

Stroke Savers by Dan Drier & Patrick Sherry

All golfers are going to make physical mistakes-mistakes with their golf swings. But besides physical mistakes, I have seen golfers add strokes to their score because of mental mistakes-bad course management.

If you were a businessman or woman, would you go to an important meeting, presentation, or proposal unprepared? If you are successful, I know the answer is “NO!” You brought the correct knowledge, equipment, and did your homework”. The same approach applies to your Golf Course Management. I have a business plan for your important meeting. The name of the business plan is “Know Your 3 C’s.”

1. Know your course
2. Know your capabilities
3. Know your clubs

KNOW YOUR COURSE

How many strokes have you added to your score because you hit the ball in the wrong place? I’ll bet too many every round. Be prepared! Ask yourself every hole where the problems are on that hole. Look at your scorecard or the sign at each tee box. Usually there is a picture of the hole. Find out where the out of bounds, hazards, and bunkers are. Now aim away from them. You still may hit into some, but if you stay out of half as many, you will have saved a few strokes.

KNOW YOUR CAPABILITIES

Remember, you’re not a Pro. You don’t play golf for a living. The shots you see the pros hit on TV take many, many years of practice. Just because you see them make shots look “easy” don’t be fooled. Even they aren’t successful every time. They have told me that if they can’t hit a difficult shot the way they want to 7 out of 10 times, they won’t attempt it.

Here are some capability tips:

- ✍ Don’t try hitting through the trees to the green. Chip sideways back into the fairway.
- ✍ Don’t try to swing like John Daly to get more distance.
- ✍ Don’t try to cut off some distance by hitting over a dogleg.
- ✍ Don’t swing hard on uneven lies.
- ✍ Don’t think, “Distance is more important than direction”

There are many more “Do’s & Don’ts” for capability, but if you just try to hit the safe shot, recognize your own capabilities, and play within yourself, I guarantee you will take a few more strokes off your score.

KNOW YOUR CLUBS

Under the rules of Golf we are allowed up to 14 clubs in our bag for any tournament play. At the practice range or during social play, there is no limit. My suggestion is to practice the same shot with different clubs and see from which one you get the best results. Know your clubs means, “knowing what kind of shot you usually hit with each club”. It helps to experiment with different clubs also. Maybe try a 7 wood or a 9 wood, a graphite shaft; lob wedge or even more flexible shaft. All of these suggestions can make some shots easier. To make things easier we have come up with a few tips on club selection:

1. Don't use a driver on narrow fairways
2. Don't use a driver on holes with out of bounds.
3. Don't use a low number iron or 3 wood in a fairway bunker with a high lip.

A 5 wood or 7 wood is easier to hit on the fairway or in the rough than is a 1,2,3,or 4 irons. If you do not achieve a high enough ball flight with your longer irons they might not be worth carrying them in your bag.

Don't hit a certain club because every one else is.

Try to learn the distance you can consistently get with every club in your bag.

If you know your clubs and stay with the safe shot, I'm sure you can eliminate a few more strokes from your score. Thus if you "know your 3 C's next time, I think that will equal at less strokes!

Good luck, I hope your "Business Plan " is successful, and your Course Management becomes better.

THE MOST IMPORTANT SHOT

Many discussions and interviews have taken place among professional golfers and amateurs concerning this question. What do you think is the most important shot in golf? When Jack Nicklaus was asked this question, he thought for a second, and then said, "My next shot."

I believe the two most important shots in golf are: The tee shot & The putt.

1. THE TEE SHOT

A. Club Selection

When hitting your tee shot, select the club suited for the hole. If the fairway is wide and you have confidence in your driver, use it. If the fairway is narrow, or there is out of bounds or many hazards, it is better to use your 3 wood, 5 wood, or even a 3 iron. Tip: "It is better to be in the fairway short than go out of bounds or end up in hazard, long"

B. The set up

- I. Stand behind your ball, look out to the fairway
- II. Imagine a line from your desired landing area back to your ball
- III. Find an alignment target near your ball on that line.
- IV. Aim your clubface to that target then set up your body parallel to that line
- V. These tips give you a better chance of your ball landing in the fairway.

