THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF PUTTING AND
CHIPPING

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VOLUME 1 – MENTAL
FUNDAMENTALS

THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF
GOLF PERFORMANCE

“A golfer’s game will only be a good as his/her concepts.”

- Mike Hebron

I sometimes become too complicated and specific for my own good. Over the last eight years in these pages, I have been sharing with you proven principles and techniques for better employing your mind into your golf. The feedback I have received from you indicates that what I have been doing has been working.
Back in the 1970s I first started doing research into the then new science of the psychology of human performance. This culminated in my first book, *Performing Your Best*. Looking at that groundbreaking book now, I am amused at how elementary it is by today’s standards. There is an emerging system to the science of golf performance. Fifteen years ago, there were many gaps, myths, and misapplications to this system. Today, the system is more comprehensive, predictable, and easy to apply.

However, all the proven mental techniques and approaches in the world are useless unless the golfer has some concepts and perspectives about how best to play golf. Back in the early 1990s Mike Hebron, one of the most innovative teaching pros, wrote a series of books about blending Zen with golf. In them, he stated that, “understanding must be as important as achieving.”

In order to consistently perform well in golf--whether it be in recreational or competitive rounds--you must understand and embrace some basic concepts of how best to perform. All the specific mental attitudes, approaches, and techniques are based on these concepts.

**The following are the five basic concepts of**
human performance in golf.

Do not immediately accept them! Instead, spend some time reflecting and even challenging them. Only after questioning them will they really make sense to you.

1. There are definite separations between learning, retention, and performance. Just because you learned something doesn’t necessarily mean you will remember it. And just because you have practiced, assimilated, and integrated something doesn’t necessarily mean you will perform it, especially in pressurized situations. Human performance embraces a unique set of skills to itself. As such, human performance can be learned and improved upon.

To a degree, the ability to perform is dependent on the quality of learning and retention. The better something is learned and makes the transition to long-term memory, the easier it can be accessed. But bringing out these skills in a unified way is a matter of learning such performance variables as positive mental attitude, trust, confidence,
and concentration.

Human performance is also dependent on the mind and body working harmoniously together. There is no such thing as the mind commanding the body to produce a movement. Nor is there any such thing as muscle memory.” In the golf swing, the mind and the body each has its appropriate emphases.

Human performance is part science, part art, and part intuition. Each golfer has her best way to perform. This can be learned from experience, but it also can be learned from others.

2. There are three levels of human performance: optimal, maximal, and peak. Each of these zones has its best applications. Those of you who have done any aerobic conditioning (i.e., running, swimming, biking, etc.) know the difference between an optimal heart rate and a maximal heart rate. Depending on one’s fitness level, most exercise sessions should be done at about 80-90% of one’s maximal heart rate. At this optimal level one is building a foundation for an occasional maximal effort. However, if every exercise session is aimed at a maximal effort, the body will soon break down (not to mention stroke out). These are the same differences between optimal
and maximal performances.

As good way of distinguishing these three zones is to use the analogy of an automobile. Today’s cars are engineered to have an optimal level of efficiency at around 55 mph. At that speed I am going pretty fast, with good gas efficiency, little wear-and-tear on parts, and with safety. Occasionally, I might want to “put the pedal to the metal” and go for a maximal performance. At this speed I am going much faster, but with less gas efficiency, more wear on the parts, and with greater risks. After maximal performances I will need recovery and recuperation time. And then there is the peak performance. This is when the car goes into “warp drive” and surpasses anything that has ever been done before! Even though more elements of the peak performance are being identified, much of its existence is still unplanned. However, the occasional peak performance is based on smart optimal and maximal performances.

All practices and many tournaments should be at an optimal performance zone. At this level, I am performing fairly effectively, but very efficiently. The quality of these optimal performances form the foundation for an occasional planned maximal performance. The emphasis of these occasional
maximal performances is on complete integration and execution of all skills while coping with the increased pressure. The peak performance, as of yet, cannot be summoned at will. There are still many mysterious elements to it. However, you can put yourself in a position to allow peak performances to emerge. Michael Johnson’s world records in the 200 and 400 meters at the 1996 Summer Olympics and Tiger Woods dominating performances at the 2000 U.S. and British Opens are evidences that we are closer to planning peak performances.

If you accept these distinctions between the zones of human performances, then you will be able to understand my principle of the “85% Full Swing.” The golf swing should always be done at an optimal level. This swing is not 85% of a full swing. Rather, it is a full swing done at 85% power. Learning how to swing at 85% full allows you to maintain rhythm, tempo, timing, and consistent ball striking. Bobby Jones said, “You cannot swing too slowly at the ball.” An optimal swing rhythm is crucial for consistency, but it also sets the foundation for a maximal swing. A couple of times during a round you can up this
to a 100% swing (a gamble drive on a par five or a hack out of deep rough), but you cannot keep it there. Great players always swing with “something left in the barn” which they can occasionally summon when they need it. However, they know consistent swings are based on an 85% full.

3. The **essence of human performance** in golf is allowing your skills, abilities, experiences, and instincts to emerge from within you. Whenever you feel you are trying to produce, manufacture, or force an effort, you are really working against yourself. The best golf performances are those you **allow** to come up from deep inside you.

Imagine that deep down inside you is the reservoir of your golf performances. This is where fluid swings, concentration, handling pressure, and mind-body integration all reside. Your goal is to go down, access this level, and allow it to come out in your swings.

The way to access this deep reservoir is through relaxation. Imagine that the process of relaxation is like taking an elevator ride down to
this level. This is why deep relaxation is called “centering.” When you arrive at your physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual center, you have accessed your performance reservoir. Once there, allow your skills to come out naturally, depending on the specific situation. That is the heart of trusting your skills and believing in yourself. You will be amazed at what comes out when you allow it to.

4. Every shot you take is a separate performance unto itself. Every round of golf is, then, a series of 72, ninety, or 108 different and unique performances. Each time you hit, chip, or putt the ball it is a unique experience. The seven iron and putt you hit on the last hole are totally different to the seven iron and putt you are hitting on this hole. Golf is a rare and complicated game. It is a dead ball sport that is played totally alone within yourself. You are not so much playing it on the course as you are playing it in your mind. Most other sports have the ball in motion and your performances are based on reacting to that ball. You are using the momentum of the ball to propel it in a direction you want. However, sports like bowling, billiards, pitching, or serving in tennis all start with the ball at rest. There is no
momentum to react to. The performer has to create every shot.

Each shot (performance) has no relation to one another unless you allow it. We’ve all experienced rounds where we have allowed momentum to connect separate performances. We “wrote off the round,” “got on the bogey train,” or “can never hit this driver.” In these instances we generalized separate performances to combine them as a means of giving up.

If you think of every swing as a separate performance unique unto itself, then every shot is brand new to you. This then demands that you take your time to approach this unique shot with all the attention and awareness that you can muster. This is your only chance ever at this shot.

You have to bring all your skills, abilities, experiences, and even intuitions to bear at this one performance. Once the shot is away, that performance is over. Then you go onto the next separate performance. This is why every shot counts so much.

5. If there is once concept that encompasses human performance it is this:
concentration. Contrary to what you might think or did with other sports, concentration is not becoming fiercely intense. Rather, concentration in golf is just the opposite.

I like the classic definition of concentration. Literally, concentration (con-cen-tration) literally means “a coming to a mutual center.” This is where the mind and body become unified to produce integrated efforts. If you accept my previous metaphor of the performance reservoir, concentration is a lowering into yourself where you can focus the flow of expertise back up in an effective manner. Concentration and centering are intrinsically linked. Concentration goes the extra distance in that it is the conduit to bring your performances to the surface in a directed manner.

The true nature of intensity in golf concentration is called “focusing.” It is using your existing energies in a focused way. When you were a kid, did you ever try to start a fire using a magnifying glass in the sun? That is the same process of focusing on the course. Use your existing energies from your reservoir to come out in a directed and efficient manner. (By the way, the old...
jocks who view intensity as pushing harder don’t have a magnifying glass and try to find six more suns to ignite the paper!) From this mutual center you can create focused golf performances.

These are the five basic concepts of good golf. Most other principles and applications to good golf stem from these five concepts. I don’t really care if you totally agree or understand these five concepts. My purpose in sharing these with you is to help you develop your own concepts to your good golf. If you agree with these live concepts, fine. If you have other ones or use other words, better yet. Once you have your concepts to good golf, everything you do on the range and on the course will make more sense.

Golf is the most complicated, unfair, frustrating, solitary, focused, and rewarding game of all. Golfers put more of their ego, pride, and even soul into every shot. Once you understand the concepts of performing in golf, you will be able to develop the broad perspectives and specific mental skills to get the most out of this grand game.
WHERE DO YOU FOLKS come from? Even though I still refuse to have a website (*ed note:* as of this writing) and remain a private person, committed golfers always find their ways to me. One group of players who — through desperation as a last resort find me, are golfers afflicted with the yips. The yips are debilitating not only for one’s game, but for one’s overall morale as well. I always make time for a yipster who has the courage to contact me.

Over the years in these pages I have written extensively on understanding, coping with, and even conquering the putting yips.
From the feedback I have received from readers and those who have come to work with me in Reno, they can overcome their yips. Getting past the putting yips not only improves scoring, it also brings peace of mind to tortured psyches. If you think this last statement is over-dramatic, you have never experienced the yips! And I hope you never do.

However, there is another separate type of yips which have rarely been discussed and never formally addressed. Although not as “glamorous” as the putting yips, this type is equally discouraging. It can destroy rounds and derail long term improvement. It is yipping on chips and short pitches.

Perhaps as much as slick downhill putts, the feel and finesse required to execute delicate chips and pitches places great stress on the nervous system. And like putting, chipping employs fine motor skills. These fine motor skills are the first to be affected by pressure. This concept is called “regression under stress.” Under extreme performance pressure, our touch tends leaves us, and our bodies retreat to more basic bigger muscle group execution. What exacerbates this problem is when we attach emotional and attitudinal reactions to this regression. We begin analyzing and fretting about our
jabbing . . .which only makes it worse.

Chipping and pitching yips take the forms of flinching, chunking, chili dipping, skulling, double hitting, and even shanking these short shots. We sense our hands have devious minds of their own. Our bodies unpredictably shutter and jab at these little shots. After a while, as we settle over these shots, a cloud seems to permeate throughout us so that we have no idea of what we are doing . . .or should emphasize. As the yipping becomes more entrenched, we eventually become resigned to embarrassing ourselves with all pitches and chips. Perhaps the only thing worse than being a “chipster” (my word for one who has the chipping or pitching yips) is living with one!

"Getting past the putting yips not only improves scoring, it also brings peace of mind to tortured psyches."
Now, some outsiders believe that the chipping and pitching yips are just a matter of bad technique or poor concentration. Over the last ten years, 90 percent of the chipsters who have contacted me have been players with single digit indexes—frequently local club champions, to even tournament players. Clearly, they have the ability to play the game. The chipping yips are something well beyond technique.

Old timers called the putting and chipping yips “losing your nerves.” They felt that these conditions naturally seeped into golfers as they aged. Previous generations of golfers became resigned to the yips merely as a function of aging. While there is definite physical deterioration as we age, the yips are an additional and separate affliction. About a third of the chipsters who have contacted me are under thirty-five years old.

Also, while there are some definite overlap with the putting yips, chipping and pitching yips have distinct dimensions and dynamics unique unto themselves. In fact, only about eleven percent of the golfers I work with the chipping yips also had the putting yips. As I worked with this minority I discovered that I had to treat these two afflictions separately. The chipping and pitching yips possess
unique issues and need to be addressed as such.

On any given week, 2-3 chipsters contact me via email or phone. Each feels isolated believing s/he is the only person who has ever experienced this form of yipping. Also, each feels defeated and at the end of his golfing rope desperate for any kind of assistance. All have not only lost confidence in their entire games, but have lost the pure joy of golf as well.

