

Have Fun While Sharpening Three Key Putting Skills

There are three skills you need to master if you want to be a good putter: green reading, controlling the speed of your ball, and starting the ball on the intended path. Now, raise your hand if you have shown up to a round of golf, missed five or six 10-foot putts on the practice green and then had far too many three-putts on the course.

I thought so.

During lessons with my students, I have them hit five to 10 putts from a relatively straight line from about 10 feet. Depending on the pattern their misses take, I'll then determine which of those three skills we are going to work on over the next half hour. Once we discuss mechanics with important items including setup, grip, eyeline, etc., I'll then set up a series of games that not only focus on the single skill we are trying to improve, but also make the lesson (i.e. practice) a fun experience.

The following are some of my favorite games to set up for improving green reading, controlling the pace of your roll, and making more three to six footers (Starting Direction).

SKILL #1: Green Reading Play Above the Apex

A lot of golfers feel like they miss a lot of putts that they should have made. An easy place to start is just by changing your intent of where you're aiming. When you read a green, what you're trying to do is to find the apex of the putt, that is, the point in the putt where it's going to break the most.

Set Up: Put a tee in the ground between the ball and hole that represents the apex, on the high side (i.e. 'pro side').

Objective: The objective now becomes to aim *higher* than that point, playing more break than you think you should. Even with reasonable speed, you're going to see that putt miss low and begin to work farther away from the hole. By making a better decision and aiming above the apex, you'll make more putts and have the ball always rolling *towards* the hole, not away from it.

Scoring: Hit five to 10 putts, scoring

one point for finishing on the high side of the tee and hole and three points for every putt made.

Variation: Start with shorter putts and continue to move farther away to help with your speed control skill.

Random Spot Putting

Set Up: Scatter balls randomly around a hole, ensuring a variety of distances and slopes.

Objective: Read the green and putt each ball. This simulates real-game conditions with different lies.

Scoring: Track how many putts you make. This drill enhances your adaptability and green-reading skills.

Variation: Place a tee in the ground, directly in front of the hole. This forces you to bring the ball into the hole from the high side. Any putt missing low will either be blocked by the tee or miss the hole on the low side.

SKILL #2: Controlling the Speed of Your Putts

Nine-point Game #1

Set Up: Put four tees one putter's length from one another to form a square. The first two tees are placed horizontally on each side of the hole. The third and fourth tees are placed one putter's length behind the hole. The area between the tees is considered the scoring zone.

Objective: Three putts per game, trying to hole out or finish in the scoring zone.

Scoring: Three points for a holed putt and one point for a putt that finishes in the scoring zone (nine total points possible).

Variation: Start at 10 feet and expand to 15 and 20 feet. Start with a relatively straight putt and then expand to uphill and downhill putts as well as those with slope.

Putting Ladder

No hole is needed in this drill as you are simply working on controlling the speed of your putt based on the distances you are trying to reach.

Set Up: Take three golf clubs and

align them parallel to one another at approximately 10, 20, and 30 feet away from your starting point.

Objective: Hit two golf balls, the first finishing between the second and third club handle and the second putt finishing between the first and second club handle. Once both putts finish between the clubs, make the distance between the first and third club closer to the second club (making your scoring zone smaller).

Scoring: Count how many times you squeeze the scoring zone tighter before you putt either short or long of the intended scoring zones.

Variation: Incorporate additional clubs to add more putts and distances to the equation.

SKILL #3: Starting Direction Nine-point Game #2

This game helps golfers practice consistency and pressure putting, simulating the need to make crucial putts during a round.

Set Up: Place nine golf balls around the hole in a circle, with each ball positioned about three feet away from the hole.

Objective: The goal is to sink as many of the nine putts as possible.

Scoring: Each successful putt counts as one point, so the maximum score is nine points.

Variation: To increase the difficulty, expand the circle, placing the balls farther away from the hole.

Tee Gate

The basic tee gate drill is a straightforward putting practice exercise aimed at improving stroke accuracy and consistency.

Set Up: Place two tees in the ground just wider than the width of your

putter head, creating a "gate" through which your putter must travel. Use with hole only five to six feet away with a relatively flat slope.

Position a second gate about 12 inches in front of the ball along the target line. Ensure the gate is aligned with your intended putting line but using an alignment rod.

Objective: Address the ball with your putter. The ball should be positioned such that when you make your stroke, the putter travels through the gate without hitting the tees, while the ball should clear the

second tee gate as well.

Scoring: One point for making it through the second tee gate and three points for a holed putt. Start with five balls for a total possible score of 15.

Variation: Vary distance from the hole, moving as far away as 25 to 30 feet, building a bit wider "scoring zone" as described in the Nine-point Game #1 above.

Three in a Row


This is a great pre-round drill to give you the confidence you'll need, especially with

the first few holes.

Set Up: Place three ball markers on the ground and in a row, from three, six, and nine feet from the hole. Place a ball next to each mark.

Objective: Starting from the shortest mark, make all three putts in a row. Any putt that is missed requires you to start over.

Scoring: Keep track of how many strokes it takes you to complete this drill.

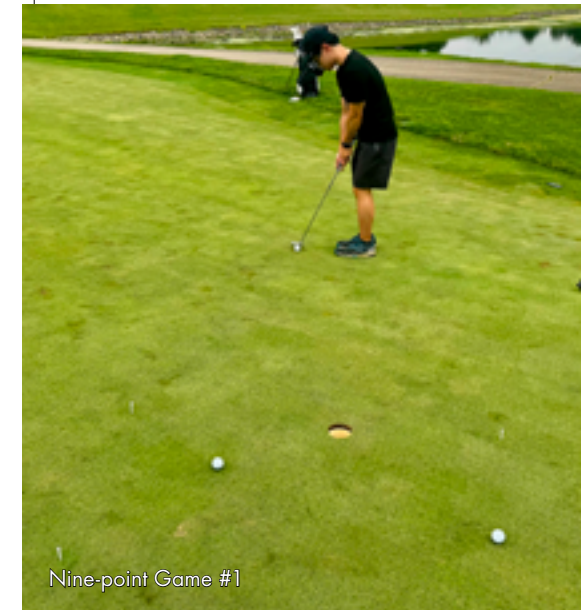
Variation: Move in a circle around the green as you work your way through this drill, keeping tally of strokes taken. 



Putt Above Apex



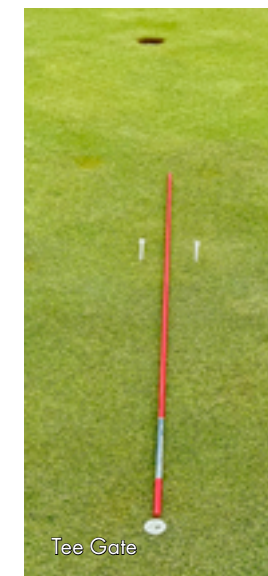
Random Spot Putting



Nine-point Game #1



Ladder Game



Tee Gate



Tee Gate