C. The swing

Tip, "Distance is great, but direction is better" Hitting a 250 or 300 yard drive is great. We would all like that, but hitting the fairway is the best way to keep your score low. You don't have to swing as hard as you can! Keep it smooth and balanced and you will hit more fairways.

2. THE PUTT

The other most important shot- the putt. Putting is such an important part of your golf game, but most golfers neglect practicing putting- or do not practice correctly.

A. “Reading” the Green:

Most putts do not roll straight – they break (curve) to the right or left. How can you tell? You must read (check the contours of) the green. The best way is to crouch down so that your eyes are behind the ball and near the ground. Doing this enables you to see the contour of the green between your ball and the hole.

B. After You “Read” the Green:

Mark your ball (use plastic or coin marker)

Pick it up, clean off any dirt or grass

Replace the ball with the name lined up to the hole to help aim your putter

C. The Set up

There are two key factors in setting up for your putt:

1. Your shoulders: They must be parallel to your target line

2. Your putter face: Must be perpendicular to your target line and brand name on your ball

D. The “Putting Stroke”

The distance you make the ball roll cannot be taught. That comes from practice.

But the mechanics of your putting stroke can be taught. If you watch a good putter you will see that they all possess 2 good traits:

There should be no body movements

There should be no hinging wrists

Tip: “ Good putting is accomplished through an arm pendulum motion back and through the ball. No wrists hinging and no body turning.

E. Summary

Putting consists of 2 parts:

+ Direction – accomplished through a good set up

+ Distance – accomplished through the correct “Arm Pendulum” motion

How much time do you spend on the driving range and how little time do you spend around the practice green?

Granted, we all strive for the right swing that will keep our shots “straight and long”, a beautiful sight to behold for any golfer, However,if you want to reduce those strokes on your scorecard, let me give you a few tips on one of the areas that will lower your score – the quickest tip: Putting

PUTTING

With putting, many golfers blame the putter for their bad putting. Sometimes it may be true.

The putter grip should have a flat surface. The shaft should be the right length for good posture to allow your arms to hang straight down from your shoulders for ease of arm swing. The putter head should be heavy if you play on predominantly slow greens, light if you play fast greens.

That is why most pro’s use light-headed putters; the greens they play on are usually fast. Toe and heel weighting is another help for golfers. It makes for a bigger sweet spot on the face of the putter.

THE SET-UP

1. Grip the putter any way that is comfortable but make sure to check the following:
 - a. Your grip pressure is very soft and your hands should work together.

- b. Your thumbs are on the flat surface of the putter grip. This keeps hands neutral and in the correct position, that is the back of your left hand (for right handers) facing the target.
2. Aim the putter face in such a way that it is perpendicular to your target line. This is a big problem I see in poor putters- face incorrectly aimed. How do you know if it is aimed correctly? Direction is best found from behind the ball, however, in putting, we stand to the side. Try this: Mark your ball – pick it up and replace it, pointing the writing on the ball toward your target line.

Next, place your putter head behind the ball and place the putter head perpendicular to the writing on the ball. Now you have aimed the putter face on the target line.

3. Stand relaxed and have your eyes directly over the ball.
4. Position your shoulders so they are parallel to your target line. A mistake that golfers make is that their shoulder line point's way left or right of the target line. If the shoulders are aimed correctly, the ball rolls on the right path.

Be extremely meticulous in aligning the putter correctly; the chances are that a putt won't drop if you're not aiming exactly at your target.

THE EXECUTION

The putting stroke is probably the simplest stroke in golf, but try telling that to someone who has just 4 putted a green. To be a good putter you must have the 2 D's correct: Direction and Distance.