Well, there is help for you chipsters in these pages. You are not alone and what you are experiencing can be controlled. There are paths out of this jungle. Believe it.

As you can already tell, this is a major piece on the chipping and pitching yips. As far as I can tell, this is the first article ever on this subject. My thanks to Bob Koczor for making the space to print it.

What follows are proven perspectives, approaches, and techniques other chipsters have found beneficial in coping with and overcoming yipping. It is presented in seven sections. Your goal from studying this two article is to create your own “short game toolbox” of perspectives and techniques available to you. Some will work immediately and some won’t. Some will be effective for a couple of
rounds and then wane. Put those back in your toolbox for you might
resurrect them sometime in the future. You see, those who best
manage their yipping have a multitude of emphases at their disposal.
Just as there are many ways to
score in a round of golf, so are there many ways to combat chipping
and pitching yips. Here we go.

**PERSPECTIVES**

While there is a definite danger of overanalyzing the patterns
of yipping, you have to expand your perspectives about the subject.
These perspectives create the framework in which you can apply your
own chipping tactics.

First, accept that they are your yips. Totally and fully accept
them. They are not some kind of disease you passively caught from
the night air. They are your yips so take responsibility for them. No,
you didn’t necessarily do anything wrong. More importantly, don’t
worry how you caught them. This is precious energy uselessly wasted.
As in other areas in life, even if you did figure out the why of a
problem (which **ii** rare), this information does not necessarily put you
in a stronger position to do something about it
Next, also accept that once you have the yips you will always have them, to greater or lesser degrees. Sorry. And yes, they will become more pervasive as you age. But also realize that you can control them to the point where they may be gone for long periods. When they do raise their nasty little heads, laugh at them knowing that you will be able to do something about them. Laughter is a great healer and an important perspective giver.

You see, overanalyzing and fretting about your yips only makes you more vulnerable to them taking hold. Now, it is easy for me to say don’t worry about them, but that is precisely what you eventually have to do. Relax assuring yourself you will be able to get on top of them. As you fill up the tool box you can then emphasize what you can do instead of what you cannot do.

And this is a key perspective to embrace:

choose to become proactive instead of reactive. Get past this “oh poor me” victim mentality. Channel your thinking away from worrying towards performing better. Hunker down and focus on what you can control right at this moment. Like overcoming the putting yip., the ultimate goal for the short game yip is to become a better player. Preventing the yips is nice, but it is way too limited of a goal
Expand your horizons by becoming a more consistent, creative, and courageous chipper and pitcher of the ball. Keep striving to perform better.

As such, remember one of my core perspectives about playing golf each shot you take during a round is a separate performance unique unto itself. Each shot has absolutely no relationship to any other shot ...unless you allow it to. So if you do yip a pitch (and you will), keep it confined to that one shot. Do not generalize saying, “I guess I will be yipping the whole round again.” It was just one shot performance, that’s all. Consciously throw yourself anew into focusing on the next shot performance.

Such broad perspectives provide comfort and solace for the chipster. Granted, we have to become immersed in the individual shot, but between shots it is helpful to remind ourselves of these bigger pictures. And one of these bigger pictures is to remember our performance goals.

**PLAYING GOALS**

Simply put, the goal for any pitch or chip is to get the ball close to the hole. That should be your singular objective in any short game
situation. Period.

...each shot you take
during a round is a
separate performance...

Entrenched chipsters lose their ways. Frequently, they become both hypersensitive and ball bound. First, they become too aware of the, offending members of their bodies (such as, fingers, hands, forearms, or elbows). As such, they try to monitor when and how these specific parts will twitch. This hypersensitivity only brings on more yipping. Along with this, chipsters become ball bound exclusively focusing on that little white sphere. In the effort of becoming too precise they forget what the goal is. The goal is not to chip the ball cleanly. The goal is to get the ball close to the hole. Chipping the ball is a means to a greater end.

Keep your mind on the goal of getting the chip close. It does
not matter how. There are no style points included in your score! The ugliest grip, stance, and stroke which consistently gets the ball close is victory. Settling into a pure performance mode keeps you focused on your goals. As in any other areas of life, when you emphasize what to do, the things you don’t want to do lose their holds and frequently take care of themselves.

I tell the golfers with whom I work that in any chipping and short pitching situation, there are actually two chances to score. The first chance is to chip the ball close. The second chance is to drain the putt. When players understand this broader perspective of scoring it actually reduces the pressure on each of these shots. And paradoxically, when there is less pressure on a shot the chances of success increase

So just get the pitch or chip close enough to give you a fair chance to sink the putt. You don’t have to execute either shot perfectly. Remind yourself that even if you do chunk a chip you can still drain the putt to salvage par. Also, if you pitch stiff you still have to finish the job and make the putt (unless your playing partners give it to you!). You have two chances to score so relax about your short game situations. it is not life or death ...it is just one little shot.
Long time chipsters are shrouded in fear. Fear of another failure and resulting embarrassment often permeate short shots.

Chipsters are so afraid to yip that they usually never get the ball up to the hole. These pervasive fears promote the myth that there is some kind of cliff right behind the hole. They believe that any ball that rolls just past will drop into a bottomless abyss. Even though the hole is the target, trying to chip the ball just up to that target actually promotes hesitant swings and hence, more yipping.

One of the steps in becoming a more courageous pitcher and chipper is to feel comfortable sending the ball past the hole. Recognize that sometimes the easier putt actually resides on the other side of the hole. Plan where to ideally putt from after your short shot. Also, just as some of your full approach shots and putts go past the hole, accept the reality that some solid pitches and chips might also go past the hole. Accepting these possibilities—and still going after these shots—is an essential step in overcoming your yipping fears.

Stay focused on the goal of chipping fairly close. Be both fairly precise on the target plus loose enough to accept pretty good results.

Remember, you have two chances to get the ball up and down.
CLUB SELECTION

Let's now look at your implements and your decision making strategies. Since fine chips and pitches rely on fine motor skills, overly small grips often promote susceptibility to yipping. You might want to check with a club fitter about installing thicker grips. The bigger diameter takes much of the fingers out of the shot, relaxes the forearms, and may lessen some yipping. However, be careful not to make the grips too big for this will then prevent a complete release of the club on full shots. Slightly larger grips will help promote more of a stroke on your chips and pitches instead of punching and jabbing them.

Next, let’s explore the grip you employ on chips and pitches. The under appreciated mid-Twentieth Century pro Paul Runyon (a.k.a. “Little Poison”) always chipped with his putting grip. He was one of the first golfers to reason that since his chipping strokes were closer to his putting strokes than his full swings, he should chip like he putted. There is a lasting wisdom in this realization.

Many golfers of all abilities put way too much wrist in their short shots. This cocking and uncocking of the wrists also open up
opportunities for the yip. Unless your timing is excellent and you are well practiced, there is very little margin for error with wristy shots. Changing your grip to a putting grip (or some variation of it with one or both forefingers going down the shaft) takes much of the wrists out of the shot. You will then be better able to stroke these chips and pitches using the larger muscle groups of the arms and shoulders. You might want to experiment modifying your grip for short game shots.

Good pitchers and chippers are smart strategists and tacticians. Beyond the stroke, they know what kinds of shots to hit in every short game situation. We will look at specific short game tactics in a later section. Let’s now look at how you decide on specific clubs.

A sad byproduct of the increasing popularity of the lob wedge is that many golfers have become infatuated with using it in every short game situation. Granted, it is fun to flop a lob wedge seeing the ball land softly and immediately bite. However, this is a shot which requires a lot of regular practice. Reliance on this club also masks the fact that there are other clubs which may be more appropriate.

Please answer this question right now: in what order do you go through in selecting the proper short game club on a particular shot? Many golfers (especially chipsters) begin the club selection process
with the lob or sand wedge and go up from there. I would like to pose
just the opposite strategy: begin with
your longest, flattest club and go down from there.

When you think about it, the flatter clubs actually have larger
margins of error than the more lofted clubs. Especially when you open
up a lofted wedge, there is very little margin of error in striking the
middle of the clubface. These strokes make glancing blows on the ball
to create such soft shots. A chip or pitch hit with a square clubface
actually has a greater margin of error.

Also, consider this. You really have more control of a ball
rolling on the ground than flying in the air. You see, when a ball is
lofted into the air, it is more vulnerable to the wind. In addition, these
high lofted shots produce more spin. Sometimes they bite and some-
times they don’t. The net result is that the

You really have more control of a ball rolling
on the ground...
golfer tries to factor in the spin in these shots. These shots actually complicate decision making. Especially with chipsters, this is way too much information to process. In most short game situations, adopt the strategy of choosing the club which gets the ball rolling on the green as soon as possible.

Target these shots in what I call a “1/3:2/3 Ratio.” That is, target the shot to land one-third of the way onto the green and let it roll the remaining two-thirds to the hole. Nick Faldo also advises to land a deft little chip three feet onto the green and allow it to roll the rest of the way. Wise strategizing depends on you having a definite game plan of what to do with pitches and chips well before you arrive at specific situations.

I believe that every chipping club decision should begin with the putter. It is your ultimate scoring club so why not consider it more with your chips? These putts-chips might not look pretty, but they get the job done. A byproduct of these putts-chips is that you gain a feel for the speed of the green which you can employ for the payoff putt. If the putter is not the proper play (because of thick or wet grass), next consider a three-wood or a hybrid club. There are many shots these clubs are uniquely suited of which most golfers are unaware. If these
longer clubs are not appropriate, then consider your midirons, 
followed by an eight or nine iron, and finally, go to your wedges.  

Experiment with altering you decision making process to 
“going down the ladder” from flatter clubs to more lofted clubs. You 
very well may discover that you become a more consistent chipper 
and even your pitches become more predictable. The key to this 
strategy is that this process takes pressure off these shots in that they 
are more simple and include greater margins for error. Adopting these 
strategies is where short game confidence begins. 

Now, if you are a typical chipster similar to those with whom I 
have worked, you are probably in need of a stiff drink by this time! 

This is a huge amount of information to process. You may have 
to revamp your thinking about how to approach the short game. Re-
member, your goal is to expand and improve your short game, not just 
cure your yipping. 

Reread Part 1 a couple of times. These first three sections, 
outlined the important perspectives, goals, and strategies for a good 
short game. In next month’s second part, we will cover the last four 
sections of the actual execution, playing tactics in combating the yips, 
relaxation techniques, and psychological emphases.
Hang in there.

Steadying the Chipping Yips – Part 2

UNCONTROLLABLY STABBING at chips and stuttering at pitches not only wastes strokes, they are downright embarrassing. When your rear hand and arm twitches on its own or your body uncontrollably shutters on the down stroke, you probably have the chipping yips. Few actions in all of sports are more scary than the uncontrollable yips.

Although not a prevalent as the putting yips, the chipping and pitching yips afflict more golfers than is commonly recognized. In Part 1, we explored the range of these short game yips. We also exposed some of the myths of the chipping yips realizing:

(1) they are valid maladies, (2) they are quite separate from the putting yips, (3) they are much more than poor technique or weak
concentration, (4) they are more than a function of age, and most importantly (5) the “chipster” can do something about them.

It is important to repeat that the ultimate goal is to become a better player, not just cope with the yips. Just as you develop a variety of shots to employ in any given situation, you can also develop a variety of strategies and tactics to employ with the chipping and pitching yips. I call this filling up your “short game toolbox.”

From my years of working with golfers who have the chipping and pitching yips, I have developed seven key areas to apply. Last month, I presented the first three of these: (1) the major perspectives to embrace, (2) the appropriate goals for chipping and pitching, and (3) short game decision making strategies. This article, we will look at the final four areas of coping with, conquering, and going past the chipping and pit yips.

...the chipping and pitching yips afflict more
golfers than is commonly recognized.

