

INSTRUCTION

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Line, speed and read

Top 50 Coach **James Jankowski** explains how to improve the three keys that make a good putter

Every putt you face on the course can be broken down into three fundamentals – the line, the speed and the read. To put it simply, you have to read the putt to accurately identify your desired line and speed, and you need to be able to start the ball on your intended line, with a ball speed that matches your intention. This feature will show you some ways to improve in all three areas to give you a better chance of holing more putts. ▶



Start the ball on line

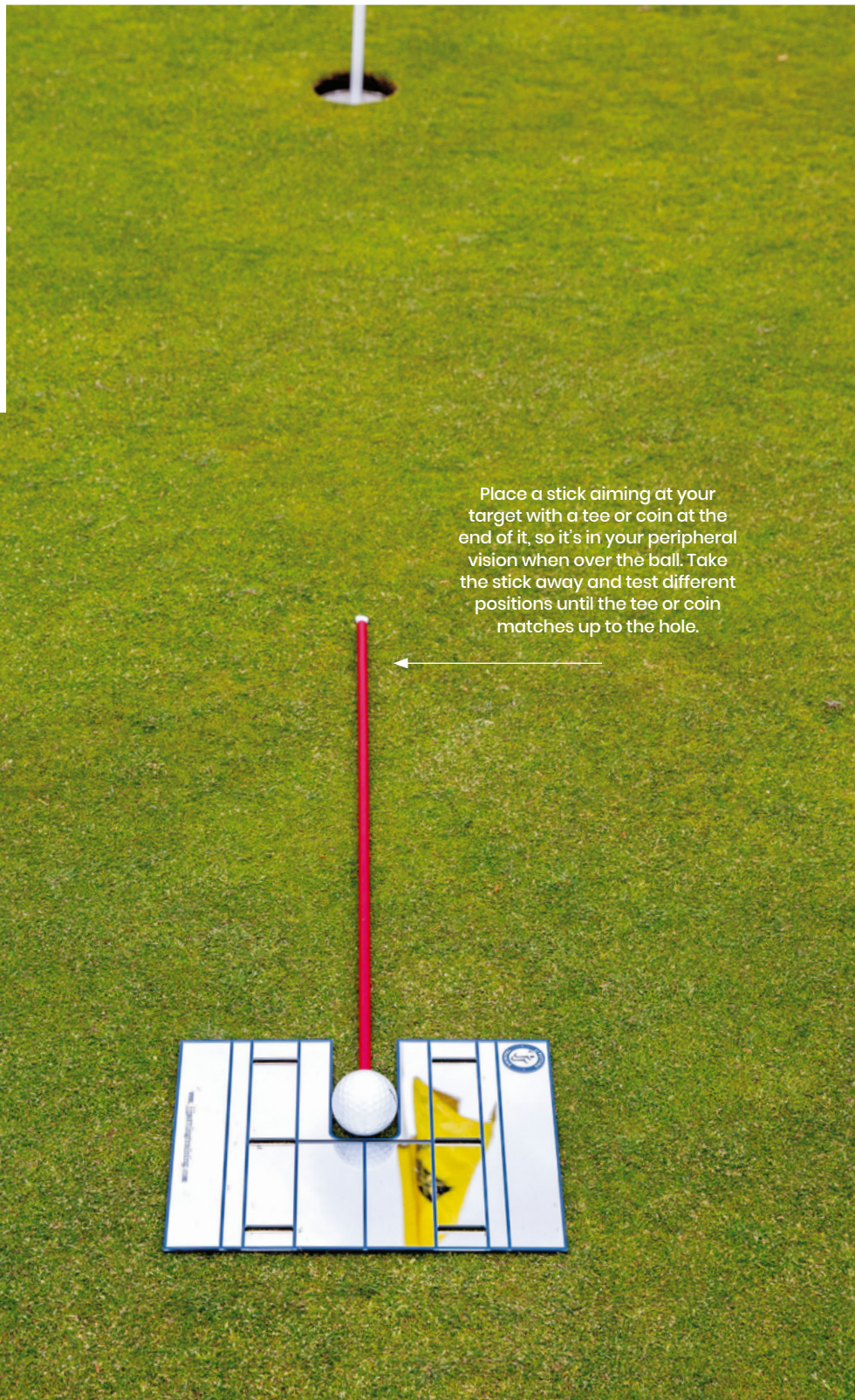
1 Make sure you're seeing straight

Changing your eye position (over the ball, inside or outside) and head position (head tilt and neck bend) can change your perception of what is straight. To test where you see straight, set up this drill (right). When does the tee/coin look on line with the hole? For many, left eye over the ball, head tilted square and eyes looking directly at the ball is a good position. I would start there. If the tee/coin matches up to the hole, that's your set-up position. If not, try changing eye position until it does. Changing head tilt and neck bend can also help. You want to see a straight line from ball to target.



