

The Shoulder Move Plus a Stockton Tip for Straight Strokes

by Geoff Mangum

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[ZipTip: SETUP & STROKE: The Shoulder Move Plus a Stockton Tip for Straight Strokes](#)

Cut strokes, pulls and putterface twists come mostly from the use of hand and arm muscles to start the backstroke, as this casts the backstroke out beyond the line of the putt, and using a simple shoulder push to start the stroke keeps the hands dead while giving you a good start on the backstroke.

Why are so many golfers plagued with a backstroke that goes outside the line and with putterface twists? The answer usually can be found in the forearms and wrists, and a shoulder move is the real cure.

[The Cause.](#)

There are essentially two ways to make a stroke: with a straight stroke path back and through or with some form of “gating.” This usually depends on hand position in reference to your shoulder sockets, with a straight stroke best promoted by hands directly beneath the sockets, and a “gating” stroke with hands more outward between the sockets and the ball. Regardless of hand position, however, starting the stroke back with the arms and hands instead of with the shoulderframe causes the stroke path to veer off line and the putterface to twist either open or closed.

To reveal the tendencies that cause this, adopt a putting address position and let your arms hang free about as wide apart as your knees, in the same position out from your body you use to putt. Now move your arms straight back and through. You will see that going back the hind arm goes lower as the forward arm rises up, and the reverse occurs in the through stroke. In a backstroke that’s no longer than a foot, the mismatch of the length of the arms can easily be three inches.

So? Well, when you grip the putter, this fixes the length of both arms and prevents this. But the tendency is still there, even though your hands can’t slide up and down the grip. Instead, there’s a tendency for the putter to travel beyond the putt line going back and for the face to twist, usually a bit closed. This results from the lengths changing relationship, exerting hand forces on the putter.

[The Fault.](#)

Sensing or seeing this, the only thing to do is make a loopy stroke path and try to retwist the face open a bit before impact. If you don’t, you get a pull stroke. If you over-correct the face or under-correct the stroke path, you get a cutstroke or glancing blow.

[Band-Aids.](#)

The mismatching action in the arms back and through causes the fault. In the past, the fault was addressed by “hooding” the putterface going back (extending the left arm to keep up with the right and allowing the face to close in order to keep the center of the putterface on the putt line). Walter Hagen, Bobby Locke, and Horton Smith all used and taught this technique. This required a little “break” (folding in) in the left wrist going back while the right wrist stayed more or less unchanged.

Today, a left wrist break is seen as a sin, but the underlying problem is still there. Loren Roberts has a little action in his wrists where the right wrist “breaks” (folds in) going back and the left wrist follows a bit by bowing (the same direction the left wrist moves in a small forward press). He then preserves this relationship of the wrists from the top of the backstroke through impact. This addresses the same problem in the opposite way, but it still leaves the root cause unaffected.

[A Fundamental Cure.](#)

To avoid this problem altogether, start the backstroke with the shoulderframe moving as a unit. This turns the pivot of the putt stroke WITH the arms, and in this case, the mismatch in arm length is eliminated. Some people refer to this as “keeping the triangle intact” in your stroke, but it’s really keeping the pivot of your putting system centered with the center of your grip as it moves, both back and through.

To check this, touch your fingertips together and move the whole triangle back by turning the pivot point (approximately in the center of your neck-collar bone area) with your fingertips. You will see no mismatching tendency in the length of your arms.

If you think you would rather not be a shoulders-only putter, that’s okay, but watch your arms-only stroke. If you are making good contact through the impact zone with a square face moving straight through the ball consistently, it’s highly likely that the pivot point of your stroke stays with the center of your grip back and through. This is true for shoulders-only putters and arms-putters as well.

[Dave Stockton’s Tip.](#)

As an added measure of insurance, consider Dave Stockton’s advice to keep the back of the left wrist level going through impact and beyond. This is especially useful if you have a “gating” stroke path normally.

For this to work, pretend someone is in front of you pointing the butt of a club at your wrist about one foot in front of the ball, and your objective is to make the throughstroke so the back of your left hand hits the butt of the club and does not rise up. The shoulder move keeps the stroke on track going back and this move keeps the stroke level and straight going through impact. The dynamic is very similar to Loren Roberts’ through-stroke move.

Start the backstroke with the shoulders as a whole and keep your putting stroke on track. Stay level through impact with Stockton’s tip. Combined, these two techniques can make you a more consistent and accurate putter.

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