SHOT EXECUTION

There are many important techniques, emphases, and mechanics for good chipping and pitching. That is the good news. The bad news is...there are many important techniques, emphases, and mechanics for good chipping and pitching! Chipsters tend to become too entangled in all the minutia of a shot. Hence when they are over the ball they are trying to remember the nine-step sequence of chipping naturally! No wonder the body and mind short circuits.

The first practical step in overcoming your yipping is to follow the KISS Principle: Keep It Simple Silly! Trying to employ very refined and complex technique on deft shots only exacerbates the yips. Your initial goal is to develop what I call a simple “yip-proof” stroke. This stroke may not look pretty, but it will get the job done. (This is also one of the initial goals for those few poor souls afflicted with the full swing yips.) Groove a grip, stance, set up, and rhythm that are both simple and repeatable. Even later as you attempt more advanced shots, you know you can always go back to this basic yip-
proof shot. By relying on this stroke you will gain confidence knowing it will always work.

This is where a good teaching pro is valuable. Choose a pro who understands your plight, who will listen, and who possesses multiple approaches in working with the short game. Good teaching pros also have their own toolboxes of various techniques they can recommend at different times. Commit yourself to only one pro who will go with you through your maze.

Although there are a plethora of mechanical and execution emphases, here are the primary ones I have found to be essential for chipsters:

- Keep your hands ahead of the club head throughout the whole stroke. Really feel the last two fingers of your front hand and the front of it leading the way.

- Avoid trying to put spin on your short shots. When you try to spin the ball, you tend to put too much rear hand into these shots.
And the rear hand is the weak link in most yipping. Instead, sweep or stroke your shots to land dead (with little spin) on the green.

- Keep almost all of your weight on your front foot. Even more than classic teaching advises, put at least 80% of your weight on your front foot.

*Chipsters tend to become*

too entangled in all the minutia of a shot.

- A good check is to see if you can hold the finish. If you emphasize the finish you take your mind off contacting the ball. Remember being ball bound contributes to yipping. You might even want to experiment exaggerating this by holding the finish standing just on your front foot.
• Stroke your chips and pitches. For many chipsters, the words “chip” and “pitch” connote some kind of short or abbreviate punch. This mindset frequently promotes more yipping. Even though it is short still stroke or sweep these shots. Emphasize stroking through the ball.

• As such, stroke chips and pitches much like you would stroke a long putt Remember, these short shots are much more like long putting strokes than full iron hits.

• Just as some players make a pressing movement before the full swing (watch Fuzzy Zoeller) or tap the putter on the ground before taking it back you can do a similar pre-movement Chipsters often report they feel frozen over the ball and can’t “pull the trigger.” Experiment with placing the club about 3-4 inches behind the ball. As you are setting up gradually slide the club forward to the ball and then immediately take it back for the beginning to the swing. Now, chipsters may think tapping and twitching their hands is the last
thing they need, but this technique works wonders.

• Play the ball back in your stance. There is really more margin of error with ball positions back of center (even all the way to behind the rear foot) than ahead of center. These shots may not always feel or look good, but they are more consistent

• As such, more of your chips and pitches should be bump-and-runs. Save trying the high floppers for next season. Even if this means landing these shots short of the green, bumps are easier to stroke and are much more forgiving.

Remember, there are no style points for pretty execution or ball flights. Get the ball fairly close to the pin. Yes, there are a ton of techniques, but keep yours simple. Develop and rely on your yip-proof stroke. Lock in your stance, ball position, arm position, hand position, and let it fly. How to let it fly is the subject of the next section.

**PLAYING TACTICS**
Some of you chipsters might now be saying, “Well, that is all well and good, but those techniques are useless when my hands are quivering and my brain is foggy.” Understanding and accepting the above strategies and tactics will help you become more relaxed and dear. However, there are some other specific approaches you can apply when you enter the “yipping zone.”

...it is physiologically impossible to breathe fully for a while and be physically tense at the same time.

First, don’t practice chipping and pitching.

Yes, you read correctly. It may sound illogical, but it works. Chipsters tend to try too hard practicing with the hope that this will eliminate their yipping. They fall prey to the “more is better fallacy.” That is, if some practice is good, then more practice must surely be
better. However, just the opposite eventually happens. The more precise chipsters try to become with their short games, the more vulnerable they become to the yips. This is one of the devious aspects of the affliction.

Once you ingrain your yip-proof stroke, stop practicing. Trust that you have enough ability and technique to get the ball close to the hole. Prior to a round you might want to chip just a couple of balls simply to groove your timing. Then stop. Any more warm-up than that will suck you down into the same old muddled patterns.

Next, remember your performance goals for the short game. The goal is to get the ball on the green and give you a chance to sink the putt. Don’t try so hard and don’t worry about super-precise execution. Just get the ball on the green and go onto the putt.

Third, this may seem contradictory to what I proposed in Part I, but when you are feeling especially vulnerable to yipping, chip or pitch with just one club. Most of us have a favorite short-game club (a flat-faced club like an 8-iron) with which we feel comfortable and with which we can even hit a variety of shots. If you fall into a spell of yipping, retreat to your old reliable. Even if the particular situation does not call for your favorite club, use it anyway. Once you get on
top of your yipping again you can then go back to the other high percentage clubs and shots.

Finally, here is a sneaky technique which works wonders. Do not pull the club out of the bag until it is your turn to hit. Decide on the club, the shot, and where to land and leave the ball ahead of time. Then, when it is your turn, pull out the club and immediately hit the shot. Unless you have to test the grass around the lie, don’t even take a practice swing. Some players pull out the club to test the grass and then put it back in the bag until it is time to perform. When it is your turn to play, take the club out and make the shot.

Consciously yawning relaxes all those little muscles in the jaw, neck, and above the ears. This way you sneak past the yips before they take notice!

Start accumulating such little techniques to put in your short game toolbox. Some of these techniques may be as simple as choosing when to talk to playing partners, purposefully putting on your glove,
or even laughing.

Some techniques may be more involved such as vividly visualizing the path of the ball, mentally rehearsing your setup or optimal stroke rhythm, or strictly following your pre-pitch routine. The key is to add a lot of techniques into the toolbox you can retrieve whenever you need something new.

Beyond having the techniques, there is comfort in knowing they exist. It is this reassurance that will keep your mind and body calm for the upcoming short game situation.

**PERFORMANCE PHYSIOLOGY**

The yips are a good—but sad—example of how unified the mind and body can become. In order to gain control over them, you also have to regain control over all the fine muscle groups of your body.

An important question to answer is this: specifically where in your body do you feel the yips emerging? Be very precise in determining where you feel that queasy tension both prior to and during the actual shot. It might be a subtle cramping in your dominant hand, a tenseness in that forearm, a churning in the stomach, a raising of the
trapezius muscles, a furling of the brow, or even a gritting of the teeth. You see, there are definite physical cues to the impending yipping before there are swing, emotional, and mental reactions. If you can detect early your body becoming tense, you are then in a better position to nip it in the bud.

Here are some physiological techniques to add to your tool box. First and foremost...breathe. Breathe fully, especially a complete exhale. Remember this physiological fact: it is physiologically impossible to breathe fully for awhile and be physically tense at the same time. Six to eight full breathing cycles will settle you down. Some chipsters have even found success with each exhale their hands seem to merge with the grip so they can’t feel where hands end and the club begins. Breathe fully and completely.

Second, shrug and shake. Now on the onset, chipsters might think these motions are precisely what they are trying to avoid! Completely shrug and roll your shoulders. You will then feel the big muscles of your upper back and neck release. Also, shake out your arms fully like swimmers do as they step onto the starting blocks. Both of these movements will help you become aware of and release any tension in these important muscles. You might want to
incorporate these, or variations of these, movements into all of your pre-shot routines. Many of the best players do this and you might never notice it. For example, note how Fred Couples always rolls his head, how Jim Furyk “draws” his hand by his hips when walking up from behind the ball, and how Arnold Palmer hitches up his pants. These variations of shrugging not only keep loose your upper body muscles, it also informs your mind you are ready to hit the shot.

Third, yawn. Be like a lion who yawns before pouncing on its prey. Yawning does not mean you are apathetic about the upcoming shot. Consciously yawning relaxes all those little muscles in the jaw, neck, and above the ears. This action is actually a precursor to locking yourself into a complete golfing performance on that shot.

Fourth, hum, sing, or whistle an enjoyable song. Be like Fuzzy Zoeller or Mark McCumber. The rhythm of your song can align with your essential swing rhythm. Some chipsters have even found success in continuing humming right on through the chip or pitch.

Fifth, especially when you feel vulnerable over a chip, purposely squeeze and release the pressure on your grip. Really feel the extremes of tensing and relaxing your grip. Ease into a nice connection with the club so that the grip seems to grip you. Quite
often, chipsters are unaware of how tightly they are actually holding onto the club. Going through this squeezing-and-releasing process a full 6-8 times helps you loosen all of the fine muscles groups of your hands and forearms. Also, this process facilitates more blood flowing through these little arteries. And an increased blood flow will lessen

Finally, really feel your yip-proof setup over the shot. As I stated earlier, this setup should add senses of calm and confidence for the impending shot. Physically, really feel the proper hands and arms positions in your setup. Feel locked in, but not overly sensitized. You are then ready to “pull the trigger” on the shot.

Again, most of these physiological techniques will work, but some may not. Store all of them away in your toolbox. The ones that might not have worked may very well become magical next year. Your body is your performance machine. Learn to keep all the little components in fluid working order.

**PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY**

Our final section in combating the chipping and pitching yips looks right between your ears. First, in order to regain control over
your pitching and chipping you have to fully believe that you are capable of playing well again. Deeply believe that you have the creativity, courage, and concentration to chip and pitch well. Anything less than full belief will only extend your yipping.

As such, you eventually must choose to be completely positive about your short game. If you say something as, “Well, I’ll be a little more positive after I see some non-yipping,” you will continue to be discouraged. Choose to become purposeful and even eager about every short game situation. View your yipping as a deep personal challenge in which you will eventually succeed.

I am not saying to be like a “Pollyanna” in being blindly optimistic. Merely having a positive mental attitude will not immediately resolve your yipping. You have to go a step beyond this by becoming what I call “doggedly positive.” Affix into your mind that you are in this battle for the long haul. Whenever you yip immediately dig in deeper. Become both more determined and more patient. Now, these last two emphases may seem to be mutually exclusive, but you have to address both of these poles of the PMA spectrum. You will find that you can shift between attending to the
specifics and being aware of the big picture. Being doggedly positive will see it through the tough times.

One of the most important states of mind to adopt during a round is to be in a performing mindset instead of merely an execution mindset. There is a subtle but huge difference between these. You see, chipsters tend to become too focused on executing precise pitches. Paradoxically, this execution mindset actually works against them in that it takes them away from purely performing.

Not yipping is not good enough! Sure, tap into your yip-proof toolbox, but emphasize playing a complete round of golf. Settle into your performance mentality of concentrating, committing, targeting, and scoring on all shots. Prepare your yipping strategies and tactics before the round, but when you apply them remember they are just like elements to any other shot.

One final psychological approach—that will help in applying and refining your strategies and tactics is called “reframing.” Imagine that the chipping or pitching situation is like a picture hanging on your wall. Whenever you yip the picture is permanently etched, but you can symbolically “change the frame” around it. Learn to reframe every disappointing effort by taking something good from it. Put a
positive spin on the situation. Here are some examples of reframing yipping situations: “Well, at least I was committed to the shot,” “It was a lot less of a flinch,” “Next time I will continue to visualize the target,” “Hey, that full thin chip was a lot better than a stuck chunk,” “I am on the right track with that immediately-pulling-the-club-out-and-pitching technique,” “Having the grip grip me feels good,” and “Wow, exhaling while loosening my grip seems to merge my hands with the club.” By reframing disappointing situations you can start laying the building blocks for future successes.

So stay doggedly positive, on your side, determined, and patient. A strong and persistent mind is your best weapon for overcoming the yips. Believe you can make things better. It may not be as quickly as you wish, but you will discover answers which work.

