

Reading Putts as Revealed by Going Behind the Hole

Geoff Mangum
Magic Wand Putting Instruction™
Greensboro, North Carolina
puttmagic@aol.com
website: <http://hometown.aol.com/puttmagic>

[ZipTip: Green & Putt Reading: Reading Putts as Revealed by Going Behind the Hole](#)

If a putt's break seems elusive, try going behind the hole for a read, but be careful that you visualize the ball's roll as coming towards you and as slowing to drop-speed in this final entry section of the putt.

Some golfers find reading their putts from behind the hole very valuable. At one point, Nick Faldo discovered he got a better sense of the putt from behind the hole than he did from any other vantage point. Occasionally it reveals otherwise hidden break. However, many pros caution that reading from behind the hole often causes confusion and should be avoided. Others reserve this technique for putts that are especially tricky or when their sense of the "read" is unclear. If you know how to be careful at it, reading behind the hole can be an excellent way to focus in on the best read. And examining this technique teaches a lot about how to read in general.

Probably the bottom line is that you have to be careful to imagine the putt from behind the hole as slowing down accurately as it enters the last three feet of the putt, get a good fix on the shape of this path, note the break point or furthest lateral extension of the path off a direct line to the hole, and use this "read" to inform and confirm a final, determinative read of the "total" putt when back at the ball.

Some Theory.

Reading putts is an involved process -- not tedious, but stretched out over time and taking a lot of information gathering to perform well. There is no such thing as "one" read -- instead, there is a targeting process that feeds the stroke-making movement process.

What golfers refer to as "the" read is really a set of cues to hold onto or fix perceptions about the imagined path of the best putt, such as the "break point," a starting "spot," an aim point so many "balls" left or right of the cup, and so on. There IS an optimal putt to be made, but it only comes in its unique pattern of speed and shape. (Golfers sometimes sense this "read" right off the bat, and feel that any more effort will only hurt, but this is not all that frequent.) Seeing this "total" putt is what it's all about. This is what gives you the cues to hold onto in the first place.

In pro golf, reading putts starts with experience of how the ball rolls on a green. During pro tournaments, reading putts begins with the practice round survey. During a round, reading begins on the practice green, tuning up for speed.

On a hole, reading begins from the fairway, taking in the lay of the green in the wider context of the surrounding terrain. It continues walking onto the green as the view of the surface contour changes. The feet and one's sense of balance come into play, as one

moves about on the dance floor sensing its tilt and speed. There are many general tips for reading greens, grain, drainage patterns, putts -- one of these is reading from behind the hole.

The point is that the different stages of reading are performed differently and provide different sorts of information. One has to respect the different ways of reading, and not overload your personal capacity for an accurate sense of the putt as a whole by over-emphasizing the details from just one phase of the process.

The second point is that reading is a staged process that occurs over time, in phases. For optimal putt reading, these different stages WILL be sequenced no matter what, so it helps if you choose an OPTIMAL sequencing.

Three Bits of Science.

1) A "read" comes together in time. Our various sources of information for reading a putt are channeled together to form a "holistic" understanding of the putt. For many, this is mostly visual, with mental images of the path and its shape. For others, it is more a feel for the speed of the putt as if in a movie or a feel of the stroke itself. For some, it is a combination.

2) When you move, you lose. The brain for targeting and sensing targets in space in relation to the body wants a still body, a still head, and still eyes. "Quiet" is a better word. It's hard to get a good fix while any of these are moving, and when you WALK after a targeting effort, you pretty much dump it all in anticipation of doing the next thing, unless you are good at concentrated focus.

3) The stroke you make must match the read you take. The putt's read ultimately controls the motor program of the stroke. The read acts like a mental blueprint or map when standing in the address position that guides our forthcoming stroke movement for direction and pace more into the correct pattern. If you don't feel comfortable as you prepare to execute the stroke, the stroke is not matching your read and you will very likely have an episode of "second guessing" in mid-stroke. When the two match up, you don't worry about technique or second guessing.

So What?

For an optimal read, all forms or stages of reading should be handled well, in their time, within your capacity, and channeled in sequence for the most vivid and accurate sense of the putt possible at the time the stroke is planned and executed. This means the read from behind the hole can't be the final read, and that the movement after this read in walking to the ball can easily dump the read and leave you with a flawed appreciation of the putt.

The behind-the-hole read also is different from all other forms of reading in this crucial aspect: the visualization of the putt is seen as "coming to" the golfer. This reverses the speed pattern of the visualized "movie" of the ball's roll. Instead of visualizing the putt going outward toward the break point and then curling back toward the hole, the golfer behind the hole sees the ball approaching generally. If you are not careful with visualizing the speed accurately, the "movie" you get will have a very indistinct "break point," and the precise shape of the final three feet or so of the putt will be vague.

Bobby Locke is probably the master of reading AT the hole, studying it's surrounding three or four feet as if preparing for a final examination for his doctorate in this one putt. Although he didn't especially get behind the hole, he was supremely conscious of the

imagined putt's speed in this area. And the "game" he hunted here was the exact path the ball would take, bumps, deflections, hillocks -- everything considered. Back at address, he was famous for his ability to maintain nearly complete detail in his visualization of the putt, even on long putts, but the key area was always the final three or four feet.

Consequently, the unique value of reading from behind the hole is that it gets your imagination down to the final three feet of the putt. But this only happens if you see the speed right and are hunting to perceive the exact path of the putt through this area, including the location on the rim where the ball will enter the cup. This sort of "read" feeds into the previous information to help identify the break point and overall energy pattern of the putt.

To hold these "cues" when moving back to the ball, keep your eyes on the key features as you return, like the break point and the final section's shape and entry point. Keep focused on the pattern of the putt while assuming the address position, and then find these cues again with your targeting routine from beside the ball. If these beside-the-ball cues don't match up, your "total" read is flawed. That's not because you shouldn't read from behind the hole, but because you didn't do something well.

[Make This Part of Your Game.](#)

Reading from behind the hole can be helpful. The pacing and close look also get you a nice handful of perceptions that make distance control a lot sharper. But it takes time, and can be dangerous or confusing if done improperly or relied on to the exclusion of other targeting phases. You can choose to emphasize other methods of gathering a good "read," for time or capacity reasons, but always respect reading as a process of targeting for the putt itself. Behind-the-hole reading is a sharp tool -- it should be used carefully, but it does fine work. If you can't use reading from behind the hole well on a consistent basis, then don't -- that's the bottom line.

For more tips and information on putting, including a free 10,000+ database of putting lore and the Web's only newsletter on putting (also free), visit Geoff's website at <http://www.puttingzone.com>, or email him directly at geoff@puttingzone.com.