

The Core Putt

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ZipTip: DISTANCE CONTROL / TOUCH: The Core Putt

Here's a tip that helps you tune your touch in to the green speed. I call it the "core" putt because it comes from the center of your manner of relating to the world, and that's what you need to get in touch with to activate your touch on the green.

The Theory. The idea of the core putt is simple. The biggest problem in finding your touch is that your body's speed is out of synch with the speed your putting gives to the ball, so you don't get the results you wanted and expected. The answer is not simply to slow down, but to slow down in harmony with the speed of the green. Then you have much better control of the speed of your putts, regardless of distance.

But every putt is different, isn't it -- especially putts of different lengths? So every putt will have a different speed no matter what the playing condition of the green, right? No, not when you recognize your core putt. It's always there, waiting for you, like a Swiss watch with its exquisite timing mechanisms. Every putt has the same tempo and total timing regardless of distance, and the trick is to tune your personal tempo in to the specific green and its playing conditions.

Everyone has their own core putt, just the way everyone has a characteristic gait and personality type. You've heard golf psychologists say before that golfers ought to work with and not against their basic personality type in terms of fast swings or leisurely swings. Well, this really isn't the case with putting. There's only one way to have great touch: slow down, partner!

How It Works. To make your core putt, you need to relax and enjoy yourself quietly. You know you are relaxed when you don't have much excess body movement; you stand still patiently without much limb or hand movements or muscle tension and breathe in a measured, easy pace. If this is a problem for you, it's a problem for your using your body to putt as well, so find a way. It also helps to gaze leisurely at the pattern of the grass blades and their sharp shadows, as this prepares the mind by giving you a desirably familiar awareness of the character of the green surface in terms of grass type, height, tightness or shagginess, and moisture content -- all keys to putt speed.

Then address the ball and make a very simple stroke to nowhere in particular -- the simpler the better, as few moving parts as possible -- as follows: initiate the backstroke with a little pushing off from the left shoulder rolling back to move the putterhead; when you first sense that taking the putterhead back any farther or higher will require some effort on your part by pushing or lifting as you feel the weight of the putterhead, just quit going back and relax; now let the putterhead fall back forward through the ball and roll the ball with good level contact just to see how far it will go. Simple.

You don't want to "hit" the ball; just let the putterhead freefall back through the impact zone. It's sort of like the putter is a hinged "pet door," and you just move the bottom of

the door back out of vertical and then drop it and let it swing gently through the ball. The tempo is about what a baby elephant uses on a lazy day to swing his trunk lightly through the savannah grass.

If you compared amateur putting tempos with pro tempos, you would be struck by how slow the pros' putt strokes are -- slow and smooth and steady. To see your tempo at a similar pace, try the following: relax, stand upright, let your arms hang by your sides, and breathe in through your nose -- a good full breath but not especially deep. As you inhale, raise your hands and arms out from your side to a total of about six inches, like expanding a bellows. Then hold your breath for one beat and relax, allowing your arms and hands to sink back to your sides. That's your putting tempo for a smooth, accurate stroke. The Core Putt ought to happen with about this same tempo.

What You Get. If you do this, what happens is the ball rolls a certain distance, maybe 10 feet, maybe 8, maybe 12. The distance depends on your body type, putter, ball, and characteristic manner of relating to the world with your body at this time, AND the playing characteristics of the green in terms of green speed. This core putt is always there. Try a second ball and see if it doesn't go the same distance. Both balls go pretty much the same distance. You can do this all day long, over and over. On another green or the same green on another day, all your core putts might go a different distance but they will all go the same distance.

Use the Core Putt to Tune In Your Touch Timing. Now take a putt to a hole that is at a distance within the length of your core putt. If your core putts all go 11 feet, set up a level 10 foot putt. A good way to do this is to drop a ball beside the hole and use the core putt to send it away; then go putt into the hole from where the ball stops or a bit closer. Don't worry much about sinking the putt -- just aim pretty decently and then concentrate on the smoothness of your easy core stroke. Watch how nice your distance control becomes. Then try to sink a few. Next, change the distance and start over, again inside the core range. Then go outside the range. Finally, find an uphill putt at about the range and see what adjustments are really required. Repeat this effort from the opposite side, at the core range coming downhill.

What This Means. This means several very useful things. First, you carry around with you every day your own personal Stimpmeter. Wondering what the green speed is? Does it really matter what the Stimpmeter says? No, what matters is whether you control the speed with your innate sense of touch, regardless of how fast or slow the green might be in terms of some number. Use your own number and find it immediately with core putts.

Second, for any putt shorter than the length of your core putt, you should be absolutely convinced that you do not need any "hit" in your stroke whatsoever, since the very relaxed and easy core putt covers those distances easily. Therefore, for a core putt of 11 feet, a 10-foot level putt should be made without any sense of "hit" in your stroke. This relaxes you and gives you superior touch on ALL of the truly should-make putts.

Third, because you have this constant reference for power in your putting stroke, you have much better speed control for putts of ANY distance. A fifteen-foot putt is not much tougher than an 11-foot putt; it's a core putt plus a 4-foot putt. Now, when you focus on the target at address, your body "instinctively" knows how to generate the stroke power or weight that rolls the ball to the hole at a very good speed for sinking. In other words, you are tuned in to the green with your body's characteristic manner of relating to the world, and you have a great sense of touch.

Make the Core Putt Part of Your Game. To consolidate this, make the core putt the first thing you do when you step onto the practice putting clock. Get the timing of your own core mechanisms in synch with the green.

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.