It has been my experience that chipsters who get a handle on their yips become much better players in the long run. Even if they do have occasional flare-ups, they know how to quickly get back on top of them so they can continue to perform well and enjoy the game.

Right at this moment, I can visualize chipsters around the world throwing down this article, running out to the back yard, and trying to apply all of these tips at one time!
There is a lot of information in these two articles so you may have to reread them a couple of times. As you do, pick just one technique and exclusively apply it for one full week. And then select another one for the next week. Reinforce your gains, even if they might be slight or fleeting. In these ways you will be able to progressively “chip away” at your yips!

These are just some answers to the chipping and pitching yips.

**Steadying The Chipping Yips – Part 3**

I've presented what has turned out to be a groundbreaking system of how to overcome the chipping and pitching yips. In that two-part series I presented seven key elements: perspectives, playing goals, strategies and tactics, mechanical emphases, specific relaxation techniques, and psychological applications. Put together, these emphases fill up a player’s “toolbox” of how to both cope with and conquer the chipping and pitching yips.

I originally wrote those two articles way back and a lot has happened since then. The response has been nothing short of overwhelming. Chipsters from literally around the world (as far away
as Australia and England) have been contacting me with their questions, thanks, comments, and suggestions about the chipping and pitching yips. Clearly, we are addressing something important for many golfers.

What has been most gratifying were the poignant success stories from golfers finally overcoming their yipping. I have heard so many heart wrenching stories from players whose prolonged frustration and embarrassment with their pitching and chipping yips have not only hurt their scoring, they have also diminished their love for the game. Hope is the key. Many chipsters have found hope in discovering there are proven things they can apply in finally controlling the seemingly uncontrollable.

A CHIPSTER’S PROFILE

I had so many golfers respond to these articles with comments like, “It seems you were talking directly to me,” “You nailed me to a tee,” “You described me and my plight perfectly,” and “Doc, you creeped right into my head!”
Chipsters from literally around the world (as far away as Australia and England) have been contacting me with their questions, thanks, comments...

From the volume of the feedback you should be bolstered by the fact that you are not alone. Even though you may be the only one you know afflicted with the yips, there are many out there silently suffering the same things.

From working with chipsters over the last 13 years, I sensed there were some personal similarities between those afflicted with the chipping and pitching yips. Again, these performance patterns and even personality styles are quite different from the putting yips. Your ongoing communications have led me to conclude that there is almost a personality profile of chipsters.

I have found most of chipsters to be quite accomplished golfers—ranging from top club, local, regional, and college players to even touring pros. Almost all afflicted have single digit indexes with many being close to scratch or plus at one time. Clearly, they can play the game. To be able to still score so well in the midst of their yipping
speaks volumes about their playing and mental abilities.

Chipsters are people usually in the mature periods of their lives who have been very successful in the rest of their lives. They typically throw themselves into any life challenge or problem. They are both passionate and purposeful about all of their committed endeavors. Even though they sometimes may be intolerant toward any kind of mediocrity, they know how to succeed.

Chipsters also tend to be very intelligent and articulate people who have used their brains to harness and propel their games. Paradoxically, it is their intellects which have exacerbated their chipping and pitching yips. They have become so meticulously analytical and mechanical that they were actually getting in their own ways. From all these people having so much going for them, they see it as a humiliating personal failure to have these little strokes impact their entire lives like this.

Most chipsters have analyzed their plights from every conceivable angle. Some have studied the entire subject almost as much as me. One of you coined the term “transition yips” (that is, transition from full swings to putting) as that category of all short game flinches—finesse, chip, pitch, and sand shots. Pretty cool term.
Many have scrupulously documented all the different techniques they have tried. They have grasped at any new “answer” no matter how weird it initially appeared. And most have become depressed and dour. Just ask their spouses!

Many chipsters have found hope in discovering there are proven things they can apply...

For all chipsters, the first step in gaining control over their yipping is to let go of pride, ego, embarrassment, self-image, and judgment. Learn to dispassionately and objectively view your chipping and pitching yips. And learn to re-view them as positive challenges. Just like any other personal challenge in your life, become eager to tackle and conquer your yipping . . . not just cope with them. This begins with shedding comparisons of how you used to play, old ego attachments, cruel judgments, and paralyzing fears.
Next, learn to become aware of the fine line where your intellect becomes counterproductive. Sure, monitor those tactics and techniques in your “toolbox,” but over shots just purely do. Coincidentally, this purposeful performance mindset is what is needed to carry over to all the other shots in your game.

So your personal strengths can also be your weaknesses. Such is the nature of your yipping. However, when you think about it (and you undoubtedly will!), this is also the nature of the entire game of golf. There are always fine lines of appropriateness (except for chocolate!). Remember, you have a lot going for you. You have proved to yourself in the past that you are “a player.” Build on your personality strengths, courageously tackle your chipping and pitching, and yet stay appropriate.

**YOUR SUGGESTIONS**

At the end of Part 2, I asked you to contact me and share what has worked so we all can expand our tool boxes. And boy, did you all respond! Thank you very much. The following are compilations of your feedback, impressions, and additional techniques which have worked for many of you. Same ground rules: try only one for at least three rounds, store it away, and then go on to the next one.
Remember, some will immediately work (if only for a while), some may not, and some may work in the future. Here we go.

- Most of you found lasting value in my metaphor of the toolbox. You admitted that if there was just one thing that caused your yipping you would have already figured it out. Or if there was one magical tool that conquered them you would have already implemented it. The natures of the putting, chipping and pitching, and even full swing yips is that they are intricately convoluted. As such, you have to develop multiple perspectives, strategies, and tactics. Many of you shared that the image of a toolbox helped you remain patient, organized, and systematic with your efforts.

    Retaining big picture perspectives is important. Many chipsters reported that no matter which techniques and emphases they tried, they needed to remain patient and optimistic. Most of you say you go nuts when you can chip and pitch smoothly in practice or in warm-up, but flinch and gag during the round. Remember what you can control at that moment. As one of you shared, “It took me a long time to remember that each new chip was a brand new experience and it was not preordained I was going to yip.”
• Take time to purposefully relax. A couple of you insightfully advised that the times you felt you didn’t have time to relax and center yourself before a shot were exactly the times you needed it the most. Apply one of those techniques we covered in Part II. Breathe fully, shrug your shoulders, laugh, or have the grip your hands. Most importantly, make time to relax. Reassure yourself that everything will be all right. It is only a little golf shot, that’s all. Only then step up to the shot.

Here are some specific chipping and pitching techniques many of you have reported to be helpful. Some are derivations of what I originally presented and some are brand new.

• Most of you found value in my distinction of stroking the shot versus hitting it. No matter the specific short game shot, emphasize stroking through the shot. The short swing that hits, punches, or abruptly stops
They have become so meticulously analytical and mechanical that they were actually getting in their own ways.

just contributes to yipping. Feel the complete stroke all the way through to the end. A couple of you also reported there was value in not thinking about the stroke at all, but just emphasizing holding a long finish on the front foot. In any event, pitch and chip by stroking all the way through.

• Many of you liked my “sneaking past your yips.” Only touch your club when it is your turn to hit. Then pull it out of the bag and immediately hit the shot. If you have to test out the length of the grass, practice it and then put the club back in the bag until it is your turn. One of you beautifully put it this way, “I mentally rehearse the shot precisely. I care about the shot then. However, when I touch the club in the bag, I don’t care anymore. I automatically go up to the ball, hit it, and put the club back in the bag. This way I sneak past my yips before they notice.” Another of you said, “I see if I can execute
my shot even before all my playing partners and the yips monster .. notice!”

- Such a technique is really a new kind of pre-shot routine. Adapting your pre-shot routine to accommodate your yipping is important. Consistently follow, trust, and rely on it. It is your safe harbor amidst the wild seas of yipping.

- Having said that, when you really feel them coming on before a shot, just go up there and bunt the ball onto the green. That is the best thing you can do at that time. All of these approaches and techniques are meant to prevent the number and intensity of the yips. There are some individual shot situations when they are flaring up where simply nothing will work. As one of you beautifully wrote me, “I have learned that just as every shot is a unique experience, so is every yipping experience. For whatever reason, some shots just make me more nervous. No matter what I do, I know I am going to flinch and stab at that chip. I have learned to accept them as being out of my control. So I just take out my trusty 7-iron and bounce it upon the green. And then I forget about that shot, not worry about it, nor fret
that this one is some kind of malevolent pattern.” See how intelligent you folks are!

• A couple of you mentioned that if you have to stroke a rehearsal shot, you just swung with your front arm. While most yipping emanates from the rear arm, practicing the shot with the front one anchors the desired rhythm and strength of the shot.

• Along with this, many of you reported success—both in rehearsal and real swings— with leading the stroke with the back of the lead hand particularly feeling the last two fingers on the grip. This keeps the hands ahead of the club head thus minimizing flipping or flinching. As one of you said, “I put my entire consciousness into the back of my left hand. This is not only the key to my ‘yip proof’ setup, but the entire swing as well.

• Stand up taller. Just as in the putting yips, there is a tendency for chipsters to stoop down close to the ball. All this does is ‘Constrict the arms, hence promoting more yipping. Stand up taller and let the arms hang down naturally. This will allow the bigger
muscles of the arms and shoulders to take over. As one of you shared, “I stand up tall like a real player!”

- A few of you reported lasting success with one little setup technique. When you are over the ball set down the club 4-6 inches behind it. When you are ready to go gently tap the club on the ground gradually moving it closer to the ball while still maintaining your forward press. When the club gets to the ball start the backstroke. This little bouncing up to the ball is actually a part of the stroke. Like some good putters who gently tap the putter on the ground just prior to the back swing, this little tapping up on short shots expands the duration of the shot performance, prevents becoming frozen and engages the optimal rhythm.

- Many of you with just the pitching yips have found success by visualizing the apex (the highest point) of the desired pitch. This manner of targeting promotes complete strokes through the shot. So instead of targeting where you want the ball to land or stop, visualize the arc of the pitch. See how high up or above the pin you plan the apex of the shot to be. Along with this, a couple of you
reported that on particularly difficult pitches, imagine the ball coming down right on top of (or as one of you said, “ensnarling in”) the flag. Since most of such pitches come up short, targeting the top of the flag will help with proper distance control. Even if sometimes the actual shot flies too far, this is much better than a hesitant chunking yip. Don’t worry about the spin or even how the ball will release.
Visualize the highest point of the pitch. See this apex in your mind’s eye in relation to the pin, flag or even background hills, trees, or clouds. Everything else will then take care of itself.

You see, many chipsters are discovering solutions which work! Some of them may take time to integrate and some may even be fleeting. But there are answers out there. No, you won’t overcome your chipping and pitching yips as soon as you hope, but there are definite solutions. Stay involved in the process believing there are ultimate outcomes. Granted, like process may not be linearly smooth and there may be setbacks with new little bouts, but believe you will get on top of them. You will also find—as others have—you will become a stronger player from this process. Believe it.

Reread these three articles occasionally so you continually improve on your chipping and pitching. And please keep on sharing
with me what is working. In this way we all help each other. Thank you.

VOLUME III – PUTTING

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PUTTING

“I don’t have any big secret about putting. Just hit at it’

It’s either going to miss or go in”

Ben Crenshaw

In a perfectly played par round, a full fifty percent of the strokes are putts. While not commanding such a high percentage with serious and recreational golfers, putting still accounts for at least 35% of one’s total score. Putting is the most important key for consistently good scoring. It is the most critical part of the game. Period.
For many, putting the ball seems to be a whole different game than taking a full swing at it from the tee box or the fairway. After taking full swings and seeing the ball disappear into the sky, putting seems quite different and even a little wimpy. So many subtle variables can affect the putt that it sometimes does not seem to be a part of the rest of the golf.

Putting is the finale to every hole. It also sets the tone for your subsequent swings and confidence. If you doubt this, three-putt the first four holes and then assess your confidence on the fifth tee!

