

THE DARK SIDE

improve your

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Welcome to the Dark Side!

In his latest exclusive article for Asian Golf Monthly, putting guru Paul Hurrion visits the 'dark side' and explores the benefits of putting 'cross-handed' or 'cack-handed' as the critics prefer to describe it.

PAUL HURRION

TOWARDS THE END of his playing career, Jack Nicklaus was asked the following question: "If you could go back and change one thing about your golf game, what would it be?" His reply: "Putt left below right."

It certainly made me think about whether there are benefits to the so-called 'Dark Art' of 'Left below Right'. Could it help me – or you – become a better putter?

It is a tough decision for a tournament professional to make any significant change to putting technique, let alone change the entire putting grip to 'left hand low'. The traditional 'right below left' putting grip has always been associated with feel, and feel is paramount when you are faced with a downhill six-footer breaking hard from left to right.

With that sort of situation in mind, it certainly is a bold move to go 'cross-handed'. However, switching grip means nothing if you lack the correct technique. Many golfers have overcome putting woes by going 'cross-handed' – Bernhard Langer's commitment to the change revitalised his career.

Consider this for a couple of seconds: Gripping the putter with the left hand below the right changes the dynamics of your putting stance

The shoulders become horizontal and level which, in simple terms, makes it much easier to swing the putter both away and towards the golf ball. It also inhibits manual compensations and twitches which, as you will know from my previous Asian Golf Monthly contributions, I make every effort to eliminate.

My experience with leading golfers and my bio-mechanical knowledge both tell me that a stance with level shoulders promotes consistency and accuracy in the putting stroke. Try it, feel it for yourself.

Left Hand Below Right Grip

The left below right grip (also disparagingly called the 'cack-handed grip') makes it easy to bring the putter through squarely on the intended line, developing a feeling of confidence. I would advise any golfer suffering from the dreaded putting yips or any twitchy feelings to experiment with this grip – and especially those with difficulty holing out from inside six feet.



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It feels a little odd at first – it would be odd if it didn't. But I am confident that your hole out percentage on short putts will quickly improve.

You will have to pay more attention to pace control on medium to long range putts as essentially with the traditional grip you have been used to using wrist break, or release, to determine pace. Now, with left below right, you will be using larger muscles and a shoulder stroke instead of arms, wrists and hands. Consistency from the longer range will soon develop.

Some difficulties, such as mis-directed putts and off-centre hits, can be reduced by simply placing your left hand

below your right, but still holding the club in a mirror image of the conventional grip. I recommend the method I am demonstrating (picture 1 facing page)

There are four key positions to notice at address:

- (1) Grip the club with the left hand letting the arm hang naturally. The putter-shaft should align with the left forearm. The motion of the left arm controls the path of the stroke (picture 2) I call this the 'Lifeline Grip'.
- (2) Be sure to have the back of the left hand in a square alignment with the putter-face. This promotes square ball contact, provided, of course, you've put yourself in the other key positions.
- (3) After the right hand goes on, lean the club left (towards the target) so that the curled fingers of the right hand press against the inside of the left wrist. Feel your hand 'locked in' together, sandwiching the grip.
- (4) The right forearm also needs to align with the putter shaft. This will help with elbow and shoulder alignment.

Your important left index finger runs straight down the side of the grip for feel and extra stability.

This method allows the hands to operate together as one unit and really encourages the arms, shoulders and putter to work together – back and forth with a solid, compact feel straight down the target line. Personally, I like the thought of the left hand pulling through the putting stroke with the putter head following behind, just like a car pulling a caravan – cars don't push caravans (eg. the traditional right under left grip is a push).

'Left under Right' does have a ten-



dency to de-loft the putter at address. I always want to see the butt of the grip directly over the centre of the ball, with a fraction more weight on the left leg. So with a three-degree lofted putter and approximately two degrees of forward shaft lean, you create the one degree dynamic loft at impact which I believe creates the optimal forward roll on the golf ball. I will talk about roll and loft in a future issue.

Using this gravity driven stroke, the power does not involve the hands or wrists or arms, or indeed the shoulder, upper back or pectoral muscles. If it did, the armpits would open and close during the stroke, giving more unwanted variables.

It is the core back, stomach and side muscles that operate the stroke. In a true pendulum-shoulder stroke, the armpits remain closed throughout the stroke. A drill to check this is to place a towel around your back with the ends under your armpits, or use two gloves. Ensure the towel or gloves remain comfortably under the armpits throughout the stroke – and don't fall out!

Move your shoulders both 'back and through' with your 'core' muscles tugging in a spiral against the hips, thus rotating the whole upper torso as a unit. As a result, during the backswing you essentially place the putter back to the top of the backswing and then let the arms and shoulders rock down in a gravity-powered free-fall motion.

