

The putting system that conquered Augusta

By Pat O'Brien, putting coach of Masters champ Zach Johnson.

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Zach Johnson is a great putter with a great natural feel for speed which is why he was able to tame Augusta National. Together we have built a system on the greens that leads to holing more putts, not just on random days, but with a degree of consistency. Our method relies on keeping the stroke natural and simple. I'll show you how, but before we go any further, let's get a few things straight. There are a host of misconceptions that I simply don't adhere to. You'll have heard some of them:

- Get your eyes over the ball
- Place your palms on either side of the grip
- Play the ball forward for an upward stroke
- Use a face-balanced putter

I don't like those tips because they don't work, or at least not consistently. And that is the key to great putting, building a system that allows you to set the ball on an accurate path as frequently as possible. My theory is built around the SeeMore putter, which has markings to help you check alignment, but you don't have to use this model. Any putter will do, just look at Tiger Woods. His technique follows the same rules as you will see here.



Pat O'Brien

O'Brien first came to prominence after helping Payne Stewart rise from outside the top 150 putters to being one of the best on the PGA Tour. He spotted Stewart using a SeeMore putter and realised that the club was designed in such a way that it closely matched his own theories of grip and stance.



Zach's putting coach

You might need to change your grip

Grip and alignment are probably the two most important areas to get right. The problem with so many grips is that they prevent the arms from working naturally. With the

palm-to-palm grip, you are in danger of taking the club back closed and outside the natural arc of the swing, not so good if you don't believe in the square-to-square stroke.



The left hand

Bring your hand into the club as I am doing here and make sure that the pad of your left hand is on top of the grip, not at the side.



The right hand

Note the position of the elbow and forearm here as I bring the hand in correctly (left) and then too much over the grip (right).

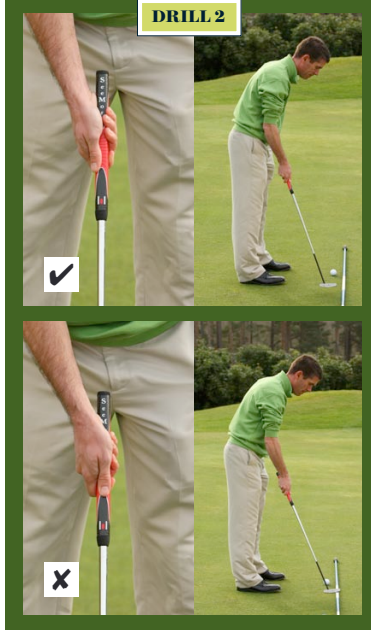
The 'thumbs up' drill

The putter should be held in the fingers not the palms because keeping it in the fingers will promote a better path on the backswing. A good drill is to hit a couple of putts with your thumbs up like this.



The 'right hand' drill

The bottom hand position is crucial to taking the putter back on a consistent arc inside the target line.



Think about your posture

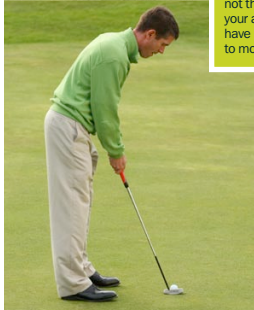
So many people putt badly because they haven't given the same thought to their posture as they do for the full swing. Many of the activities we do today, from driving our cars to sitting at a desk, brings our shoulders forward into a rounded position. That leads us to be too cramped over the ball, not giving our arms any room to move.

Try this exercise just to get your shoulders back into a good position. I'll refer again to Tiger here because he always has good posture and never gets 'round shouldered'.

Now hold the club out like I am here and then tip forward from the hips, not the waist. Try to keep a little of your natural height. Look at the pictures and see how there is room now between my hands and my thighs.



The hip tip
Tip from the hips not the waist and your arms will have more room to move.



Alignment and ball position

As I said earlier, good alignment is crucial to setting the ball off accurately towards the hole on a consistent basis. If you want to allow your arms to

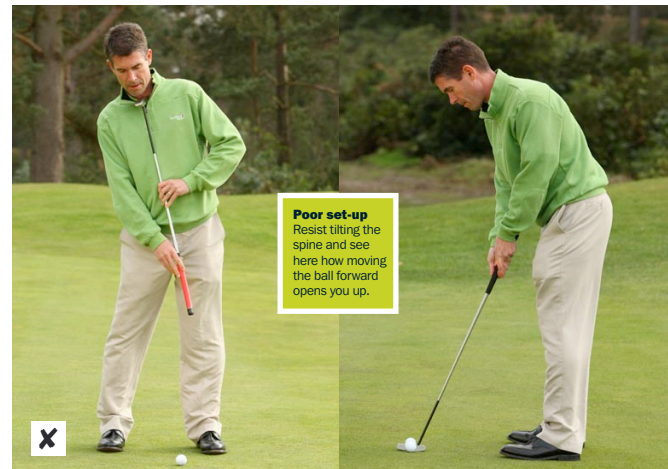
move on a natural arc that goes in-to-square-to-in then it is imperative that you take on board the points I make on this page.



Stay centred
Keep your spine straight and play the ball off the centre, not too far forward.

At address the putterhead needs to be in the centre of your stance. This is vitally important because it will help you to be consistent with your alignment.

If you keep your shoulders level at address with a central ball position then you will find that the putter stays square through the stroke.



Poor set-up
Resist tilting the spine and see here how moving the ball forward opens you up.

Many golfers are so used to hitting balls on the range that they tend to drop their right shoulder lower than their left and stand tilted.

If you play the ball too far forward in the stance then there is a real danger that the shoulders will open, causing you to pull putts to the left.

TIPS

Inside the line
Give yourself some room by positioning your eyes just inside the target line. If you're too much over the ball you'll feel cramped.



Swivel the head
If you are right eye dominant then check where you are aiming. Zach aimed three inches right. I'd say that 90 per cent of golfers are not aiming at the hole when they think they are. When you take a look, remember to swivel your head like this.



The SeeMore check point
Zach Johnson uses the SeeMore putter because it has a built-in alignment aid. The idea is to set up so that you cannot see the red dot. This ensures that the clubhead is never open, closed, too far forward or back. For information log on to www.seemoregolf.co.uk or call 01432 880510.

