

THOUGHTS ON PUTTING

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A GOOD PUTTER

- **Touch.** Be able to control the ball speed (distance). This takes practice and experience. Be sure and make solid contact; if your contact is sporadic, so will be your distance control. Find your putter's sweet spot and strike the ball there. Consistently.
- **Green Reading Ability.** You must be able to anticipate how the ball will behave on a given slope, at a given speed. The green may be wet or dry, bumpy or smooth, bent grass



or Bermuda, grainy or not, firm or soft. Sometimes wind is a factor too. You may be putting the same direction the greens mower went that morning (down grain, shiny grass, extra fast) or the opposite direction (up grain, darker grass, extra slow). One of the best ways to read a green, or to confirm or deny your beliefs about a particular putt, is to watch the other players' balls as they roll in the vicinity of the hole.

- **A Stroke You Trust.** Keep it simple. Use a pendulum-like one piece stroke. That is, the shoulders, arms, hands and putter move as a single unit while the legs, hips and head remain motionless. Learn to swing the putter straight down your target line with the face square to that line. Keep the putter head low. Accelerate though the ball. SMOOTHLY.

- **A Decisive and Positive Attitude.** “Often wrong, but never in doubt.” See the ball rolling into the hole along the line you anticipate. Make it happen.

SPEED DETERMINES LINE

My mom always told me not to answer a question with a question, but mom was never a caddie. Whenever someone asks me how much a putt is going to break, my answer is ALWAYS “How hard are you going to hit it?” A fast moving ball breaks less. A slow moving ball breaks more. That’s why uphill putts, and putts on slow greens break less; you have to hit the ball relatively hard to reach the cup. Conversely, downhill putts, or putts on fast greens break more because you have to hit the ball relatively soft so the ball doesn’t go too far.

So how hard should you hit it? I’m pretty much in professor Pelz’s camp on this one; if you miss the putt, the ball should go a foot or so past the hole (Pelz says 17 inches). This does a couple of important things. First of all, by reaching the hole you give the ball a chance to go in. Secondly, the ball will hold its line better if it approaches the hole with a little extra speed; it won’t “wobble” so much near the hole on less than perfect greens.

NOW, PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

It goes like this: You approach the green. Take note of the surrounding terrain; is the green (or entire course) on a big hill? If so, where does it slope to? Is there a lake, creek or pond nearby? If so, it’s likely that the architect built the green to drain in that direction. Look at “the big picture”. When an entire landscape is on an incline, what appears to be level actually matches the slope of the landscape. That’s why seaside courses tend to break toward the ocean; the entire landscape tends to slope that way. That’s what “plum bobbing” is all about; it gives you true vertical, which should give you a sense of true level.

You walk onto the green. How does it feel beneath your feet? How does it feel when you fix your ball mark? Is it firm? Soft?

Look at the grass between your ball and the hole. Is it dry? Wet? Shiny? Dark? Smooth? Bumpy?

Get down low and look down your line from at least 5 paces behind the ball. When in doubt go back 10 more paces. How’s the slope look? Based on the information you’ve gathered so far, how do you expect the ball to behave?

Watch the other players’ balls go by the hole. Does this confirm or change your expectations?

Choose a line, based on speed, of course. Be decisive. Set your putter up square to the desired launch direction. Get your body in position to move the putter down that launch line.

NOW, stop for a few seconds and look at the hole. Where is it? Look back at your ball. Do you feel as if (if you were Mr. Stretchy Rubber Man) you could reach out and put your hand in the hole while looking at your ball? If not, look at the hole again. Where is it? This is the part that tells you how hard to hit it. Repeat this process until you feel as though you can put your hand in the hole without looking at it. Then **ROLL YOUR PUTT WITH CONFIDENCE.**