

BETTER PUTTING STROKE



EXCLUSIVE DAVID HOWELL INSTRUCTION

HOW I BUILT A BETTER PUTTING STROKE

In the last 12 months I have completely transformed my putting technique. I have a new stance, a new putter and a new stroke. Putting is now one of the strongest parts of my game. I hope my secrets help you, too.





HOW I BUILT A BETTER PUTTING STROKE

Putting has always been one of my strengths but I've never truly excelled on the greens. My putting statistics are usually steady but not spectacular. About 12 months ago I decided that in order to challenge the world's best players I had to improve my stroke. I've always admired the simplicity of Tiger's technique and love the fact he has absolute confidence in his stroke. I wanted to emulate his square-to-square swing path so under the guidance of my coach Clive Tucker at Mannings Heath and with the assistance of Paul Hurron's Quintic putting analysis software I've transformed my stroke. Visually, it looks quite different, but the changes have actually been really simple to make. Just follow this step-by-step guide and you can groove a better stroke yourself.



EYES DIRECTLY OVER THE BALL

1 I used to have a 35-inch Yes C-Groove putter but it was too long for me and as a consequence I stood very tall and quite a distance from the ball. My session on the Quintic stroke analysis software showed that in order to get a better posture at set-up I needed to have it shortened to 32 inches. I've had to add a bit of extra weight in the grip to compensate for the length I lost in the shaft but it has really helped me get my eyes directly over the ball. I now feel that I am much more bent forward from the hips, with the top of my back horizontal to the ground. A good check is to get a friend to lay a ruler across your shoulders (see above). You should be able to let it rest there while you take your stroke.



WIDEN THE STANCE

2 My putting stance is considerably wider than it was before. Before, I would address my putts with my shoes only a few feet apart, similar to a wedge shot stance. Now my feet are wider than my driver stance, a foot or so outside my shoulder width. The reason I made this change was to get a much more stable base. Widening the stance stops the body from moving in the putting stroke. A slight flex in the knees helps me maintain this good posture throughout the stroke.



KEEP THE HEAD DOWN

3 Looking up straight after you've struck a putt to see whether it goes in the hole is a bad idea. It opens up your shoulders and the putter face with it. A lot of pros like to listen for the ball to drop in the hole before lifting their head but I've discovered an even better way of keeping my head down. I leave a little gap between my putter and the ball at address and focus on the small patch of grass in between. As I strike the putt my eyes remain glued to those blades of grass.



Focus on the grass between the putter and the ball.



LEARNING THE SQUARE-TO-SQUARE STROKE

4 The toughest change I had to make was retraining my stroke so that I take the putter on a straight path back and through. To help me groove this new swing path I practised putting beneath a straight guideline. You can buy these from a club professional or just as easily make one using a couple of knitting needles and a length of string. I pop a tee peg flush into the ground just behind the ball when I've got the string perfectly set up so that it bisects the centre of the ball. This helps me to re-address each putt from the same good position just in front of the peg.



Use a tee peg to mark the spot you should hit each putt from.



DAVID HOWELL MYTHREE PUTTING KEYS

SWING SMOOTH AND WRIST FREE

Don't swing the putter back too fast. Take your time in the backswing and keep the transition into the through swing smooth and fluid. This will give a much better rhythm to your stroke. Keep the wrists out of your putting stroke; always lead by rocking the shoulders. Never hit a putt using your wrist action; always let the upper body do the work for you.



WRIST FREE: Make a smooth stroke by rocking from the shoulders.



WRIST FREE: Keep the wrists firm as you strike the putt through.



WRISTY: Don't allow the hands to collapse as you swing through.



GRIP LIGHTLY

A common mistake amateurs make is to grip the putter too firmly. This puts a lot of tension in the forearms and doesn't allow freedom for the shoulders to rock. I grip the putter very lightly as though there is a delicate bird in my hands. I build my grip by placing the left hand lightly on the putter first then adding the right hand.



POSITIVE PUTTING

Don't fall into the never-up-never-in trap. Pop a tee peg in the ground 17 inches behind the hole (my comfort zone for missing putts) and aim for this point. You'll put a more positive stroke on the ball and give each putt a chance of dropping.