Good putting can make up for bad swings and botched shots. It can salvage bad holes from becoming worse. You can slice off a drive, thin a worm burner second shot, chunk it into the trap, dribble it out, and then roll in a thirty-five footer for a “good” bogey! Good putting can be a mitigator for a multitude of swing sins.

However, nothing can make up for poor putting. Either you putt well or your don’t. Fanatical golfers have even created their own putting disease which they discuss in hushed tones in the locker room and 19th hole. Once you diagnose yourself with a case of the “yips” it is very hard to cure yourself of this malady and become a good putter. For better or for worse, putting has become the most important and,
for some, the most mysterious part of golf.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF PUTTING

Especially for those who consistently have trouble putting, there has evolved a whole mythology surrounding it. In attempting to come up with answers to questions that may never be solved, many golfers have developed their own beliefs, rituals, and superstitions about putting.

Such golfers try to isolate every nuance about putting. They try to dissect and analyze every minute factor about the putting stroke. They also talk about the type of grass, which direction the grain is leaning at different times during the day, the slope, spike and ball marks, sand specks from the bunkers, and even the condition of the lip. What actually happens is that the more these golfers overly analyze the more superstitious they actually become.

Other golfers continually focus on luck in putting. This is quite similar to those gamblers who worry about their luck with the cards. Such golfers follow seemingly silly rituals and even talk to the golf gods! All these golfers really end up doing on this elusive journey is to diffuse their concentration away from they need to roll good putts.
Now, about the putters themselves. Many golfers talk to, implore, beg, threaten, and even bite their putters. They refer to their putters with loving or derogatory names. These golfers probably have basements full of putters.

Then there is the matter of “magic” in the putters. Golfers who have gone overboard with the mythology of putting believe each of their putters have various degrees of magic. For them, there seems to be a finite energy in every putter that at some point is completely expended. Even Greg Norman said--I believe only half-facetiously--that every putter has just a limited number of good putts in it and when they are used up they are used up.

When these golfers buy a new $300 putter what they are really looking for is not only magic, but a panacea. Putting is perhaps the most difficult and unfair part of the game. One is trying to roll a dimpled ball across varying terrain into a small 4 1/4 inch cup. Since the ball is going slower than during any other shot more variables affect its course. Becoming over analytical or mythological is not the answer to these challenges.

THE PURPOSE OF PUTTING
The purpose of putting is, pure and simple, to get the ball into the hole. This may seem ridiculously obvious, but I am continually amazed at how many golfers forsake this maxim in exchange for some more complicated quest. Keeping in mind this purpose, golfers can develop the perspective headlined in Ben Crenshaw’s quote.

One of the best putting tips I ever received was from Don Fleming, founder of Graeagle Clubs in northern California. He said to always remember when you are feeling pressure standing over a putt, it is merely a matter of a single stoke, nothing more. Your life will not change either way as a consequence of this one putt. Just put the best roll you can on that putt. Similarly, when someone asked Lee Trevino about what pressure he felt standing over a putt on the final hole, he said that if he missed it he still received a lot of money for second place! Pressure in putting is self-imposed. Paradoxically, it you can accept the responsibility of possibly missing a putt you will tend to make more putts.

CONTROL
One quality I have seen in all consistently good putters is reminding themselves what they can control and what they cannot. Good putters know that the only thing about their putting over which they have total control is their strokes.

Whether or not the ball goes in the hole is partially outside the golfer’s direct control. The ball may hit an old ball mark, a speck of sand, or a worm may be moving underground at that line! Clearly, it the golfer strokes the putt well the odds increase that the ball will go into the hole. But nothing is guaranteed. Continually remind yourself of what you can control; namely, putting a good roll on the ball.

A relative to control is patience. I think we have all encountered times when we were rolling the ball extremely well and they just weren’t dropping. These times are precisely when you have to reinforce that you are stroking the putt well. Develop the patience to believe that the putts will soon be dropping for you. The only thing you can directly control is the quality of your putting stroke.

**PUTTING TIPS**

It is with a great deal of trepidation that I include this section. For over thirty years I have been a student of putting. I have learned
from the great putters--the famous and the not-so-famous. I keep an old notebook in my golf bag and record every proven tip, cue, and image I have learned about consistently effective putting. The following are some of the best tips I have encountered.

Now, eager readers as well as those suffering from self-inflicted cases of the yips will want to gobble up these tips and try them all at once. Please don’t! In order to get the most out of these tips please follow these guidelines.

As you read through these tips be skeptical. Some of them you might not understand. Others you might not agree with. Still others you might not yet be ready to apply. Do not mindlessly agree with them all and try to implement them all at once. Some tips might even contradict one another so look at each separately. If there is a tip below that you like, single it out and practice it exclusively for three practice sessions. Start with emphasizing it putting in your den or office. Then go out to the practice green. Only alter three solid days of practicing it try it on the golf course. Realize that when you are assimilating a new emphasis into your existing putting stroke the initial results may not be completely positive. As you integrate the specific tip it will become more natural and the results will improve.
Remember to implement one tip at a time and give it three solid days of practice.

Here then, in no particular order, are the best putting tips I have learned:

- I firmly believe that your stroke rhythm should be a microcosm of your full swing rhythm. If you have a quick swing, your putting stroke should be of similar tempo. If you have a fluid swing, so should you putting stroke. Putting problems occur when you have different tempos of your full swing and putting stroke.
- No matter your putting tempo, each putting stroke should be taken back relatively slowly.
- More importantly, each stroke should start back at the ball relatively slowly. This promotes a smooth acceleration through the ball.
- Speed/distance control is the most important element of all putts, even over accuracy. Proper speed control provides more options for the ball rolling into the hole. Follow Dave Pelz’s research
that if a putt misses it should roll seventeen inches past the hole.

- Develop and use the same pre-putt routine on all putts. Avoid the temptations of minimizing or eliminating your pre-putt routine when discouraged or under pressure. Your routine is home base.

- Line up precisely perpendicular to where you want to send the ball; not necessarily to the hole, but on the line you want.

- Visualize in great detail the path you want the ball to go.

- Focus your vision on the hole. See the depth of the hole. Then work your sight back along the planned line to your ball.

- Mentally rehearse, in vivid detail, your full putting stroke.

- Tips for targeting breaking putts:
  - If you are a “thinker,” target by using such
numbers as “five inches to the right” or “two balls to the left.”

- If you are a ‘feeler,’ target by feeling the ideal line or the apex break point in the putt.

- With either style in the above, imagine that the hole is a round clock with 6 o’clock being the closest point to you. Judge what hour you want the putt entering the hole. This might be as specific as “5:30” or or “7:30.” This clock metaphor really helps in precise targeting and speed control.
  - During your practice swing(s) really feel the putter head. Feel it in a full pendulous arc. The pendulum emanates from the shoulders.

- Just before your start back, sensitively tap the putter on the ground a couple of times. This is similar to the waggle in the full swing.

- A putt is a stroke and it rolls the ball. Don’t hit or strike the ball. Roll it.
• Emphasize being smooth. Start back smoothly and start forward smoothly. An effective mental cue is to “stroll’ the ball: stroke and roll.

• Forget about the ball. Feel the putter head moving on the target line.

• View the ball three dimensionally. You might also be able to focus on an individual dimple.

• Especially for quick tempo putters, use the image from the great putter Walter Travis by tapping an imaginary tack in the back of the ball.

• For those who need auditory cues, hear the “click’ of a well stroked putt. Program the sound of this click into your pre-putt routine.

• On long lag putts take your practice swings looking at the
hole and emphasize feeling the length of the correct back swing.

- On long putts relax the forearms during the last half of the back swing. This will help you gauge the distance better.

- Feel your rear elbow brush across your body on a good follow through. This is the best rule to put a good roll on the ball.

- After the ball has been stroked, visually focus on the spot on the grass where the ball was resting.

- Especially under pressure situations, emphasize putting a good roll on the ball (instead of expecting to make the putt). Reinforce your good efforts. Good efforts form the base for making pressure
putts.

- On particularly tough putts, remember past similar putts where you executed them well.

- Putting confidence emanates from what you did well. The night after a round, mentally replay all those putts you rolled well or made not the putts you missed or jabbed. Build on strengths.

- Maintain an ongoing list of your own important putting tips. Refer to it when you are putting well as when you are putting poorly.

Most importantly, remain really positive about your putting. Be actively on your own side when you are putting. It can become lonely out there and you have to be your own best friend when you are facing a slick downhill putt.

Continually learn about your own unique style of putting. Feel free to experiment and refine, but always keep in mind the essential maxims
of your putting. Practice and integrate new emphases, but maintain a big picture perspective. Have patience, emphasize that which you can control, and stay positive.

There is a system and an art for consistently good putting. Good putting is part method and mechanics, part feel and intuition, part courage and confidence, and part experience. Most importantly, putting is a matter of positive mental attitude. When you think about it, putting is the most wonderful challenge of a game that is full of challenges. Enjoy your journey and then...go drain it!
Practical Putting Session

OKAY, I WANT YOU TO TAKE your putter and place it across your lap facing due west while reading this article: You are going to become friends with it again for we are going to put the magic back into your putting!

In a past issue I presented a major piece on my system of the mental playing session. Your feedback was very kind. Those of you who contacted me said you appreciated how detailed I was in openly
sharing most of my “secrets” of working with players on their mental and scoring games. In that article I alluded to having separate putting sessions. Many of you asked me to elaborate on what I cover during these practical putting sessions. So gently pat your putter and read on.

**TRULY UNDERSTANDING PUTTING**

- Anyone can putt. Your old Aunt Ethel can putt. Any little child can putt. Any good junior player can glance at a slick breaker, step right up to it, and immediately drain it. However, once you started realizing the importance of putting, these shots became increasingly difficult. Inexplicably, you started missing more putts. You started doubting yourself, feared more missing, and then made tentative jabs. At extreme levels, putting can disintegrate into the yips. So what was once simple and natural has become disjointed and even dispiriting.

  The putt is the most precise shot in golf. Since there is such a small target compared with the other shots, it is natural to have some fears about missing putts (especially with the wounds of a recent four-jack!). Whereas one can recover from a poor drive, approach shot, or
chip, a missed putt is a shot lost forever.

The great Mickey Wright once concluded, “Putting is a psychology, not a system.” Face it; the putting stroke is much more technically simple than the full swing. It is neither rocket science nor obscure mysticism. However, it is immensely interwoven with a wide variety of independent factors. Good putting is part science, part art, part experience, part routine, part touch, part consistent technique, part patience, . . . and all confidence, commitment, courage, and concentration. Perhaps more than any other shot in golf, putting requires an engaged and immersed mind.

• The best putters I have ever known—the famous and the ones you never heard of—have all been students of this stroke. They have not only studied Mr. Pelz’s research, they have also read the classic putting books of Jerome Travers, Bobby Locke, and George Low. From all of this, these students have developed their own philosophies, principles, and styles of putting.

And this is where I begin working with golfers. We talk about their theories of putting. We discuss how they read putts, how they
target putts, the elements of their strokes, and what they think about during various putts. Quite often, golfers do not have a complete grasp of their styles of putting, so this initial conversation helps them clarify and expand their views.

**THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF PUTTING**

No matter the individual’s style, putter type, or grip (and I have documented over 18 basic ones each with multiple variations!), there are three essential principles to good putting. Once golfers understand and embrace these principles, they immediately become more consistent putters. Skeptical? Good! Read on.

1. **A MICROCOSM.** There is an essential personal rhythm to playing golf. The most consistent players stroke putts with the same rhythm as they swing at full shots. The putting stroke should be a microcosm of the full swing. Just about every yipster with whom I have worked violated this principle. These tormented golfers usually possessed nice full swings, but then jabbed at putts. Of course, pressure and doubts add to these ‘punches, but there was really never much of a stroke to begin with.
...once you started realizing the importance of putting,
theses shots became increasingly difficult.

