



Improving your Putting with the F.P.A

with P.G.A Master Professional Tony Bennett

One of the biggest misconceptions in amateur golf is that a player should take two putts on each green, now if you are a beginner then this is a good intermediate goal but if you have been playing for more than a few months then you should raise your sights and try to make every putt! The top professionals routinely take less than thirty putts in eighteen holes, so why can't you?

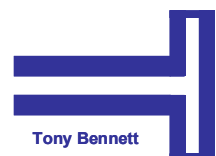
Putting is a game of control and finesse, the requirements of a putt are simple, you need to read the green, aim the putter, make a swing and control the distance of the ball. The first part of this article is solely focussed on the set up for your putting stroke and the last part deals with the swing.

Because putts are normally taken on the green and are less than thirty metres long there is no requirement for the generation of power, this means that you can stand to the ball in a way that increases the accuracy of contact and in a way that results in a much more repeatable action.



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The following points are called the, Five Point Address (FPA) and can be found in the set up of most good putters.



FPA1. A line runs vertically from the eyes to the target line just behind the ball. If you position your eyes in this way then you are better able to aim the putter face towards your target.

FPA2. For advisable players that use a pendulum type stroke with the pivot point at the top of the spine, it is advisable that their hands and elbows should be placed directly under the pivot. This position allows the arms and hands to swing naturally developing an efficient and repeatable swing path

FPA3. A line drawn vertically down from the sternum should reach the ground at a point inside and behind the ball. The sternum is the swing centre and so the putter should reach the lowest point of the swing in front of this point. When the sternum is a little (3-5cm) behind the ball then the putter will meet the ball on the up swing so helping to create a better roll.



FPA4. A vertical line drawn from the top of the grip should reach the ground just in front of the putter face. This will help to ensure that the putter meets the ball without adding loft to the face of the club.

FPA5. To help keep balance in the stroke I suggest that you keep the centre of your hips directly above the centre of your heels





The Putting Stroke

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THE PUTTING zone has been called many things: to some it is the “game within a game”, to others the “money game”. This article will develop the technique of swinging the putter in a repeatable manner.

Technique must be separated into different skills, the pre swing positioning of the club and body (mentioned previously), the aim and alignment along with the movement all come together to become a stroke. Once the stroke has been built there is a need for a consistent pre shot ritual that allows all the relevant facts, such as speed, line, the current position of the game and so on to be considered.



The aim of the putter face is without doubt one of the key fundamentals of building a pure putting stroke. For those that already have an established putting stroke, the aim will normally reflect the errors that are present in the stroke, a kind of compensation if you like, for a new player it is important to learn an accurate putter face aim.



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It is my belief that there is not one perfect stroke for all players, take a look at some of the great putters over the years we can see that they did not all utilize the same technical approach. Jack Nicklaus, by many considered to be the greatest golfer that has ever lived, was also perhaps the best pressure putter ever to walk the greens. His technique involved a crouched position with the right arm held close to his side and a kind of piston movement straight toward the hole. Ben Crenshaw was another great putter his more upright style allowed the shoulders to work in a more swing type stroke, with the hands very quiet. Moving forward to today's top players and Tiger Woods who is without doubt one of the best short to medium range putters ever has many conventional aspects to his technique, although his grip encourages rotation of the club face.



Over the years there have literally been hundreds of different ways of holding the putter but there is one vital point that must be stressed and that is the player must feel comfortable and position the hands in a way that allows them to gain maximum control without losing feel. By positioning the putter grip in the lifeline of both hands, it is possible to reduce the amount of rotation applied to the face of the putter and in the case of mechanical breakdown this will result in a greater margin for error.

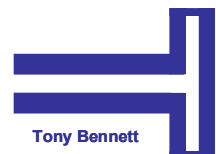


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This type of grip allows the back of one hand and the palm of the other to be aimed parallel to target line. Advances in putter grips now allow a player to hold the club easily and keep the shoulders level, the 2 thumb putter grip is now used by several players on various tours and in fact achieved it's first worldwide tour win in June 2006, some players hold the grip with the thumbs level, others hold it conventionally or cross handed, but in any case the grip allows the putter to be held in the lifeline.

Take a look at the Tour and it is clear to notice that each player has what could be best described as a routine or ritual, in fact some players are very distinctive even in the manner that they walk around the green as they study the fall of the putting surface. Once the player has read the speed and fall of the green, the next stage tends to be one or more rehearsal strokes, some players like to do this away from the ball, perhaps half way down or behind the line or near to the ball at the side of the line. Then comes the holding and aiming ritual, the time taken for this depends on the individual player, however it is wise to keep it as short as possible as it is easier to repeat. Once the putter face is positioned at the ball, then it is important that everything is done to achieve a smooth take away. A good routine will give comfort in even the most pressurized of situations.

Players who have good distance control will rarely take three putts. Not only that, they will hole more than their fair share of 5-10 meter putts. A putt that has the correct pace will normally not rim out of the hole whereas a putt that is too strong will frequently hit the edge and spin out.

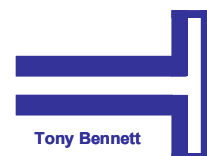


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It is important to understand that the contact point on the face of the club has a bearing on how far the ball rolls, an off centre hit will produce a different distance than a centre strike, so the first practice drill is to ensure that you create a consistent strike pattern. Once this has been achieved you need to understand that the length of swing will have a direct effect on the length of the putt. If you are attempting to use a “SWING” type stroke then the length of back swing and through swing will be more or less equal, it is then a simple matter of increasing or decreasing the length of stroke to adjust the distance that the ball travels.

Finally it must be remembered that good mechanics do not always lead to great putting, the ability to read the greens, judge the speed, stroke the ball to an exact distance, the ability to control nerves and deal with pressure all have a massive effect on the overall putting ability of any player, but if all these things are equal then the player with the best mechanics will consistently make more putts than the player with weak mechanics.

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