot of the putter, the putter face is much more likely to turn. You could make a quality stroke with a square face, but miss the putt due to the face opening or closing as a result of an off center hit. The second reason is that distance control becomes nearly impossible if you are continuously hitting different spots on the putter face. This causes the ball to leave at different rates of speed each time, making consistent distance control nearly impossible. Listed below is a very simple drill that anyone can do to improve their center contact.



“Miss the Tees Drill”

Setup to a straight putt. Place one tee just outside the toe of your putter, and the other just inside the heel. Better putters can make the tees barely wider than their putters, while others should start with more room for error and gradually make the drill more difficult. Now simply stroke putts making sure you miss the tees. Very simply, if you miss the tees you are ensuring center contact. If you are not, be aware to any patterns as to which tee you hit more often. As you gain success, you can narrow the width of your tees and also attempt longer putts.



Key#2: “Starting the ball on line”

If you cannot start your ball rolling on the line that you intend, it is extremely difficult to make putts. There are two main factors that determine the line that your ball rolls on. The first is the path of your putting stroke and the second is the angle of the clubface when it contacts the ball. However, the angle of the face has a far greater affect on the ball, and thus is more important to be good at. The “shape” of tour players’ putting strokes vary considerably. Some players have a relatively “straight back and straight through” stroke, while others swing the putter in more of an arcing motion. What they all do consistently is have the face square at impact. If you are not proficient at returning the putter face the same way each stroke, you will not be able to consistently start the ball rolling on line. In order to do this, you must first align the putter correctly at setup. Most golfers do not do this well, and even many pros go through bouts of poor alignment. The logic is very simple. If you aim poorly, and then make a good stroke, you will miss. If you do not quickly realize your alignment is off, you will not make good strokes for long. There is simply no motivation to do so. Thus you will learn to make an improper stroke in an attempt to get the ball on line. There are many drills and training aids designed to help you in both your alignment and the path of your stroke. I will take you through one simple drill that will get your putting headed in the right direction.

“Three Chalk Line Drill”

Get a chalk line from any hardware store, they are fairly inexpensive. Go to the practice green and find a hole with some slope to it. Find three putts of 10 feet or so. One straight putt, one breaking from right to left, and the third breaking from left to right. On the straight putt simply snap the chalk so that it makes a line in the center of the hole. On the two breaking putts, snap the line so that it aligns with the point that you have to aim at to make the putt. This should be the line that you are trying to start the ball on. Putt a tee on the far end on the chalk line so you can see the exact point in which you are aiming at. This will serve as an alignment test. When you align your putter face along the chalk so

that it is pointing directly at the tee, you have to ask yourself if this is where it looks like you are aiming. If you typically are a “good aimer”, where you are actually aiming and where you think you are aiming will match up. If you are not a good aimer this will not be the case.

The next step in the drill is to practice on all three types of putts. What you are looking for is if any patterns become evident. First, you need to rate your ability to start the ball rolling down the chalk line. If you cannot do so on a consistent basis, try to figure out if you are more likely to miss the chalk line either to the right or to the left. Then see if this pattern holds true for all three types of putts. This may or may not be the case. Often players’ strokes vary depending on where the putt is breaking, even though it shouldn’t. It can be helpful to view every putt as a straight putt, and it is your sole job to simply start the ball rolling at the point in which you are aimed. It should not matter to you, nor should it influence your stroke, what way the putt is breaking. The whole point of this drill is to promote “self-discovery” about your alignment tendencies, stroke tendencies, and on which types of putts you need the most work. With this knowledge your putting practice will become much more productive.

Key#3: “Speed Control”

Speed control is the third element of success putting. If you can master the skill of “center contact” you are already well on your way. Center contact has a huge affect on the ability to control speed because without consistent contact the ball leaves differently each time. There are also some intangibles involved in the sense that some people just have better “touch” than others, or grew up as little kids who spent all day playing around the putting green. However, there are many drills that you can do to help you improve your speed control. Here are a few that I have found work extremely well.

Drill #1: “Fringe Putting”

Take several balls and stand in the center of the putting green. Try to hit putts that roll just to the edge of the fringe. Try all types of putts. That’s it!

Drill #2: “Cluster Putting”

I have seen Jim McLean do this with all levels of students, and you can get a more complete description in his book, “The Complete Book of Drills”. Take five balls and hit the first putt a random distance across the green. Take the next four and try to hit them the exact distance as the first. The closer you can “cluster” the balls the better.

Drill #3: “Ten Ball Drill”

Select a 20 foot putt. You could putt to a hole or a tee. You must hit the first putt at least half way to the hole, and it has to stay short. You must hit the remaining nine putts short of the hole, but each ball must go past the previous ball. If any of the putts go past the hole or does not go past the previous ball, you must start over. Do the drill until you get it.



Key#4: “Green Reading”

The art of green reading is mastered over time, and it is not all that easy to say why some people are better at it than others. It is similar to the “touch” required for good distance control. For some it comes naturally, while others have to work at it. To really improve your green reading it definitely takes time and a fairly methodical approach. World renowned instructor Carl Welty, who is based out of Palm Springs at PGA West, has developed a systematic approach to improving a golfer’s green reading. He uses many advanced techniques including the use of a digital level where a player learns to judge the degree of slope on any given putt. He or she then records the results and assesses his green reading tendencies. There is no one better than Carl in this area, and I highly recommend anyone who is seriously interested in improving there green reading to go see him. I will take you though a couple more basic ideas that I think can help.

Tip #1

First, understand that most greens are designed so that they slope from back to front. This is by no means absolute, but is definitely the majority. If you are faced with a long putt across the green this concept can help. Imagine the coordinates of a compass and that the back of the green is north. If you are putting on a green that is designed sloping back to front, you automatically know that a putt across the green will break to

the south(The lower part of the green). There are always slight undulations throughout the green, but you can be confident that ball will eventually move south.



Tip #2

This one is pretty simple. PAY ATTENTION. I see many amateurs who are either talking, looking at the birds, filing out their scorecards, everything except trying to figure out how their putt will break until the last second. Here's some tips. Watch how the golf balls of your playing partners react on the green as they approach the hole. Which way are they breaking, are they speeding up or slowing down, what does the ball do before the hole, after? This applies to chipping and pitching as well. Tour players are great at this. Most of them do these things subconsciously without realizing it. However, they probably weren't born with this perceptiveness. They had to learn these tricks and so can you!