Now, this does not mean that everyone should stroke putts like a Larry Mize or Ben Crenshaw. If your full swing is long and languid like them, fine. So should be your putting stroke. However, if your full swing is compact like a Craig Stadler or Christie Kerr, so should be your putting stroke. Apply the essential rhythm of your full swings into your putting strokes.

2. “STROLL” YOUR PUTIS. Two mechanical features ‘the best putters share are that they take away the puller very low to the ground which also includes a very long follow-through. In fact, the follow-through should be at least as long as the takeaway. Pop, jab, or hit strokes have very little follow-through. Although these pops might have been effective a generation ago when the greens were longer and the lofts were higher, they do not work as well today.

This long follow-through implies an acceleration of the stroke. When I work with golfers, I ask them to choose one of two words as a cue for accelerating the putting stroke. Golfers either feel more comfortable with “smooth” or “gradual” acceleration. Whichever
word you choose, use it to remind you to smoothly or gradually accelerate the through-stroke.

I have created the word “stroll” (stroke + roll) to summarize gradually accelerated putts. Strolled putts ease through the entire stroke and gently kiss the ball. Such strolls create a heavier” roll on the ball which keeps it on line better. A smoothly accelerated putt tends to release the club head thus making more consistent contact with the ball. Strolling your putts connects all the mechanical elements of the putting stroke.

3. SPEED CONTROL Whether or not you believe make-able putts should die in the hole or roll 17 inches past, all good strolls have precise speed control. On longer putts, this concept expands into distance control. It may not come as a surprise to you that one of the research studies I conducted found that about 92 percent of three putts were due to poor distance control on the first approach putt.

It is important to understand that there are five phases to every putt. They are: (1) the skip off the face, (2) acceleration, (3) coast, (4) deceleration, and (5) the trickle to a stop. Of course, on uphill and
into-grain putts, each of these phases is compacted. The reverse is true on downhill and down-grain putts where each phase is expanded. In either case, strolled heavier putts extend the coasting phase. Such putts possess more momentum. This is one of the secrets to good putting. Shhh . . . don’t tell others!

Perhaps more than any other shot in golf, putting requires an engaged and immersed mind.

One phenomenon I encounter with many players is that they are hesitant to stroll the ball past the hole. It is almost as if there is something deep in the collective unconscious which makes them believe the world drops off right past the hole! In their primes, both Arnold Palmer and Tom Watson were great putters (especially under pressure) because they were bold on the first putts. If those putts didn’t go in, they gained a good read on the come backers.

A useful warm-up technique I recommend players do when they first walk onto the practice putting green before a round is not to initially putt at a hole. Instead, they should stroll longer putts in all directions to start gaining a feel for the speed and contours of the
green. Granted, although the greens on the course may have a little different texture, you can start calibrating feel from the practice green. Only after you have a pretty good feel of the speed, then start aiming putts at holes.

Okay, do these three principles make sense to you? Understand and honor each of them.

Consistent and courageous putting stem from these principles.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF READING PUTTS

A committed miss is much better than a clueless make. Ponder this proposition for a moment. Great putters trust their reads. Few things are worse than having no idea how a putt breaks and “hoping” the ball near the hole. There is an art and science to reading greens and targeting putts. Let’s look at both of these skills.

READING GREENS. The best putters feel the line as much as they see the line. They first use science and experience so that they can let art and intuition come out. Reading a putt begins when you are walking up to the green. Take in the big picture of both the green and
the surrounding topography. As you survey the green, here are some questions you should ask yourself. What is the overall slope? Where are the other levels of the green? Where are the back slopes of greenside bunkers? Where are the drainage areas (most greens have 2-3 of these in which the grain, thickness, and slope are more pronounced)? Are there regular shaded areas?

Where are the influencing rivers, oceans, hills, mountains, and valleys, (not to mention black holes!)? What would be the general direction of the grain and even the wind?

As you reach the green, use the above information to start plotting out the putt. Generally determine the speed of the putt and how it will break. A good rule of thumb is to factor speed/distance before break. Good readers pace off the putt and even walk around the hole. Some appear like they are stalking prey. They are feeling the slope as much as with their feet as with their eyes. Especially on a breaking putt, look at it from the low side. You can gain better sensations and perceptions from the low side.

As players assimilate all of this information, they make the mental transition from reading the putt to creating a line.
TARGETING PUTTS. Precisely how do you target putts? Is the break measured in inches, ball diameters, cup widths, inside or outside of edges . . . or merely “Out that away?” Do you use apex points? How do you read the speed of the green near the hole? Whichever method you use, it is critical that you employ it consistently. Conscientiously following your system of targeting prevents silly mistakes and enables you to put more committed strolls on the ball.

Here is another targeting method I devised you may want to consider. Pretend the cup is like a clock with 12 being the farthest point from you and six being the closest. Use this imaginary clock to target just at what “time” the ball will go into the hole. You see, on every breaking putt the ball is actually going straight ...from its point of view. Too often, many of us target breaking putts to go into the center of the hole (6 o’clock) when really the true center is at an angle away from us. This is why we miss such putts on the low side where the ball breaks in front of the hole. Visualize the angle at which the ball should go into the hole. Read the “time” of putts as specifically as “7:30” or “5:15.” This method helps achieve a good feel of the angle in which the ball goes into the hole.

Whichever targeting method you employ, make sure you factor
in the all-important speed component. So you may want to say such
statements to yourself as "one ball to the right, firm" or “8:00
smooth.” Every targeted putt should include both speed and break.

As your concentration goes from broad awareness to narrow
attention you will be making the transition from planning to ex-
cuting. Your pre-putt routine will help complete this process.

**PRE-PUTT ROUTINE**

As consistently as you groove your pre-shot routine, you
should be at least that precise with the pre-putt routine. Under
pressure or discouragement there is a tendency to rush or skip these
routines. When you think about it, these are exactly the times when
you need to follow them the most.

I have golfers first verbalize then act out their pre-putt routines.
I am continually surprised at how many don’t follow what they say.
Verbalize and act out your own pre-putt routine, like you were
explaining it. You may be surprised at what you discover.

It seems paradoxical, but the purpose of a structured pre-putt
routine is to free you up to make committed and fluid strolls.
Especially under pressure, a solid pre-putt routine also serves as a
relaxation tool. It can be seen as a comforting harbor from the wild
seas of doubt and pressure. It should actually be a relief when you commence your pre-putt routine.

Although your playing partners’ putting may interrupt your own routine, emphasize what you can control when you can control it. Here are some key elements of any pre-putt routine:

• Commit yourself to your line. Consciously affirm what you are going to do with the putt. "5:30 firm" or "Left edge smooth" act as methods of programming your mind and body.

• Visualize the path of the putt. Precisely see the path of the ball including the speed, apex breaking point, and the angle in which it goes into the hole. Choose whether to play this mental movie either forwards or backwards. Some players prefer working the putt back from the hole, through the last four feet of the break (when it is in the decelerating or trickling phases), and to the high point. Even if you are not particularly visual, detail the desired path the best you can.
• Relax. Especially under pressure, do something a little physical to remind yourself to relax. Shake out your arms before your practice strokes, shrug your shoulders, tighten and then relax your grip, or breath deeply.

• Rehearsal strokes. Just as in the full shot pre-shot routine, groove how and when you take pre-putt strolls. The purpose of these rehearsal strokes is to program the desired stroll. They also help make the transition from thinking to doing. Now, some players do not make practice strokes. That is okay as long as they somehow make the transition. Some players make one practice stroll behind the ball before they walk up to it. Other players make two strolls aside of the ball. Just make sure you complete, your rehearsal strolls. Don’t make abbreviated mindless swipes. Use your practice strolls as rehearsals to solid performances.
The best putters feel the line
as much as they see the line.

• Lock in. Many find it helpful to do something physical with the putter just before they take it back. Nick Price always first placed his putter in front of the ball and then looped it back over behind it. Some place a little forward press while others gently tap the club head on the ground. All of these techniques aid in engaging rhythm and not becoming stuck.

• Become ready to pull the trigger. Once you are over the ball, what do you do to become ready? Although you may not want to be like Jack Nicklaus who seemed to stoop interminably over the ball, he actually waited for himself to feel ready. Over the ball, most find doing something visual helps them become ready. Move your head so your dominant eye is directly over the ball. You may even want to slightly tilt your head so your dominant eye is closer to the ball. Then focus on an
individual dimple, look at the space between the putter face and the ball, look at the logo, unfocus and take in the ball as a whole three dimensional sphere, or spot a piece of grass just ahead of the ball. Whatever you do, remember that the act of visually focusing initiates the execution process.

- Keep on refining and grooving your pre-putt routine. One of the hardest things I ever did with my routine was to decrease my rehearsal strolls from two beside the ball to one behind the ball. I was amazed at how difficult this was. Become increasingly consistent and efficient with your pre-putt routine. Remember, a solid routine actually frees you up to release good strolls.

**PRESSURIZED PRACTICE**

Hopefully, most of the above makes sense. However, all of this is useless unless you regularly practice them. Pick out one thing from what I presented and emphasize it during the next practice session. Even if this means practicing your rehearsal stroll on the carpet at
home, this counts. Always make sure that the last third of each practice session you put it all together emphasizing full putting performances. Conclude every practice session feeling connected, clear, and confident.

One valuable practice technique is to stroke without the ball. You see, whenever most of us practice we hit a ball. This is all well-and-good, but also spend some time just stroking the putter. Groove a feel for the proper line and rhythm of your stroke. Do this at home and even during a round, What are some pros doing on the green when another is putting? They are out of sight practicing their own strokes. Do you think you should do the same?

Here is a neat little non-ball practice drill. Remember when I presented earlier that good putters take the club head back very low to the ground? Place a nickel 3-4 putter widths behind your club and see if you can brush it on the backstroke. When you can do this consistently you will have grooved a flat pendulum stroke.

In order to heat temper your putting, experiment with various pressure practices. Play such little games with yourself as making every 3-foot putt in a circle around a hole, no 3-putts on nine different approach putts, successfully draining 6 putts each one foot farther
from the hole. In any of the above games, If you miss one you have to start from the beginning. I’ve sometimes had to stay out there until dark! One of my favorite pressure practice games is Mr. Pelz’s “Safety Drawback.” On the approach putt you have to get the putt in a 3-Inch semicircle behind hole high. If you don’t, you have to draw back the ball one putter length on the subsequent putt until you sink it. This little game puts pressure on all phases of putting.

You may even want to compete against friends. Playing for a soda or just bragging rights increases the stakes of your practices. Pushing your game by these little competitions hardens you. Now, I am not advocating gambling, but find ways to put pressure on your putting to see how well you and your stroke hold up.

Make these practices challenging, but also make them fun. Most importantly, practice the way you want to play. Take your time and go through your pre-putt routine on all putts. In essence, there is no such thing as practice putts. The basal levels of your brain cannot distinguish between a practice session putt versus one on the final green. If you can prove some things to yourself on the practice green, believe you can replicate them on the course.
…even Annika Sorenstam and Vijay Singh miss more puffs than they make.

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DRAINING PUTTS**

After all of the above have been accomplished, there is still the little matter of sinking putts on the course. When you think about it, even Annika Sorenstam and Vijay Singh miss more putts than they make. So don’t be so hard on yourself. View every putt as a creative challenge. Here are the main mental and playing putting tactics we cover during our sessions.

- First and foremost, emphasize the process of strolling a good putt. Do not concern yourself with the outcome. Do not say to yourself something like, “I just gotta make this putt.” Instead, immerse yourself into the process of executing the shot. Drained putts should almost come as a surprise to you.
• Be clear and committed. The only way to see if your reading and targeting were correct is to completely throw yourself into your plan. Learn from both your failures and successes so that your reading and targeting become even more accurate.

• Unlike full swings, when you are over the putt you should, seek to have an empty mind. You may choose to emphasize a putting cue when you are targeting or rehearsing the putt. However, when you are over the ball visually focus on your emphasis, empty your mind, wait to feel ready, and then pull the trigger.

