

# What the Heck is a Forward Press Good For?

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[ZipTip: SETUP & STROKE: What the Heck is a Forward Press Good For?](#)

A forward press is a bad trade for a little rhythm in your stroke, and at a minimum requires careful attention to how it is performed to avoid creating problems.

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The forward press in putting is often said to be useful to "relieve tension" and to impart "rhythm" or "smoothness" to the stroke. Hokum. Forward pressing helps some people putt a bit better, but in general it's far from optimal and offers a poor trade-off of advantages versus disadvantages.

[A Little History of Wrists and Loft.](#) The forward press in putting is a descendant of the forward press used with the driver. In the early days of golf through at least Jack Nicklaus, a forward press of the driver has been a standard technique to get the full-swing stroke started with rhythm and fluidity. But at this time, greens were pretty rugged affairs, and most putters had lots of loft to get the ball rolling good. A forward press in putting wasn't very helpful. From the 1920s into the 1960s, most top putters used a lot of arm and wrist motion in putting. Billy Casper's "pop" putting for short putts was all wrist action back and through. Another sort of wrist action, famous from Walter Hagen, Bobby Locke, and Horton Smith, was the "hooding" action of allowing the left wrist during the backstroke to bow targetward to keep the putterface square to the putt line in a gating stroke path or a straight path powered by an arms stroke.

Somewhere between the 1940s and 1960s, golfers started using a forward press in putting. In actuality, the putters of that day were more lofted than necessary. Also at this time, the shoulder stroke gained stature and the greens became more finely manicured and truer. On these finer surfaces, "left wrist breakdown" caused inconsistent energy and started the ball with a bounding action. As putter lofts decreased with the improved greens, the low and level stroke became the norm, and the notion of "true roll" became more prominent. Before lofts decreased substantially but after green surfaces improved, golfers delofted their putters to get a more consistent, truer roll. The functional purpose of the press was to dump off excess loft, but the rationale was borrowed from the driver swing, so the putter forward press was said to give fluidity and rhythm to the stroke.

[The Forward Press Dumps Off Loft as a Way to Get a Little Rhythm.](#) According to Dave Stockton, who grew up on the true greens of California and toured during this transitional period, the forward press adds rhythm to the stroke and promotes a good roll. Interestingly, Stockton does not particularly desire loft at impact, but he wants loft in his putter so he can remove it with a forward press. This is in line with others, who agree that at impact you basically should not have any loft, but should contact the ball with a face that is near vertical to the surface. Tom Kite says that to promote this impact you should reposition your hands a bit forward as a way of removing loft, and then maintain that slight wrist bowing throughout the stroke, but he does this without a forward press.

(Stockton advises against the prepositioning, since it prevents you from watching the loft disappear.) Loren Roberts adds the bowing of the left wrist during the backstroke, and then maintains it throughout the rest of the stroke. Phil Mickelson, who has a very pronounced forward press, has a specially designed putter with 6 degrees of loft to allow him to keep the press in his stroke. His putter is a throw-back to the 1930s and Bobby Jones' "Calamity Jane." All agree that at impact the putterface should be square, near vertical, and with the sweetspot moving straight on line through the center of the ball.

[A Forward Press is a Dangerous Trade for a Little Rhythm.](#) If you simply want to get rid of loft, get a putter with little or no loft. So, the forward press comes down to rhythm and fluidity in the putt stroke. Looking at the associated difficulties versus the supposed gain and the need of the press to attain this gain, the forward press looks like a rotten deal.

The Disadvantages. The main disadvantage of the forward press is not doing it correctly, so the putterface orientation gets out of square. According to Stockton, you have to square the face and then look at the face that the loft allows you to see (below the top edge of the face). Then, when you forward press, you move your hands 1 to 2 inches laterally directly toward the target and watch the loft close evenly all along the face. To make the loft disappear evenly, your hand movement has to be directly at the target on the line the face is square to. If the loft disappears unevenly, you are changing the face orientation either to closed or open. (I bet the vast majority of forward pressers have never thought of watching the loft disappear.) Without being careful like this, odds are pretty good the forward press is taking the face out of square.

