

Set Up to the Ball, Then the Putt

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ZipTip: SETUP & STROKE: Set Up to the Ball, Then the Putt

To make sure the setup never changes and therefore the stroke dynamics don't alter from putt to putt, set up to the ball itself first, and then to the putt, so that you don't pull the trigger unless the two setups coincide.

One of the most common faults in putting occurs in the setup, or the taking up of the position of the body and putter at address. The fault is setting up to the putt, instead of setting up to the ball. What happens is that when you set up to the putt, you have not yet completed your assessment of the line of the putt and the setup causes you to prejudge the remainder of your perceptions to fit your established orientation. The result is that -- even if you accurately perceive the line -- you are highly likely to try to make the stroke from a flawed body orientation or a with a flawed stroke path or both.

A Bit of Theory.

Setting up to a putt presupposes that you accurately perceive the line of the putt. However, every golfer still has the critical aiming process to complete AFTER taking up his or her position at address. The perceptions during this post-setup targeting almost always cause a fine adjustment of the putterface or the sense of the starting line or the body orientation to the stroke. Accordingly, you really haven't completed your setup until after your targeting is complete.

In addition, all putts are the same except for distance, in terms of setup and stroke. Once you set up to any putt, the visual composition of the ball at your feet should always look identical to that for every other putt. (I don't recommend altering stance or putter orientation for different putts.) This consistent setup helps the brain plan and execute a reliable straight stroke, so that all putts start away from your body on exactly the same line out from your setup. The movement of your arms and shoulders in the stroke always follows the same path in reference to the rest of your body, and the start line of the ball as it leaves the field of view at your feet always looks the same and follows the same path in reference to your feet and eyes. The trick is to aim the whole setup so that this constant, identical putt leaves the address position on the line that matches the putt's line.

Because of these considerations, there really are two "setups" that must coincide: a general setup to the ball and a specific setup to the putt line. If you don't get a good setup to the ball, however, you cannot get a good setup to the putt line, and if you have to adjust to get a good setup for the putt line, you also have to re-set to the ball itself.

How This Works.

In order to set up to the ball itself, use only an approximated sense of the line of the putt itself. Let this approximate line intersect the point on the ball's equator that is closest to

the target, and continue from there through the ball's center, and out the opposite point on the back of the ball. This "line" through the ball is the line that determines your setup of the putter and your body. Set your putter so its sweetspot is directly behind the rear point on the ball and so that the face of the putter is perpendicular (or "square") to the line through the ball. Then set your eyes and gaze above the ball, square your feet, hips, and shoulders to this line and the putterface, and take up your grip.

Then, continue your normal aiming process. As your perceptions of the true line develop in accuracy and vividness during the post-address aiming process, you will very likely discover the need to alter your body's positioning at address slightly, or to adjust the putterface a bit, to fine tune your aim. At this point, again you should set up to the ball itself, using the more accurate sense of line. The new, more accurate line will intersect the front of the ball in a different point, and pass out the back of the ball along a slightly different line. When you adjust your setup of the putter and your body to this accurate line through the ball, your whole system must adjust as a unit, keeping the same relationship of your stance and shoulderframe orientation to the putterface.

At this point, the setup to the ball matches the setup to the putt line, so you are primed for your reliable, straight stroke. Your brain knows what to expect visually and kinetically, and so has the best chance to execute the intended putt. The optimal stroke path will start back away from the ball along this ball-putt setup line and the sweetspot of the square putterface will travel back into impact along this same line and continue through the ball on this setup line.

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

Practice setting up just to the ball itself. Pick a point on the front equator and see its opposite point on the back equator. Set up the putterface and your body to this "line" through the ball. Visualize a perfect stroke sending this ball straight out of your setup, the putter's sweetspot traveling squarely through this ball line at impact. Then, adjust the ball line one dimple, so the front point is farther from you by one dimple and the back point is nearer to you by one dimple. To this line, you have to adjust the whole setup as a system, reorienting the putterface as well as your whole body (stance, hips, shoulders, eyes). On the practice green, treat your initial setup as nothing more than a tentative approximation, subject to change as your targeting hones in on the real putt line. Only when the setup to the ball line matches the setup to the putt line do you get a green light to pull the trigger.

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