

Avoiding 3-Putts

■ By Brian McDonald, PGA of Canada

Reducing three-putts is by far the best way to improve putting, and leads to better scores. There are many different ways to measure your putting performance but the common 'putts per round' is pretty useless. It's the most commonly used criterion because it's the easiest to calculate.

Better players will hit the ball closer to the hole and should therefore make more putts. By simply measuring the number of putts per round, it's impossible to get a true representation of putting skills.

Three-putts are annoying and can ruin a very good round of golf. Initially, you must determine the distance from the hole where you will make all putts, your '100% success circle'. If that distance is presently 45cm (18"), it could be stretched out to 60cm (24") with a little practice. This is an important skill that will pay off tremendously.

With a little knowledge and practice three-putts can be limited, and here's how:

Improved Fundamentals

A good setup and ball position are the building blocks to consistent putting. You want your feet beneath your hips with a nice bend from the waist so that your arms dangle from your shoulders. The ball should be positioned directly beneath your lead* eye to ensure solid contact and to keep your shoulders parallel to the target line. It's also more difficult to keep your lower body still on longer putts. An active lower body will increase the putter head speed and cause inconsistent contacts.

Map out the Putt

Two questions to ask yourself: is the putt going uphill or downhill; and is it curving to the left or to the right? Most greens are constructed to have a main slope or predominant tilt for drainage purposes. When your ball lands on the green pay attention to how it rolls, this will confirm the main slope. Visualize the putt via an imaginary line (or dots, or arrows) from the ball to the hole. If you're going uphill play less break, and allow for more break on downhill putts.

Practice Time

Like everything else we do and especially with golf, so many repetitions are needed on the practice green to improve. Through quality time spent on the putting green, you will acquire the skill of distance control. Distance is way more important than direction and during a round of golf, you will have 18 different lengths for your first putts. The only way to get a sense of the green speed is to roll a few putts before your round. The goal of a long lag putt is to get the ball as close to the hole as possible, or at least within your '100% success circle'.

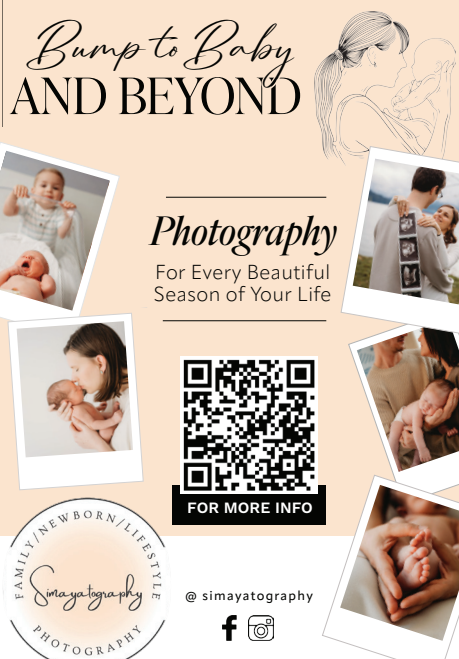
Tidbits

On the PGA Tour, more than 99% of putts inside 90 cm (36") are made. So, this proficiency results in just over .5 three-putts per round for the best players in the world. Recent statistics show that an average 75 shooter will have 1.5 three-putts per round which increases to 3 three-putts for an 85 shooter. It can easily reach 6 or more for the 100-110 shooter!

**Lead side is the side closest to the hole, the left side for the right-handed player.*

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