

PLEASE FIX MY PUTTING!

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Tour star Steven Tiley helps four golfers who just can't putt

Putting can be a saviour and a curse. Hole out from 30ft and your laughing; miss from 3ft and your crying. But have you ever wondered why you can hole a 30 footer one minute, and a miss a three footer the next? Concentration plays a big part, but a lot boils down to pace and path. Get those right and you'll be rolling putts in left, right and centre. Get one of them wrong and you'll be crying over more than one three footer. But to do that you need to practice. So instead of ignoring the putting green in favour of the driving range, grab your putter and start thinking about the three Ps: Practice, Path and Pace. Four hapless putters did, and I managed to fix their biggest putting flaws by giving them some simple drills. They'll work for you, too! ➔



'Distance control always lets me down'

TOUR TIPS
STEVEN TILEY
ROYAL CINQUE PORTS, KENT



**'I've lost
confidence
on the
green'**

**'I lack
consistency
inside six
feet'**

**'I push so
many of
my putts
right'**





DAVE BARSON
HANDICAP 12

'My distance control always lets me down'

What's the problem?

Dave is prone to lifting the handle up at impact and strikes a lot of his putts "thin" with the bottom half of the face making contact with the ball first. Not only does this lead to inconsistencies in terms of pace, but it also affects direction as well.

What's the fix?

A simple forward press. Phil Mickelson swears by it as it helps to keep the putter head low to the ground and the hands ahead of the ball at impact. Before you start your takeaway, just nudge your hands towards the target by an inch or two. It may look like you've delofted the head at address. But as long as you don't rotate the face open, I guarantee you will deliver the club square at impact.

What Dave said

My stroke feels so much better now, and I'm no longer feeling a vibration through my hands from my stroke bottoming out. I think I was probably guilty of being too deliberate in my setup, whereas now I just take my stance, look at the hole once or twice and use the forward press to act as a trigger to start my stroke. It's an easy routine to repeat and it's already helped to ease some of the tension in my arms at address.



Press on it

It may feel unnatural at first, but a forward press is a quick fix to achieve a smoother takeaway and a truer roll.

Build a ladder

Create zones with some tees and try to roll the ball into them. If you've only got five minutes, use your towel and focus on one distance.



STEVE'S BEST TIP HOW TO ELIMINATE THREE-PUTTS

If you struggle with pace and alignment, a three-step ladder drill is a great way to hone speed control from varying distances. Start by pacing out 30 feet from a tee peg and draw a perpendicular chalk line to the tee about 10 feet wide. Place another two tees either side of the chalk line and repeat the process three times, with each line separated by the length of your putter to create a ladder effect. Once achieved, go back to the starting tee and try to putt into each step in succession, increasing your length of stroke. The goal is to get at least four out of six balls in the correct gaps consistently.



WILL WARD
HANDICAP 12

'I really lack consistency from inside 6ft'

What's the problem?

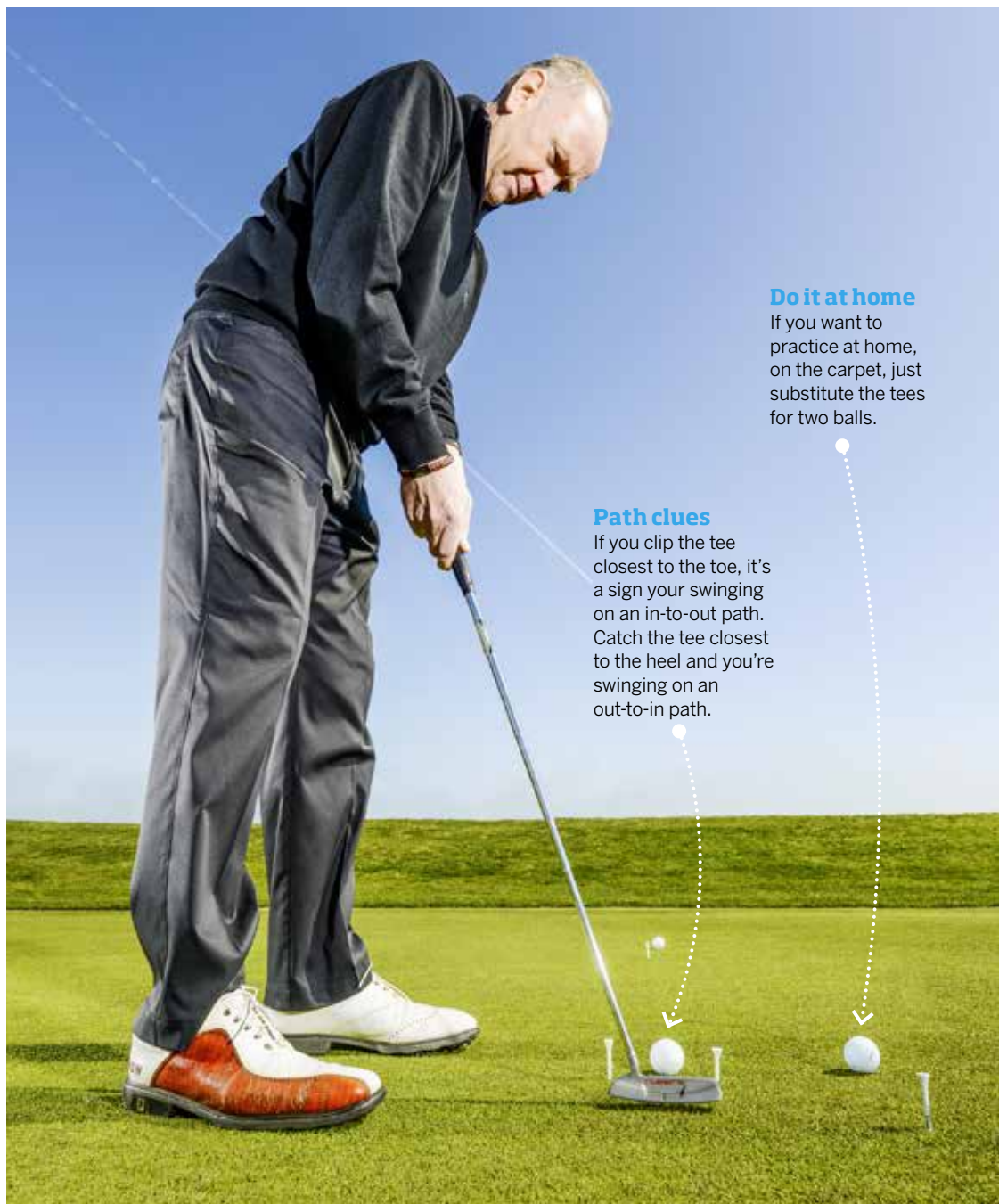
Will has a tendency to take the club back just outside the line of the putt. It's only minimal mind you, but just opening or closing the face fractionally is enough to send a putt veering off line, even one from tap-in distance.

