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Harold Swash, Europe's Putting Doctor, offers his insights for putting technique in a rare article. In the Traditions 2002 issue of *The Golfer* magazine, Harold Swash describes the key principles of technique he teaches for putting. *Match Play: Does Harold Swash hold the secret to the perfect putt?*, The Golfer (2002), 45-47. The full text of what Harold writes:

The Perfect Putt

I grew up in England with a keen interest in sports. After my leg was seriously injured during a soccer game -- it was still in a plaster cast -- my friends took me to the local golf course and introduced me to the short game of golf, chipping and putting. Putting quickly became my forte. That was always the foundation of my golf game, just rolling the ball into the hole. On two occasions, both times at my home club, Hillside, I completed a round with only 18 putts. I've had 19 putts on six occasions.

My father was a very serious snooker player -- Americans would call it pool. Even though he never played golf, he was able to explain to me how a forward, topspin roll creates accuracy on the greens, and how it can be achieved. The sooner this is understood, the sooner one will putt better. Over my forty years of experience in the golf industry, I have developed four basic beliefs about the art and science of good putting.

[Square Blade]

First of all, the blade of the putter must be square to the target at both the address and strike positions. I've met countless golfers who tell me they address the ball with the putter blade either open or closed but then naturally compensate during the stroke. This is not an effective method under pressure -- very little goes on that is natural in tournament competition -- and good putting is all about putting well under pressure.

[Square Path]

Secondly, the blade of the putter must travel square to the path of the stroke through the hitting area. In other words, any putting stroke that hooks or slices the ball at impact will create unwanted sidespin. A square strike will eliminate any sidespin and prevent the ball from flicking off line.

[Upstroke Impact]

Thirdly, contact with the ball must be with a slight upstroke. This not to suggest a pendulum action. I mean an upstroke when contact is a tangential strike. It is achieved by pivoting the shoulders and having the hands presses forward so the clubface is delofted at impact. This must occur only two inches beyond the bottom of the arc of the stroke. Only then will a correct strike plane on the ball be achieved.

[Straightness]

Lastly, every putt should be hit as if it were a straight putt. Even at Augusta. The ball will break according to the pace of the putt and the contours of the green after it has begun rolling. There should not be any adjustments made to the stroke based upon the break of the putt.

[Spine Posture]

I believe there is such a thing as an ideal stroke, and it is the same for all golfers. In fact, I have developed a teaching aid called the "Putting Stroke Perfectionizer" where I am able to illustrate beyond a shadow of a doubt there is a way to achieve a perfect stroke. I know I am 10 or 20 years ahead of my time! The first step, and this is a very important first step, is to create a posture in which the top of the spine runs parallel to the ground. From here, the golfer must simply rock his shoulders. If done correctly, the putter blade will travel straight back and straight through, remaining square to impact along the target line. Without the spine in such a position -- and this includes about 99 percent of all golfers -- the player will develop an inconsistent arc in the stroke and a putter blade which is only square to the target for a brief portion of stroke.

[Handiness]

Most people endeavor to putt with their hands. But that creates another pivot point in the wrist area and inevitably leads to additional moving parts in the stroke and another inconsistent roll -- something less likely from shoulder movement. It also makes it difficult to understand why putts are pushed or pulled.

[Green Speed]

It is vital to have a very good sense of the speed of the greens. Since the pace of the putt determines the break, a premium is placed on the ability to control the speed of the strike. This can best be controlled by developing a technique of smooth acceleration through the hitting areas, as well as a proper plane of the upstroke through the hitting area. I do not wish to create the visual image of a popping stroke. In order to have as little skid as possible, contact must be tangential.

The micro-conditioning of greens has had an irrevocable effect on putting. Yeras ago, greens were never manicured to the condition most courses are today. Smooth greens do wonders for disguising imperfect putting techniques. There is no question the advantage held by golfers with better technique has been diminished by the superior quality of putting surfaces. On poor greens, a flawed stroke has little chance of rolling the ball on line. Just watch how the ball rolls differently on shabby greens, or when putting from the fringe. That's when you see the ball jump and flick off line.

[Pro Models]

I am often asked which professional golfer has the best technique. A very sincere, honest answer is "not many." I am convinced it is pure determination that allows so many professionals to succeed on the greens. Their techniques are so flimsy -- they have too much movement in their hands, wrists or bodies to roll the ball on line.

The finest, most perfect stroke I've ever seen belonged to Bob Charles. In his heyday, he put such a great roll on the ball. In the last ten years, I believe Phil Mickelson has come closest to creating the perfect roll, though in the past year or two his technique has changed and prevents him from rolling the ball as he once did.

[Teaching]

It seems every time I am approached by a golfer looking for advice, he starts off by saying, "My problem is" Since I now expect this, I immediately stop him right in his verbal tracks and tell him to let me judge his putting as I see it. My scrutiny of technique includes careful attention to the movement of the body, the rhythm on the putter and the roll of the ball. And most often, the golfer will putt well on the practice green because there isn't any pressure. Then I will try to observe him in competition. There is no question about it because the simpler the putting motion is, the easier it becomes to achieve a superior strike and roll of the ball when the putts matter most.

I do not believe in tips, or quick fixes. I never work with a new pupil the day before he is playing in a tournament. I may offer one point, but never anything more because it confuses the mind. One of the things I say to all my students is that if they expect to win the tournament the next day they have got another thing coming. If I don't offer this disclaimer, they will miss a few putts in competition the next day and then try to blame me. Just like the full swing, rebuilding the putting stroke is not a quick and painless procedure. It takes time to change the putting action. I cannot

restate this enough. Make one change at a time, become comfortable, believe it and trust it.

[Acceleration]

I often hear the golfers say they are trying to stroke the putter with a steady, even speed. Well, these people do not know what they're talking about. Since the stroke begins from a static position, it must accelerate back and then change directions. So the club again becomes momentarily static. In order to control the speed of the strike far better, the putter must accelerate smoothly.