• View approach putts like you do full approach shots. I hate the term “lag putt.” This is way too defensive of a concept for my tastes. Plan out where you want to leave the approach putt to provide an easier payoff putt. Sometimes this means not even aiming at the hole or
purposefully rolling the ball past it. One little image I find useful in calibrating the weight to stroll long approach putts is to pretend there is a thick rubber band around both the ball and the hosel. As I take back the putter, this rubber band expands eventually creating the proper resistance. From this point, I then smoothly accelerate releasing this tension.

- Cut in half the distance you view putts as “make-able.” From the first series of scoring research I conducted, I discovered that most golfers have too long of a distance in which they believe putts are make-able. When they cut in half this distance, they not only made a higher percentage of them, they also made a higher percentage of mid-range putts. Do whatever you can to take the pressure off your putting.

- On any putt beyond four feet you should give priority to speed/distance versus line/break. Don’t “fall in love with
the line” and leave the putt short. Emphasize strolling the ball creating a heavy roll.

- Relax with the prospects of missing. Mentally reframe any miss in a positive way. Consciously say to yourself, “Hey, at least I had good speed control on it,” “That was a great committed stroll,” “I left it in a good spot,” or “I know how this comebacker will break.”

- Stay positive with your putting. Sure, you will misread some putts, others will occasionally hit an old ball mark, and a couple will lip out. Laugh at your misses! No matter what we covered above, there are simply some things you cannot control The important thing is to stay positive and encouraging.

- Be patient. No matter how well you stroll putts, sometimes they just don’t fall in. Be patient and “wait ‘em out” Keep on doing the proper things. Remind yourself
that good strolls will eventually drop.

As Mickey Wright said, putting is all about psychology. Which leads us to the most enduring quality.

**BELIEVE**

This is probably more than you ever wanted to know about putting! For such a simple stroke, there is an awful lot to it. You can see why I have multiple sessions with my golfers. And this does not even take into account the special challenges of yipsters. It is another seeming contradiction that by going through all of these emphases putting can again become simple and pure.

The important thing is that you start earning the belief you are a good putter. Even though you might have an occasional poor putting round, retain the belief that you are an overall good putter. Confidence and belief are intertwined. Indeed, the root of the word “confidence” literally means “with faith.” Confidence is a resultant feeling, which comes from regular routines, smart practice, and building on successes. Touch, intuition, and even courage all evolve from true
confidence. Which all comes back full-circle to a deeper belief in your putting.

Throughout reading this article, you might have felt the putter on your lap heating up or even vibrating! Although there may be “a secret” to putting, I am not going to tell you. You see, what is a proven secret for one golfer may be folly to another. The important thing is to discover your own secrets. However, honoring the core principles, reading greens and targeting putts, grooving your pre-putt routine, pressurize practicing, and adhering to scoring tactics all lead to better strolls. Once achieved, magic will come back into your putting.

Now, doesn’t your putter feel differently in your hands?!

**Gutty Putting for The Yips**

THE PUTTING YIPS IS THE DARK side of golf. These uncontrollable spasms derail good putting and even sap the joy out of the entire game. When fine motor skills are continually bombarded with pressure and fearful thoughts, performances can sometimes
deteriorate into yipping. For a game of recreation and personal
mastery, the yips is a black hole.

Those of you afflicted with this malady know that I haven’t
overdramatized the above. I have seen so many golfers who are on the
verge of tears from despair about their putting. How can such a simple
stroke cause so much frustration and even heartache? In a game which
emphasizes control, the yips are that rogue element which contributes
to being totally out of control.

But wait, there are answers. There is light at the end of the
long, dark, and quivery tunnel.

Over the last five years, “The Yips” has become a more
recognized and accepted performance phenomenon. Not only are
more golfers and teachers admitting to different variations of them,
people from other walks of life are experiencing them. Recently, pro-
fessionals ranging from neurosurgeons to concert pianists to dentists
to diamond cutters have reported incidents of the yips. (Just put those
images into your head!) More scientists are now researching various
dimensions of this phenomenon. Whether parts of this affliction are
valid or mere fabrications, the yips are being more clearly delineated.

My apologies to the yipsters who read me in these pages for I
have been neglecting you lately. Over the last two years I spend most of my research and writing time with those afflicted with the chipping and pitching yips. One thing I confirmed is that those forms of the yips have quite different causes, dynamics, and solutions from the putting yips. You putting yipsters are just so unique!

...the yips are that rogue

*element which*

*contributes to being totally*

*out of control.*

Over the years, I have presented systematic approaches in coping with and overcoming the putting yips. There is not only hope, but answers to your putting woes.

For golfers who come to Reno to work with me on their yipping, we sometimes discover brand new techniques which I then apply with other players. This article summarizes some of the more recent techniques and tactics which have been proven effective.
PUTTING YIPS PERSPECTIVES

Before I present these new approaches, it is necessary to remind you of three important perspectives about the putting yips.

First, you didn’t “catch” the yips overnight so do not expect to find one single cure which will immediately remedy them. Your unique variation of the putting yips are a culmination of a whole bunch of little mechanical, mental emotional, and procedural things which have accumulated over years. These elements can be compounded with age. Given this, you must accept that it will take a while to cope with and eventually conquer them. There might be some relapses during the quest, but believe you can eventually overcome yipping.

Second, your ultimate goal should be to become a better pressure putter.

Merely overcoming the yips is too limited and defensive of a goal. Commit yourself to become a great putter. This is quite possible. In fact, some of the most consistent and courageous putters I know are ones who have overcome their own forms of the demon yips. Finally, I don’t buy into this rationalization that putting is separate from the
rest of golf. Putting is just a series of individual skills much like pitching or chipping. Here is one of the cornerstones for both overcoming yipping and consistent putting: your putting stroke should be of the same basic rhythm as your full swing. Ninety-five percent of the yipsters who worked with me had nice full swings and then made abbreviated jabs at their putts. I like to say that your putting stroke should be a microcosm of your full swing. Honor your essential rhythm in all strokes.

Do the above make sense? Remember them. Too often in the depths of despair, yipsters forget these big picture perspectives and grasp at any little magical answer. All of the strategies and tactics I present below are grounded on the above three perspectives. Regularly remind yourself of them.

NEW YIPS TIPS

The following are the most recent approaches I have found valuable with yipsters. A couple of caveats: (1) some of these will work and some of them won’t, (2) some of them will work for a while and then fade,
...your putting stroke should

*be of the same basic rhythm as your full swing.*

(3) some may not make sense now but may become useful in the future, and (4) some may even seem to contradict others. The important thing is that you develop your own “putting toolbox” in which you put all your approaches and techniques. The most successful and resilient putters rely on their toolboxes.

Let’s explore some of the more recent proven approaches. The first few techniques emphasize the basics.

- First and foremost, hole out all putts. Accept no “gimmees.” And don’t halfheartedly swipe backhandedly at them. I know, I know, you will yip many of these. Doggedly gut out all putts. This is the first step in getting back in charge. You cannot be a passive victim and shy away from any potential yip-able situation. Become a “putting warrior” and hole out all putts.
• Be quiet about your challenges. Don’t whine, complain, explain, or make excuses. Keep the quest of becoming a better putter to yourself. Silently struggle and concentrate.

• Genuinely look forward to putting. Dread and fears become perpetuating. Actively confront your fears and doubts. And choose to become genuinely eager in viewing every putt as a personal challenge.

• Pre-putt routines are more critical for yipsters than for other golfers. A solid pre-putt routine immerses yourself into a more positive mindset. Without it, you tend to become more reactive and unsure. Now, don’t be so structured that it creates tension. On the contrary, commencing the pre-putt routine should act as a relief. Your routine should be seen as an old comfortable pillow.

• Use a long putter. Even though I have some ethical problems with them, it has been my experience that golfers significantly decrease both the depth and frequency of yipping with broomstick and belly putters. As long as they are legal (and I believe they shouldn’t), you might as well as take advantage of them.
The next few tips are some effective techniques in the setup and stroke.

• Hover the putter above the ground behind the ball like Jack Nicklaus.

• Place your blade in front of the ball and loop it back over the ball like Nick Price.

• Tap your putter on the ground a couple of times before you take it away. Some expand this technique to include starting with the blade 4-6 inches behind the ball and with each tap they nudge it closer. All three of the above techniques emphasize pre-igniting some rhythm before the stroke begins so you don’t become stuck.

• Employ a low takeaway. This promotes a wide pendulum which takes the hands out of the stroke. Here is a training tool: place a nickel on the ground 3-5 putter widths behind the putter. See if you
can brush the nickel on the backstroke.

- Complete a relatively long takeaway. I would much rather see a deceleration of the throughstroke due to a too long takeaway than a twitchy stroke caused by too short of a takeaway. Develop patience . . and even courage . . . to take the putter all the way back.

- “Stroll” (stroke + roll) your putts. The easy transition from backstroke to downstroke is important. Attach either the word “smooth” or “gradual” to the acceleration of the throughstroke.

- Hold your finish. Abbreviated and recoiled followthroughs promote more yipping. Pose until the ball goes in the hole!

The next couple of tips emphasize the relationship between the stroke and the eyes. There seems to be a neurological connection between the “eye bones and the yip bones.”

- Practice putting with your eyes closed. You will be amazed at how solidly and fluidly you stroke such putts. Anchor these
feeling deep within you. Some yipsters have also found success with this technique on the course.

- Tilt your head slightly so that your dominant eye is over and closer to the ball. This adjustment helps lack in your setup.

- Instead of squinting on an individual spot on the ball (such as a dimple or the logo), relax and take in the ball as a three dimensional sphere.

- Don’t even look at the ball. Instead, look at the space between the ball and the putter face or even at a spot ahead of the ball. In doing either of these the putter then seems to stroke itself. (By the way, I have not found lasting success with yipsters looking at the hole during the stroke like Davis Love III used to do.)

- Don’t get “ball locked.” Once you settle over the ball, visually focus on something and immediately pull the trigger. Waiting to feel ready almost always promotes more nervousness with yipsters.
• Although this next point doesn’t have anything to do with the eyes, it has some fascinating physiological components. I don’t have much expertise with energy meridians, but there seems to be some correlation between the putting yips and the webbing between the fingers. Even though I do not understand why, some yipsters have found relief and success in gripping the putter in such away that constricts the webbing, especially between the thumb and index finger. Perhaps someone proficient in acupuncture can explain this to me.

The final group are playing tactics to emphasize during the round. Some of these may contradict others. Choose those that fit for you, but store away the other ones that may not have immediate application.

...remind yourself you can do something about improving your putting...
• During the first 3-6 holes of a round, emphasize strolling longer putts smoothly and gently. Kiss the ball with the blade. These strolls establish the fluid rhythm for the rest of the round. Just as you settle into your full swing rhythm early in the round, also settle into an easy strolling rhythm.

• Throw yourself into the outcomes of hitting the target or sinking the putt instead of the specifics in the process of not yipping. Remind yourself that you are playing to score well instead of therapy for your yipping. Unlike other shots, emphasize the outcome instead of the process.

• Don't try to die make-able putts into the hole. Dying the ball promotes being tentative. And being tentative promotes more yipping. Instead, fully stroll them in. If you miss or yip it, fully stroll the next one.

• Along with this, stroll short putts with contempt! Take as much break out of the putt as possible. Show it who's boss!

• Completely disassociate from yip-able putts. Don't concentrate nor grind these putts. When you feel like you are going to yip before you set up (such as feeling queasy or having tunnel-vision), do not go through your pre-shot routine. Instead sneak up on the putt.
and execute *it*. If you are susceptible to becoming hypersensitized to the stroke performance, follow Lee Trevino’s advice and “miss ‘em quick.” As you drain some of these mindless putts, you will gain confidence upon which you can expand later.

Finally, ...laugh. Care, but don’t care too much. Laugh at yourself, your foibles, your frustrations, and even your futility. Laughter is a wonderful healer and a great perspective giver. Laughter keeps you in charge.