What's the fix?

The best solution to help groove any stroke is to set up a two-tee gate drill. Find a straight putt 6ft from the hole and place a pair of tees in the ground – one outside the heel and the other outside the toe. Make sure the gate is large enough for the putter head to travel through, and then make a series of practice strokes straight back and straight through. Once you start to avoid the tees, pop a tee in the ground ahead of you, drop a ball and try to hit the tee – then watch the putts drop!

What Will said

I thought I was actually coming in square at impact, but the gate proved otherwise and instantly highlighted the errors of my ways. As a feedback tool, it's been revolutionary and aiming at a tee peg has already made a big difference psychologically in narrowing my focus. I now feel a lot more confident over short putts, which is a massive step forward for me.



Do it at home

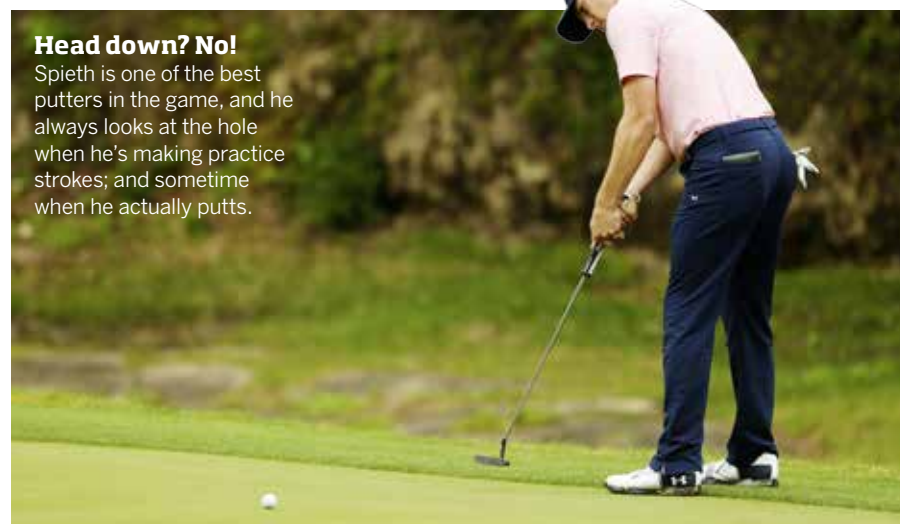
If you want to practice at home, on the carpet, just substitute the tees for two balls.

Path clues

If you clip the tee closest to the toe, it's a sign your swinging on an in-to-out path. Catch the tee closest to the heel and you're swinging on an out-to-in path.

Head down? No!

Spieth is one of the best putters in the game, and he always looks at the hole when he's making practice strokes; and sometime when he actually putts.



STEVE'S BEST TIP KEEP THE EYE ON THE PRIZE

If you were trying to throw a piece of paper into the bin, I guarantee you would only have eyes for the target. The same principle applies to your putting, because you learn nothing by just staring at the ball. All the best putters like Ben Crenshaw and Jordan Spieth (left) rely on feel and take practice strokes looking only at the hole. When they address the ball, their primary focus is on distance control and setting the ball off online. They all try to keep their routines as simple as possible because the more things you think about, the more tension starts to eat into your stroke.



