



EXCLUSIVE BY
PETER KNIGHT
GOLF AUSTRALIA
TEACHING EDITOR

THE FOUR CHECKPOINTS FOR BETTER PUTTING

GOLF seems to lend itself to ever-advancing use of technology. An example of this is a computerised device which measures the movement of a putter three-dimensionally. The device, produced by a German company called Science and Motion, is named PuttLab. The technical information available from PuttLab is of tremendous value to both coach and golfer. But like most good technology, the limitations to its use by the golfing masses include price and availability.

It is, however, still possible to benefit from information that has been gained from the use of PuttLab by Tour players around the world, even if you don't have access to a PuttLab.

Through PuttLab it has been discovered that there are key elements which have been proven to exist with all players who are good putters.

The key parameters that are measured with PuttLab, which can also be measured by you in practice, are face alignment at address and impact, path, centred impact and stroke rhythm.

FACE ALIGNMENT

A simple way of checking your alignment at address is to have a friend look to see where you are aiming. If you don't have someone who can do that for you, then you can use a string line.

These are available from some pro shops or golf training aid websites. Alternatively you can make your own using a two-metre

length of hat elastic with a metal meat skewer tied to each end. Find a straight putt on a practice green and push one skewer into the ground just behind the hole and the other about three metres from the hole. This should have the string line hovering 12 to 15 centimetres above the putting surface.

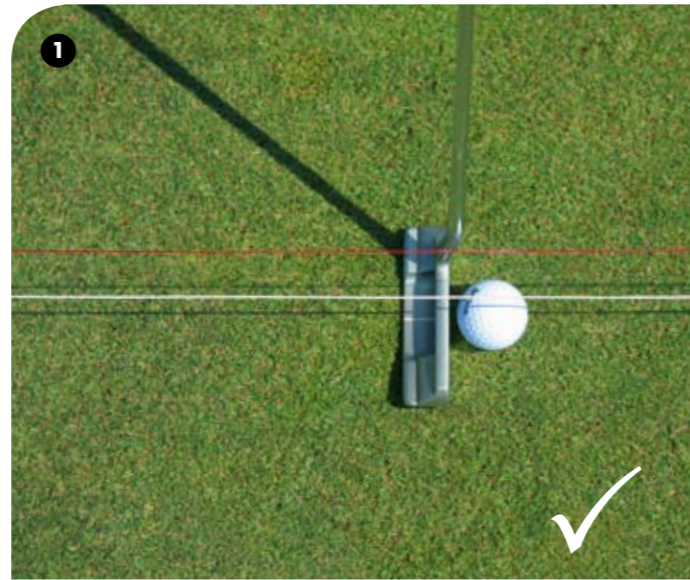
Place your golf ball directly underneath the string. If your putterface is aligned square to the hole it will also appear to be at 90 degrees to the string line (pic 1). If the face is not at 90 degrees, it is incorrectly aligned (pic 2). Some putters have a line on the top or back to further assist with this alignment check.

When you strike the ball it should start rolling along the length of the elastic. If it starts off-line, then your putter face will have been aimed incorrectly at impact. Adjust as required.

PATH

While the alignment of the face is a major factor in the path the ball travels, the path of the putterhead is also influential.

The correct path of the putter follows a slight curved shape or arc on the backswing (pic 3), into impact and through. There can be some variation in the steepness of the curve, however the putter must be moving toward the target at impact. Any other path - including straight back along the target line (pic 4) - will impart some sidespin on the ball, affecting its path (pic 5) and also distance control.