This will give you a good set-up for putting; your direction will be on-line. Using the Triangle method attains good distance. The triangle method is made up of your shoulders, right and left arms. These three body parts working as a single unit moving the putter back and forth with light grip pressure give you the best chance of touch and feel for the right distance. I like to work the back of the left hand towards the hole, so I have my hands set forward of the ball position which allows me to work my hands and putter through to the hole together more easily. For a smooth roll you must accelerate through the putt, not jab or stab at the back of the ball. A slight forward press is a good way to do this, and an excellent way to initiate the stroke. I set my eyes over the ball, which gives a true perspective when you look along the line to the hole.

Mental Game

Now I am in position, all that is left to do is hole the putt, the most mentally controlled part of the game. You must find a thought or thoughts to allow you to be positive, and see the putt going into the hole before you putt. Try not to take the putter back until you know in your own mind that the putt is going in. Believe me, putting is purely visualization and confidence. Sure, the best putters have the best stroke as well as mind control, but the best stroke in the world will not help if you don't believe you can hole the putt. In practice I constantly say to myself "stroke it smooth" or "low and slow" or "take it back slowly". All of these 'self talk' steps accentuate the need to put a smooth stroke on every putt, which is the most important thing leading to consistency.

I'll finish by giving you one last visual thought for a correct stroke. Imagine that your putter shaft is made of fine glass. If you don't stroke the putt smoothly and gently, the shaft will shatter on impact.

I found a great practice drill for attaining touch and feel using the Triangle Pendulum. Place some balls in the middle of the green and using the Triangle Pendulum method, putt a ball and try to have it finish on the fringe of the green. Putt another to a different fringe area. What you are teaching yourself is how to judge distance. Your mind is not concentrating on a hole. It will give you great Touch and Feel while practicing the correct method – Triangle Pendulum.

CHIPPING

Most golfers do not use the chip shot very often around the greens. The harder shot is the pitch shot, which is used more often. What is the difference between the two shots?

The pitch shot, simply explained, is a shot used around the green when you must get the ball up in the air over a bunker or up to an elevated green. The ball must get high in the air, so when it lands on the green, it will not have much roll. The pitch shot = a lot of height, a little roll.

The chip shot, however, is just the opposite and should be used whenever possible. The chip shot has very little height, lands on the edge of the green and rolls to the hole. The chip shot = a little height, a lot of roll. Why use the chip shot? It is easier to roll a golf ball to the hole rather than try to fly the ball near to the hole and stop it.

Now let's learn the set-up and execution of the chip shot.

SET-UP

1. Grip your iron with your regular grip or you can use a putting grip.
2. Aim the face of your club as you would in putting on your target line. Since the ball will be rolling, you must read the green to see what break or borrow there is.
3. Stand with your shoulder line parallel to your target. Next lean towards the pin so that a little more weight is on your left foot (right foot for left handers). This will take loft off the clubface so the ball won't fly high in the air.

Leaning towards the pin also ensures that you make contact with the ball and don't hit the ground behind the ball.

EXECUTION

Now that we have the proper set-up. Let's talk about the execution of the chip shot.

We are near the green and there is no bunker or other obstacle in our way. The chip shot would be the best choice of shots. The execution is very easy. It is exactly the same as the putting stroke or 'pendulum' (that is why you may use your putting grip) Without turning your body, but leaning your weight towards the green, move your arms back and forth like a pendulum, the club face will make contact with the ball, the ball will fly over the grass with little height, land on the green and roll towards the pin.

How far it rolls depends on the iron you select. The lower the number of iron, the farther the ball rolls. With about 30 minutes of practice I'm sure you will master this simple and very useful shot.

KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME

Are you overwhelmed sometimes with the amount of positions that your body should be in during a two-second golf swing? Some of the more frequently exposed positions I'm sure you have heard are:

- ✍ Keep your left arm straight
- ✍ Keep your right elbow near your right side

- ✍ Turn your shoulder 90% on the back swing
- ✍ Have 90% of your weight on your right foot at the top of your back swing
- ✍ Transfer your weight to your left side on the down swing
- ✍ Clear your hips out of the way so your arms can swing freely.
- ✍ Roll your right hand over your left at impact to keep from slicing
- ✍ Turn your body to the fairway for a proper follow-through.

One Key Swing Thought

These are valid “swing thoughts”. Professionals and good golfers do use some of these thoughts during practice. Can the average golfer master all or some of these positions during his golf swing? Let’s make it a little easier. There is one “position” that most pros attain during their golf swing. It enables them to:

1. Square the clubface at impact
2. Keep from slicing
3. Get more distance with each shot

If it can help them this much, I’m sure it can help you to an extent. What is this “magic” new position? It’s really not new and it’s very simple! Watch golfers swing a club and when the club head makes contact with the ball you will see that almost all of them keep their head behind the ball. By keeping your head behind the ball at impact, you will find it much easier to square the clubface, resulting in straighter shots and avoiding slices. Also, if your head is behind the ball, you can get more power into your shot. **WHY?**

Try this test at a Driving Range or on the course sometime. Set up to your ball as normal except for one change- have the ball positioned in line with your back foot (right foot for right handers – left foot for left handers) Now try hitting the ball. First, it will probably go to the right or slice. Second, there won’t be much power on it because the ball is too far behind your arms and body. When average golfers make contact with the ball, many times their head and upper body are way out in front of the ball, even though they set up with the ball centered or forward in their stance.

A Practice Aid

So after you have hit some balls off of your back foot, try hitting some balls with one swing thought. **AS YOU MAKE CONTACT WITH THE BALL, BE SURE TO KEEP YOUR HEAD BEHIND THE BALL.** A self teaching aid is to place the ball on the ground or tee so that the brand name is towards the back of the ball but still visible. As you swing and make contact with the ball, try and see the brand name. If you can see the brand name you have kept your head behind the ball. If you can’t, your head and upper body are too far in front of the ball.

With some practice, I’m sure you can concentrate on keeping your head behind the ball. This one position will be of great help in hitting straighter and maybe longer shots during your next round of golf.

THE FAIRWAY BUNKER SHOT

The fairway bunker shot is not often used, but when you do, remember 3 things

1. Use the correct club
2. Have the correct set-up
3. Perform the correct swing

1. Correct Club

When your ball is in a fairway bunker, don't just check the distance; see what is in front of you first. Is there a "lip" in front? If so, How High? Club selection is determined by what club will clear the "lip" of the bunker. A good way to check to see if your ball will fly over the lip is to lay your iron on the grass, not sand, and step on the face. The angle of the shaft shows you the trajectory of your ball flight. So choose the iron that will clear the lip. If there is no lip, a #7 wood, #5 wood or club of your choice needed for the distance to the green may be used.

2. The Correct Set – Up

Ball Position

Stand so that the ball is in the center of your stance. Too far forward will make you hit the sand and not the ball, and too far back will make your posture drop down.

Posture

Keep your chin up! If your head is down, you will have a tendency to hit too much sand and not advance the ball out of the bunker. So stand tall, pivot from the hips, and don't round your back.

Hot Tip!

Choke up on your grip a little. It keeps the club head from hitting too much sand

3. With the correct club and your grip (choked up) and a good tall posture, now swing correctly and get out of that fairway bunker with some distance.

Two keys that will help achieve a correct swing are:

- a. Swinging your arms high above your head will only make the club head dig into the sand too much. Try keeping your arms swinging a little flatter, around your shoulders.
- b. As you are making contact with the ball, make sure your body is turning with your arm swing. If your body doesn't turn, it will want to drop down to hit the ball, but you will hit the sand and not the ball. So turn and follow through for good ball contact.

Hope these tips help and good golfing.