2 Create a T-shape

Aim is crucial to consistently holing short putts. You can check your aim with alignment sticks. Place one stick aiming at the dead centre of the hole and position another perpendicular to that. Now take your set up and set your putter head right up against the stick square to target. If it feels open or closed, that will show you what a square putter face should look like. Are there any references on the putter that look square? The leading edge? The lines? Pay attention to them. If you want to hit putts, simply replace the stick with some tees to reference square and fire away.



Place a stick aiming at your target with a tee or coin at the end of it, so it's in your peripheral vision when over the ball. Take the stick away and test different positions until the tee or coin matches up to the hole.



3 Square face and centre strike

Strike location and face control will also influence the line your ball starts on. A good drill to ensure you're striking the ball out of the centre of the clubface is to set up a gate with two tees just slightly wider than the width of your putter head and hit the ball from the middle of the gate (top-right image below). Put a mark or push a tee right into the ground in the dead centre of the gate so the ball is always in the right place. If the putter head passes through the gate, the ball will come out the centre of the clubface.

Dr Paul Hurrion's research has shown that when the putter has the centre of gravity further from the face (a mallet), an off-centre strike will have more impact on direction but less on speed. If the centre of gravity is closer to the face (a blade), an off-centre strike will have more impact on speed and less on line.

Set up two gates: one for putter and one for ball



4 Add a second gate for the ball

Once you've mastered that, add an extra gate for the ball that's a putter grip length ahead of the first gate, and the width of the short side of a credit card. Don't push the tees in too far or the top of them will catch the ball. If you hit the ball through the second gate, you're starting it within a degree of your intended start line.

Control speed with backswing length

Metronome
You can use a metronome to find this tempo. Set it between the high 80s and 105 beats per minute and try to match this metronome for all strokes. One beat to start the stroke, one at the top of the backstroke and the third at the finish.

1 Length changes but tempo stays the same

Your stroke should take the same, or a very similar, amount of time no matter how long it is – from holing out a short putt right up to a long lag putt. The longer the backstroke is, the faster it needs to be. It should take the same amount of time to go from address to the end of the backswing, and then from there to the finish. Stroke time can vary from golfer to golfer, but should be very similar for that golfer across all putts.

2 Calibrate your distance control

Measure how far the ball rolls out with different backswing lengths at that consistent tempo. Hit a few putts with a specific backswing length at a specific tempo and take the average of how far the ball rolls. Repeat this for a variety of backswing lengths and you'll find it much easier to control your speed and distance.



3 Correct follow-through

Your through-swing should ideally be the same length as your backswing, but don't worry if it's a little shorter. The putter should feel heavy through the ball because you're not applying any force to it – that means it's a stroke rather than a hit.



Visualise the break and speed



Different locations

You will generally see the orientation of the slope better from the low side. It's also helpful to go a few feet away from the line on the low side. I also like to go two-thirds of the way down the putt and make some strokes above the line to visualise how it's going to break at the end of the putt.

1 Paint a picture

A lot of people decide on their start line without painting a picture of the curve of the putt in their mind. Wherever you look at the putt or whether you use your feet to

judge the slope, it's all with the end goal of trying to create an image of the path of the ball to the hole. Base your start line on the curve you think the ball will take, rather than aiming at an arbitrary distance outside the hole.

Find a technique that works well for you



2 Roll the ball on the curve

Picture the curve and put something like a ghost hole or tee down about two-thirds of the way to the hole – a point you think the ball will roll over to go in. Figure out if that's the right spot by rolling the ball over it and seeing if it goes in or near the hole, then work out what enables you to start the ball on line to roll over that spot consistently. That could be a line on the ball, picking a spot on the green a foot or two in front of the ball or simply visualising the full curve of the putt.