The above two dozen ideas have been proven to be effective with fellow yipsters. I just do not know which of these will work for you at this time. Find out for yourself. Choose one of the above and apply it for a full week (or at least three practice sessions and three rounds).

Please contact me on which of these and other techniques you have found to be successful. In this way we will all help each other.

The most important thing is to remind yourself you can do something about improving your putting (did you notice I did not say overcoming your yipping?!). Although progress may not be linear or as quick as you desire, believe you can eventually get on top of your yipping and become the putter of your dreams. Others have done it.
You can do it too.

**Taking Back Control of Your Putting Yips**

I sincerely hope no one reads this article. Please do not look at this if you merely have a passing interest in the putting yips. There is nothing for you here. Go scan another article elsewhere in these pages on some new magic driver. The only people I want studying these words are “yipsters” who have struggled with their putting yips.

Good,...now that the curious have gone away, we can begin work. I hope you yipsters have spent the off-season staying away from your putting. (Go retrieve your putter out of solitary confinement in that cold dark closet!) Now with a fresh mind is the time to take back control. There are answers for you below. Beyond that, there is also hope. One can overcome the putting yips. Believe it.

Flinch, twitch, cringe, shake, shutter, stutter, sputter, spasm, yank, blank, bonk, jerk, jab, gag, freeze, seize, seizure, flutter, blubber, quiver, shiver, jiggle, tremble, tremors, yipups (yip hiccups), disconnect, and short-circuit are the more common words I have heard golfers use in describing their putting yips. Some of you might have
experienced nervousness just reading the above sentence!

Strange things happen to the mind and body when approaching a short putt. Your insides start to feel queasy, your breathing becomes constricted, and there begins an uncontrollable quivering in the hands, arms, and even legs. Beyond these maladies, when you take the putter back the eyes immediately blur, the brain cuts out, and the hands involuntarily convulse! Both your mind and body seem to be completely possessed by some kind of putting demon.

There is nothing funny, cute, nor trendy about having the putting yips. I have seen golfers on the verge of tears from being totally out of control with this little stroke. Even today, many players rarely speak the words “the yips.” And when they do the phrase is frequently uttered in hushed, embarrassed, and even bitter tones. There seems to be something humiliating in admitting to having the yips...like it is some kind of personal life failure.

I have spent the better part of the last twenty years researching and helping golfers with the putting, chipping, and full swing yips. Way back in 1990 I wrote my first piece on overcoming the putting yips. Compared to my present system, that article was very basic. However, it did help a lot of dispirited and desperate yipsters. Now,
every other year or so I write a major piece for these pages updating my advances with the topic. Find copies of my last couple of GT articles (4/05, 6/03, and 7/01) so you can come up to speed. In that last comprehensive article I asked you readers to send me your proven approaches in combating the putting yips. Many of you did. Thank you. I also asked if any of you had experience with energy meridians. Nobody responded! Since then I have been studying more of the neuropsychology of the putting yips. I now have some practical answers from this area.

This is a two-part series on current proven practices in overcoming the putting yips. In this article, I will address essential perspectives to doggedly possess. Part II next month will cover the neuropsychology of putting, proven setup techniques, stroking emphases, and playing tactics. So take a deep breath and let’s go.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE YIPS

Golf commentator Peter Alliss is famous for saying, “Oh, he left himself one of THOSE putts.” The phrases “Losing one’s nerves,” “The black hole of golf,” and “The throw-up zone” are also indicative of golfers’ insecurity with short putts.

Perhaps we (including me!) have blown out of proportion this
malady called the putting yips. Throughout the history of the game, old timers have quietly struggled with the deterioration of their putting. They just grimly accepted what they had. Even though hard scientists have been recently researching the neurology of the yips, there are still many more questions than answers about this phenomenon.

Over the years from working with players’ putting, I have observed illogical belief systems which have digressed into self-imposed limitations. Some of these have become generalized into a whole mythology surrounding the yips. Let’s expose the most common of them.

MYTH #1: “There are just so many good putting strokes in you.” It is almost as if the golf gods allotted just a limited number of smooth strokes throughout your entire life. And when you have expended them you are destined to yip the rest of your days.

RESPONSE #1: Baloney! Granted, even though there may be some physiological deterioration as we age, we can still putt well. In fact, with all the accumulated experience, many old timers putt better. Sure, we will probably have to make adjustments, but all of golf involves continual adjustments. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy
that if you believe you will lose control of putting, you have lost it. On the other hand, if you sincerely believe you can be in control of putting, you will be able to find a way.

MYTH #2: Yipsters “lose their nerve.” With all the emotional baggage many players carry from past putting disasters, they allow fears to govern all future efforts. It is almost as if there is a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for putting.

RESPONSE #2: On the contrary, those battling the yips are some of the most courageous golfers I know. They are openly honest with themselves. Although they may become discouraged and even dour, yipsters tend to be doggedly determined. Also, it has been my experience that recovering yipsters become more courageous putters. No slick downhill breaker will ever “unnerve” them.

MYTH #3: Yipsters “lose their nerves.” Some believe that yipping is purely physiological where the nervous system mysteriously breaks down on short putts. No matter the age, these golfers believe their nerves and muscles misfire, something over which they have no control.

RESPONSE #3: Interestingly, the golfers who believe in this are also the same who tend to believe in the myth of “muscle memory.”
These lost souls mistakenly believe that there are little brains in each of the nerves and muscles. They think that if they can mindlessly let their muscles work, they can perform well. Both no-brainer misses and eventually the yips evolve from abdicating self-control. The mind has to be actively engaged for committed shots as well as overcoming the yips. Indeed, one of the joys of golf is having the mind in control of the muscles, swings, shots, and entire performances.

MYTH #4: The putting stroke is separate from any other shot in golf.

RESPONSE #4: Rubbish! Those who think that way use this as a shallow rationalization. The putting stroke is like any other stroke in golf. Sure, it involves more subtleties, but it is still a stroke. In fact, one of the cornerstones to good putting is to realize the putting stroke rhythm is a microcosm of a player’s full swing rhythm. Strokes are strokes and rhythm is rhythm.

MYTH #5: The yips are all physiological...or all mechanical...or all mental.

RESPONSE #5: The yips are perpetuated precisely because players try to create a single cookie-cutter solution to one of these elements. Overcoming the yips--as well as consistent putting--is a
holistic approach encompassing mind-body connections, mechanics, techniques, and attitudes.

MYTH #6: All putting yips are the same. Flinches are flinches.

RESPONSE #6: Your form of the yips is unique to you. This is precisely why so many golfers feel alone. Over the years, I have worked directly with well over a hundred yipsters (and indirectly with hundreds more via the phone or online) and I can honestly say each person’s yips were unique. Granted, there were similarities, but each form had a different etiology, progression, and development. As such, so were the emphases and sequence of interventions.

MYTH #7: “My putting yips are just like my chipping yips.”

RESPONSE #7: Sorry, it has been my experience that the dynamics of the putting yips are quite distinct from those of the chipping or full swing yips. Although there may be some general perspectives and strategies that work with all three types, there are specialized tactics and techniques which are only effective with each of these forms.

MYTH #8: The great Henry Longhurst once observed, “Once you’ve had ‘em you’ve got ‘em.” It is almost as if the yips are some kind of terminal disease.
RESPONSE #8: THE core belief is to sincerely believe you can overcome your yips. You can, you know. I have seen many golfers regain command of their putting. Now, their yips may sometimes come back in altered forms, but they could more effectively combat new incarnations. The important thing is to deeply believe that it is within your control to overcome your yipping.

REGAINING CONTROL

I do as much work with yipsters’ attitudes and belief systems as with their setup and stroking techniques. This is why I spent so much of the above exposing the common myths. Although there is a danger in becoming too analytical, yipsters have to fully understand this phenomenon before they can effectively combat it. It is important to know your enemy so that you can exploit its weaknesses. And the yips do have weaknesses.

It is so sad to see yipsters continually struggle and eventually resign themselves to forever twitching. The first step in tackling your yipping is to STOP ALLOWING YOURSELF TO FEEL LIKE A POWERLESS VICTIM! As long as you are passive and pessimistic you will be susceptible to the yips. Aren’t you tired of being beaten up? Come back in charge! As you to begin to regain control of
yourself, here are some key perspectives about putting to understand and accept.

First, putting is supposed to be hard. It is the most complex shot in golf because it intimately involves mental, emotional, and fine motor skills. Precisely because it is the shortest shot to the smallest target, it is significantly affected by little outside influences. As such, the putt has the least margin for error. All of these factors contribute to the putting stroke being the most vulnerable to stress.

Second, the makable putt is the ultimate shot in every hole. While one can recover from other misses, a missed short putt is a shot lost forever. Once realized, this fact lends itself to more self-imposed pressures.

Third, we all miss more putts than we make. Even those great players on the professional tours miss more putts than they make. And all of us experience pressure with our putting. Fear of missing contributes to more misses than yipped strokes. In fact, ongoing fears of missing makes the player susceptible to yipping. One of the best ways to regain control is to actively confront your fears. As you do, you will see that your fears quickly crumble. Go ahead, find out for yourself.
Fourth, putting is challenging for everybody. All of us have occasional bad putting rounds. Even Brad Faxon, Rosie Jones, and Ben Crenshaw. Sometimes we can’t read putts accurately, don’t have a feel for the speed, become nervous, or make uncommitted strokes. This happens to everybody. Don’t panic, judge, nor generalize. It was merely a single shaky putt. It was just one bad putting round. As soon as you become hypersensitized and self-critical you allow the yips to snowball.

Finally, even if you do yip a putt it does NOT necessarily mean you will yip the next one...unless you allow it to. Just like other shots in golf, every putt is a separate performance unique unto itself. Linking all putting performances together is how the yips flourish. Each putt (even the fifth one!) should be seen as a separate performance.

THE QUANTUM SHIFT

Once you stop being a victim and embrace the above perspectives, you are then ready to make a critical shift in thinking. Few yipsters know this and even fewer implement this. Here it is.

The goal is NOT to cope--nor even conquer--your yipping. This is not good enough. THE goal is to become a better putter. There is a
subtle, but huge, distinction between these two concepts. You see, as long as you are in a reacting mentality you will always struggle with the yips. You have to make a quantum shift committing yourself to become a better putter.

Here is the bridge for this shift between not yipping and becoming a better putter. Ask yourself this question: what is the opposite of yipping? It is a simple yet difficult question. Please take time and be very specific in detailing what good putting means to you. Analyze, visualize, and even verbalize your notions of solid putting.

You see, most yipsters are so tunnel-visioned by their twitching they don’t recognize other important dimensions of putting. Any conception of good putting should include these components: a doggedly positive mental attitude; reading ability; precise two or three dimensional targeting; a consistent preputt routine; solid stroke mechanics; speed control; touch; intuition; smart approach putting; commitment to the line; patience; reliable relaxing/centering skills; and immersed concentration.

Develop a complete picture of your putting. You may even want to write it out, revise it, and most importantly, refer to it. The more complete picture you create the better you can develop a clear
blueprint for improvement. You see, all change and ongoing improvement are grounded in building upon existing strengths. And the primary strength is the mind. Recognizing all of these perspectives is critical in regaining control. Techniques and tactics are ineffective without the foundation of broad supporting perspectives.

I have so many desperate yipsters contact me wanting “the secret cure.” It is almost as if they believe I have a magic wand. (I do, but it is in my golf bag!) There are resolutions to each golfer’s unique affliction of the yips, but these first need to be based on confronting common myths and accepting key putting perspectives.

Next month in Part II, we will cover specific proven techniques to regain control of your putting. We will explore the relationship between the eyes and specific parts of the hands (I am not divulging the part right now!), proven setup emphases, stroking techniques, playing tactics, and maybe a couple of “secrets!” Until then, reread the above, stop feeling like a victim, and become a PUTTING WARRIOR!

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