The second disadvantage is using too little or too much delofting. Too much, and you get "negative" loft that drives the ball into the turf and it rebounds out with uncertain energy and direction. Too much loft and the ball gets launched, again losing energy and direction. In addition, too much forward pressing tends to cause a push in the stroke path.

The third disadvantage is moving something other than your hands in the press. The press will likely alter the relation of the front forearm and the hind elbow, and this new relationship has to be preserved without much time to learn it well. In addition, there is a tendency to let the front shoulder slide forward with the press (as probably happens a bit in the driver full-swing), but this moves your head as well and changes the orientation of your upper torso to the putt and the ball. Not good! And if the shoulders shift open in the press, you promote a pull stroke or a cut stroke.

A fourth disadvantage is that the press alters your sense of the location of the bottom of the stroke arc. This knowledge is vital to consistent, solid impact, with the face square and vertical, and the sweetspot moving level through the center of the ball. People who forward press have to be very careful to avoid head movement or lifting the putter going back or sway of any kind, since their technique predisposes them to hit down into the ball instead of level and low through the ball. The forward press is very dangerous without a well-practiced fixing of the wrist angle at the end of the press, and a level and low through-stroke to go along with it.

The Rhythm Advantage. The principal advantage is illusory. Do you need the forward press to get rhythm in your putt stroke? Not really. The real problem here is the notion of using your forearm muscles to initiate the stroke. There is a powerful tendency to initiate the stroke with the hands and a left-wrist break, like Casper, as the putterhead is the heavy part of the system. In order to avoid wristiness, many golfers today climb one level up the limb system to the forearms.

But if you watch, these golfers are feeling a sudden increase in tension in the forearms at the initiation of the stroke, but the real movement is from the shoulders pushing the arms-hands assembly back as a unit. (The forearms alone are not capable of moving the putter back, because the elbows prevent this.) Unfortunately, this forearm tension tends to cause snatchiness in the wrists and grip-pressure changes. These influences tend to throw the stroke path out of pattern and cause the face to come out of square. With a stroke like this, the forward press serves to stabilize the forearm-wrist system before the snatchiness can affect it. The so-called "smoothness" thereafter in the stroke comes from a combination of shoulder power and elimination of wrist action. If you simply increased your grip pressure to an unreasonable level, along with forearm muscles locking the elbows in place with tightened wrists, you can still make a very smooth, fluid takeaway without any question.

Initiation is the Problem for Rhythm. So, rhythm is not really the problem -- it's HOW you initiate the stroke that's the problem. Your stroke needs to start without any sense of snatching or grabbing the putterhead back along the line, and the motion needs to fit into your established tempo from the beginning. A slow, even tempo allows this sort of initiation.

A Better Way. A better technique without risking the disadvantages of a forward press is to combine a secure initiation move with good tempo. You need to have your tempo in mind before you initiate the stroke and then do so with sufficiently even, constant, light tension in your forearms and grip so the putterhead moves "fluidly" and "smoothly" back. For me, the key is to start the stroke consciously with a fixed arms-hands system (or "triangle") but the whole pushed back with the left shoulder dropping. This "push back away" move, when combined with a nice tempo, is always even and smooth, and it goes straight back from the ball on line without changing the face or the upper body orientation to the putt.

Make This Part of Your Game. Try replacing the forward press with a shoulder move back and a slow tempo. If your impacts occur with too much loft, then your putter is not well designed for your stroke (or the ball is too far forward of the bottom of your stroke arc). It's far more important to keep the putterface square and to make solid, consistent impact than to risk this for the sake of a marginal gain in rhythm and fluidity, especially since you don't have to make the trade at all! The forward press is an odd-ball relic from a certain transitional phase of golf history, and has outlived its usefulness as a technique. Of course, though, it's addictive, so.....

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