

PUTTING YOUR BEST

by John Bertges, PGA Professional

Learning to putt your best is a matter of ingraining a few basic fundamentals then forgetting about them....literally. Like any motor skill habit, they are done best on a subconscious level. Athletes aspire to perform at this level of subconscious thought often referred to as the 'zone'. Conscience thought only disrupts the 'zone' and inhibits true performance. Basically thinking is bad when it comes to athletic motion!

In this article I want to explain the four core fundamentals of putting, how to practice them, then ultimately forget about them. There is no doubt you will dramatically improve your putting as a result of incorporating these principles. The four fundamentals are: stroke control, alignment, centerness of contact, and reaction ratio. Below I will explain these in detail and give you practical drills and exercises to practice them to perfection.



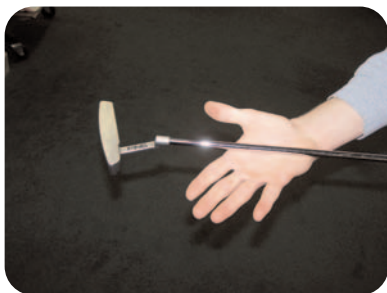
John Bertges

- PGA Professional
- Director of Golf Guaranteed Golf Schools Indiana
- PGTCA Master Professional
- Player Magazine Golf Advisor

Stroke Control

Obviously all good players can control their stroke, but how? The answer is by using their dominant hand. The golf club is nothing more than an extension of your hands. More specifically, the clubface is a mirror reflection of your dominant hand's palm. Just like if you pitch a ball underhand at a target, your palm will face forward or at the target you're throwing at. The putting stroke is no different. Your dominant palm should face at the target during the stroke. The clubface should also aim at the target during the stroke. Both are one in the same. ***You control the clubhead with your dominant hand's palm.***

Great players are sensitive to the connection between the dominant hand and the clubface. Take for example a table-tennis paddle. It is easy to maneuver because there is an obvious connection between the palm (dominant hand) and the paddle face. Even though the same connection exists in golf, the clubface is much further from the hands making it not such an obvious connection with the dominant hand's palm.



Right Hand Only Drill - Try putting frequently with your back hand only. Soon you will regain control over your stroke and be able to sense the clubface during the motion.



Alignment

Your eye-line and clubface should aim at the target. From here your shoulders need to be parallel with your eye-line. That's it. It doesn't matter if your feet are square or not it is considered a preference. Some players keep them open, some square, and others even closed. ***What is most important is that your eyes clubface, and shoulders are all aligned properly.***

You are swinging the club around your shoulders, so it only make sense to keep them parallel the line. Think of your eyes as the scope of a gun and clubface as the barrel. It is critical that these two coincide with one another and aim correctly at the target. Most players turn their eye-line during the stroke resulting in a pulled putt (see image right). Remember to keep your eyes steady until the ball is well down the runway.



Mirror Drill - One sure fire way to accomplish a square-to-square motion is to place a mirror underneath the ball. As you assume your address position you now can easily get the eyes directly over the line of the putt. Simply look to see that your target-eye is covered over the ball as you assume your address position. Also the mirror can assist you on keeping your shoulders parallel to the ball-target line (another vital key in a consistent stroke). You place a strip of tape parallel the ball-target-line to aid in keeping the shoulders square

Centerness of Contact



Forget about everything else in regards to lag putting, the number one rule is to hit the ball in the center of the putter-face. **Center contact hits is the beginning of learning distance control.**

Consider this. Let's say you have a 20 foot putt. If you make three strokes with identical speeds and paces, but hit each one make contact at a different point on the clubface, they all will vary in length and direction. Try this sometime on the practice green. It is next to impossible to gain control over a putt if your contact is poor.

Masking Tape Drill - Stick a 10 foot strip of masking tape straight onto the flooring. Put a golf ball on the tape and practice putting. Watch the top-line of the putter stay directly over the tape. This is a simple drill to improve your centerness of contact.

Reaction Ratio

Reaction Ratio is basically a percentage of time a player looks at the hole or the distance to the hole and a percentage of time a player looks at the ball before hitting it. Generally, the better the player the greater percentage of time he/she devotes to looking at the hole. In addition, better players will not spend more than a few seconds looking at the ball before hitting it. In other words, they are still focused on the hole in their minds eye even though they are looking at the ball to strike it. Most amateurs do the opposite. They spend little time looking at the hole, but alot of time looking at the ball. Then they hit the ball but forget the distance in mind. **Remember we are reacting to a target which is the hole not the ball!**

Count Drill - Set up to a 8 to 10 foot putt. Turn your head to look at the hole and count to 5. Next, turn your eyes back upon the ball, count to 1 and then hit. This is a good way to ingrain the hole image over the ball.