JAMES HOLMAN
HANDICAP 1

'I've lost all my confidence on the greens'

What's the problem?

James used to play off scratch but now he's not playing as much, he has lost his feel and confidence. The only way he can rediscover both is by going back to basics, and that means holing putts, which used to be his bread and butter.

What's the fix?

A lot of better players benefit most from what I call perfect practice, where the scenarios replicate a pressure situation out on the course. One of the best drills to build consistency and confidence is to create a circle by dropping five balls about 3ft away from the hole. The idea is to move around the circle by holing each putt. To make it harder, you have to start again if you miss one. It's the ultimate in pressure putting.

What James said

I've never really tried to replicate the pressure of a competition in a practice session, so the idea of being forced to start again if you miss a putt is a really clever way to maintain interest and focus. That's probably been my downfall since I've started playing again, but now that I'm holing putt after putt, I'm starting to feel more comfortable with my stroke again.



Test your nerve

Once you've made all five putts in succession, create a new circle with the balls positioned four feet from the hole. Keep extending the length until you've ran out of time (or daylight).



Band aid

A couple of elastic bands a ball's width apart on your putter will tell you if your strike is off-centre.

STEVE'S BEST TIP FIND YOUR SWEETSPOT

A common mistake amateurs make is thinking they've struck the ball out of the centre of the face when it's actually come off the heel or toe. Not even the best putters in the world find the centre of the face all the time, but it helps to know where you are striking the ball so you can make the necessary adjustments to achieve greater consistency. To put your stroke to the test, take two elastic bands and double-wrap them around the edge of the putter face. A putting clip or impact tape will work just as well, and all three will tell you instantly if you've found the sweetspot or not.



'I seem to push every putt right'

What's the problem?

Michael actually has a very solid set-up, but his natural reaction is to decelerate into the ball without a proper release. The knock-on effect means the face arrives open at impact and a lot of putts finish short and right of the hole.

What's the fix?

Place a coin a couple of feet in front of a ball and then draw a straight chalk line which intersects both objects. Practice rolling the ball along the line, with the follow through matching the length of the backswing. The goal is to make sure the face travels square along the target line. Any deviation indicates that the face has rotated at impact and the hands are getting too involved.

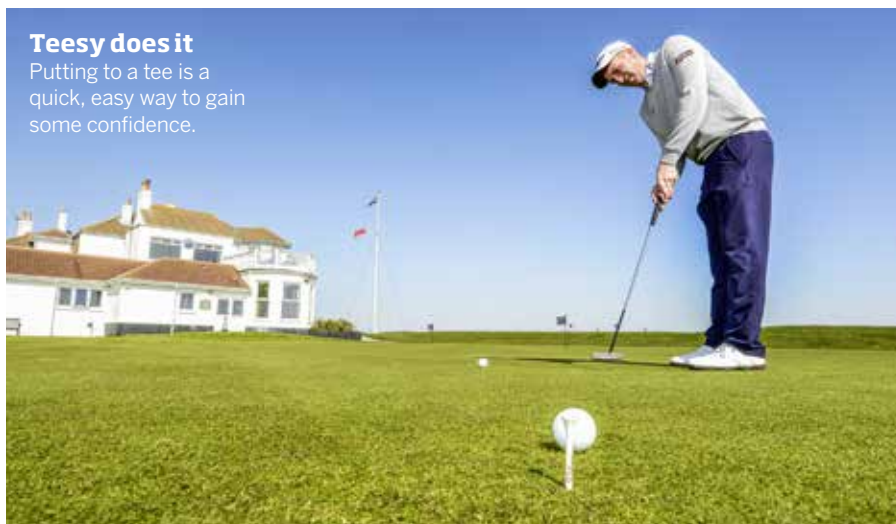
What Michael said

It sounds and looks so simple, but using a coin as a visual aid has already made a massive difference. I'm putting so much more aggressively now and committing to the stroke, rather than fanning the face open at impact. As a result, almost every putt is starting off online and tracking past the hole. It's reassuring to know that my set-up is sound and early impressions suggest my stroke is getting there, too. I even holed two 30-footers back to back!



Teesy does it

Putting to a tee is a quick, easy way to gain some confidence.



STEVE'S BEST TIP TEE UP SOME EXTRA CONFIDENCE

There's nothing worse than missing a short putt before a round, so why put yourself through the agony? Putting is all about confidence, so forget about the hole and warm up before your round by putting to a tee in the ground. If you miss, at least you can convince yourself that it would have gone in ordinarily. And not only that, the hole will appear twice the size when you're out on the course. It's a simple mind trick, but it works a treat – and you can do it anywhere on the putting green, at any distance, with any amount of break, in the five minutes before you tee off.