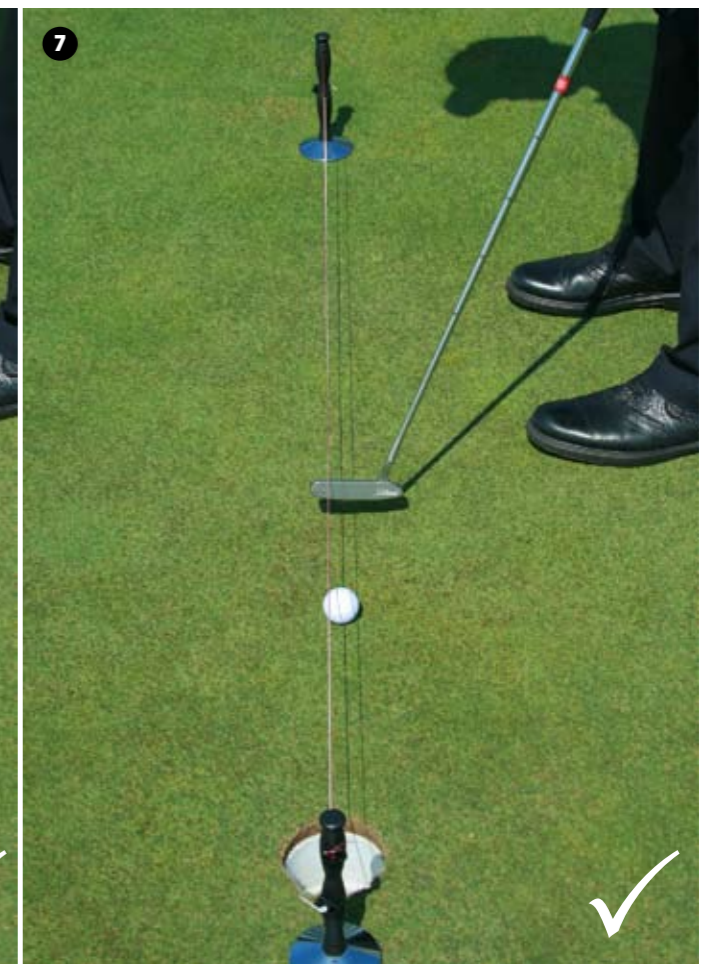
To check path, draw a ring around the equator of the ball. Aim the ball so the ring around the ball is directly underneath and parallel to the string line. When you hit the ball, the line drawn around the ball should show the ball rolling end over end with no

wobble of the line. Any wobble will indicate an error in swing path or face alignment at impact.

Practise adjusting your stroke path (pic 6) until the roll of the ball shows that you are making square contact and

getting a straight roll (pic 7).

Doing these two things will give you much greater accuracy control, essential for holing putts inside two metres, which is the distance that causes the most frustration among golfers.



CENTRED IMPACT

When you make a full swing with an iron or wood and the contact is slightly off-centre, you will feel it as there is more vibration into your hands through the shaft than with a well-struck shot.

With a putter, centred impact is equally important and generally inconsistent among golfers, yet never suspected as the difference in feel is not as pronounced as it is with a full shot. It is also one of the major causes of inconsistent distance control; stroke rhythm is the other.

To check your centred contact, place some talcum powder on the face of your putter and hit a putt. The ball will leave a mark at the contact point. Repeat this from six to 12 times, beginning with a newly-powdered putterface each time and note the pattern of contact points.

To practise hitting the ball more in the centre of the putterface and get the ball rolling with a consistent strike, drop two \$2 coins just behind a ball. Set the putter behind the coins (pic 8) and then make your stroke (pic 9). The idea here is to miss the coins and strike the ball in the equator as the putter passes by the bottom of its swing arc and starts moving up and slightly away from the ground.

The tip here is to allow the putter to swing freely; the harder you try to make the putter miss the coins, the more inconsistent you are likely to be ... this also happens on the course.

STROKE RHYTHM

The stroke rhythm and timing for all length putts should be the same. On a longer putt, you will take a longer stroke and the speed of the stroke will be quicker. This is completely normal and also what all great putters do.

A good way to establish a good stroke rhythm is to putt to a count. The backswing takes roughly twice as long as the top of the backstroke to impact. This means you can count '1', '2' on the backswing and '1' on the downswing (pics 10, 11 & 12). So the stroke rhythm is 1-2-1 (or 1-2-3 if you prefer). It is quite alright to count out loud while making your stroke as you develop a feel for this rhythm.

Next time you are watching golf on the television, apply the count to the players you are viewing and you will see that this pattern is consistent among all the players you watch.

If you practise developing these four factors you will enjoy greater accuracy and distance control over your putting. This is certainly one of the fastest ways of ensuring a drop in your scoring averages.



GolfAustralia
www.golfaustralia.org.au

Peter Knight is one of only three PGA Master professionals in Australia and is the director of Elite National Development for Golf Australia.



BRING ON THE GAME



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