The free-fall pattern is smoother, more consistent for energy transfer and more accurate, enabling you to learn to judge pace and distance. The hands have nothing whatsoever to do on the downswing, just hold on for the ride.

Palms Together Grip

If after really trying the 'Left below Right' grip your 'feel' is too different to what you have been used to, then maybe you should try my 'Palms Together' grip.

The main issue with a traditional reverse overlap grip (Right hand Low) is the emphasis on the right hand for power and a degree of 'touch and feel', while the overlapping left index finger supposedly stabilises the left wrist to guard against left-wrist breakdown or flipping through. Whilst the hands should 'oppose' one another on the grip, right hand low dominance opens the way for problems – the shoulders start tilted out of horizontal and the spine angle set-up is like addressing a seven-iron.

I prefer a set-up with the shoulders square to the target line, with shoulder joints approximately the same height and the spine vertical so I have devised a grip that has the palms opposed and does not

result in one hand especially lower than the other.

This grip, which I call, the 'Palms Together' grip (picture 3) is formed by 'sandwiching' the handle with both hands then opening the last three fingers on the right and wrapping them over those of the left to rest in the gaps between fingers.

Note: the whole of the left hand is on the left hand is on the grip. This is the control hand, so it makes sense to have the whole of the hand in contact. It's a simple grip with the benefit of reducing the influence of any unwanted wrist action. A number of European Tour players are using such a grip, notably England's Ross Fisher (picture 4).

I look at the function of your putting grip simply as a tool that can control the handle of the putter to ensure takeaway, transition, downswing, impact and through-stroke are performed with a smooth tempo without jerkiness, abruptness, or any snatching.

Unwanted movement will encourage the handle of the club to twist or move inside your grip, especially if you use a thick grip! That is why I like a free-fall gravity stroke by which the 'triangle' of shoulders and arms falls from the top of the backstroke by gravity; the handle has a natural and smooth acceleration downward that peaks at the bottom of the stroke. Nothing is added to the speed of the fall by muscle action in the hands or arms or shoulders.

The main thought is for your hands to 'ride' the handle as it falls so you 'feel' no activity in your hands. The shoulder triangle must keep flowing through impact and not stop once contact with the ball is made.

At first, some golfers say: "It just doesn't feel powerful." They feel this method will not get the ball all the way to the hole. However, what matters for power is putter-head speed at impact – essentially the energy transferred from the club into the ball and not how that speed was generated.

In the gravity free-fall shoulder stroke, the speed pattern is controlled by



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gravity, which is extremely consistent. The actual putter-head speed at impact depends upon the length of the fall (the backswing). So putter-head speed corresponds and varies very exactly with stroke length and tempo.

I ask many of my golfers to practice with palms together to develop their feel for pace, and it works even on 70-footers at St Andrews.

Back to the left-hand low grip: the left arm and wrist remain stable throughout the stroke and there is no powering or aggression with the left hand which is travelling 'backwards'. Conversely, traditional reverse overlap grip has the right hand facing forwards and it demands its 'head' to control the through-stroke powering through with so-called 'touch and feel'.

This powering through of the right hand expresses itself sometimes as left-wrist breakdown. But sometimes the left wrist stays stable and the right hand sends the extra 'oomph' up through the left elbow. Either way it destroys the golfer's intended stroke. The chances of this

occurring are significantly reduced with the left-hand low grip.

The point of all this is that a 'palms together grip' and a 'left-hand low' grip are a lot closer to a 'dead-hands' shoulder stroke than a reverse overlap grip with right-hand power.

Consequently, if you go for a true shoulder stroke with dead hands, it will very quickly be great on short putts. But after plenty of practice and familiarisation, it will be great on long putts and you will develop smooth power with minimal clubface rotation. It works for Pádraig Harrington and it would have for Jack Nicklaus, too. How many more tournaments would he have won?

I encourage all players, especially juniors, to consider 'left hand low'. With practice and a good technique I can guarantee that the effect of taking the hands out of the stroke, levelling the shoulders at address, having a shoulder motion with 'gravity led' acceleration will produce more accuracy and consistency on the putting green.

Give the Dark Art a try and lighten your scorecard!

Dr Paul Hurrión is among the world's foremost putting coaches. His passion for golf has led to a specialism in putting analysis and advice, assisting European Tour professionals and holding PGA accredited Putting Clinics. Through his work with Pádraig Harrington, he advised Hi-Tec on the bio-mechanical design dynamics of their new CDT Golf Shoe. For further information, visit http://www.quintic.com/quintic_putting_laboratory.htm or www.paulhurrión.com

Paul has recently designed a signature range of putters for GEL Golf. For further details on the GEL Putting Alignment Mirror, visit www.gelgolf.com