

INSTRUCTION

Pat O'Brien

Proper posture is key to simplify putting



If you're struggling with your putting, perhaps understanding the design of the putter will help to free your stroke. A putter is essentially a weight on a stick, and the shaft goes into the head at an angle less than 90 degrees, usually around 70 degrees.

The balance point of the putter is about 6 inches from the head. If you held the putter lightly in your fingers, when you let it swing, you would see that the head travels on a natural arc and it comes up out of the ground. It also returns to square at impact with no effort. That is what it is designed to do.

If you are not allowing this to happen, you are putting forth too much effort into your stroke. The putter isn't designed to go straight back and straight through, or square to square.

To quote instructor Jim Hardy, "If we played pool or shuffleboard, where we stood on the target line, straight back and straight through works, but we stand to the side of the ball, so there has to be an arc."

Also, if you're trying to keep the putter low on the backswing, you are moving the bottom of the swing behind the ball. This would cause you to use your trailing arm to accelerate the putter to get it back to the ball. Speed is hard to judge when you have forced acceleration. The putter is designed to swing with a rhythm that resembles a pendulum. It's designed to swing up on the backswing and then fall down on the way through. It's not designed to swing low going back, and then forcefully finish high on the follow through.

When people come to me for help, I look to their set up for clues as to why the putter isn't swinging freely. If you are having challenges, here are a few things to look for:

- Your posture should be athletic, yet relaxed, so you have leverage over the club. If you are bent too far over, or your shoulders are rounded and your arms too straight, you are putting too much pressure on the balance point of the club.

If your weight is too far toward, then your toes and your arms are too heavy. Gravity pulls you down, and there will be resistance when you take the putter back. It will travel too low and with effort.

I'm using a weighted ball in the first picture to demonstrate gravity winning. In the second picture, my stance is taller with light arms and my weight is everywhere but my toes, just like how I normally stand. The ball is relatively a lot lighter and I am freer to move. The putter can now start back with no resistance and get out of the ground. My brain senses this freedom and will let me swing the putter naturally and with no forced acceleration.

- Your shoulders should be fairly level, with your weight equal on both feet. If your spine is too tilted to the right, chances are that there is too much weight on your right leg.

It's easy for the putter to travel too low going back and too high coming through. It's essentially matching the tilt in your shoulders and eyes. When you can get your upper torso to be level, your weight should automatically balance equally on both legs.

If you have been really tilted, looking in a mirror will help convince you that you are not too far left. In this position, the putter can now travel up in the backswing and down through impact. You can now feel like you compress the ball during the stroke.

You have freedom of movement. I hope this helps demystify putting, and may you see more putts go in! **TL**



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Pat O'Brien is the teaching professional at Lakewood Country Club in Dallas. He's the short game instructor to 2007 Masters Champion Zach Johnson, as well as PGA Tour players Vaughn Taylor, Colt Knost, Ted Purdy and numerous other professionals and accomplished amateurs. He also enjoys teaching golfers

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