

# Golf Insider

## IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR GAME

### Better putting deserves a hand

Despite its importance, putting practice is usually neglected by golfers in favor of hitting full shots on the driving range. There's no question that power and accuracy in your full swing make you a better player, but the easiest and fastest way to lower your handicap is to improve your short game, especially putting.

Any way you slice it (and I hope you don't), three of these and one of those adds up to four, and the "one of those" is the putt.

You can learn three important things about putting by simply clapping your hands in front of you:

1. When you clap your hands, they come together as a unit with your palms facing each other, just as they do when you grip the putter. Even though your hands are separated on the putter's handle, your palms face each other so that your hands work as a unit. The palm of your right hand faces the target, as does the back of your left hand, so your putter faces down the target line, and the club face also points in that direction.

2. When you clap your hands, you also learn where the ball should be positioned in your stance. Since your hands meet naturally in the center of your body, all you have to do is grip your putter and bend from your hip joints until your putter head touches the ground.

You'll find that in this position, the handle of your putter points to the center of your body. For the correct ball position, simply locate the ball just in front of your putter head, and you'll have identified the bottom of your swing arc.

3. When you clap your hands, you learn about the putting stroke itself. Note that in order to arrive together in the middle of your chest, each hand moves at an even, pendulum-like pace. This balance is what you want in your putting stroke so that your putter travels back and through without any attempt to increase or decrease its speed.



There aren't a lot of rules you need to follow to become a good putter, but one of them is keeping the putter low, both back and through, as our player Kevin Stadler demonstrates above.

## THE GOLF DOCTOR

### How a good putting stroke should feel

**Problem:** Most golfers don't have the feel of a correct "no hands" takeaway, where the putter head moves away from the ball in a straight line. This is because their hands are too active at the start of the stroke, causing them to either lift the club head outside the line or whip the putter too much inside.

Either way, the club head is off the intended line of roll much too early, and you can say goodbye to any kind of consistency. Pushed and pulled putts signal too much of an inside or outside path, respectively.

It is true that as the putt gets longer

and therefore requires a longer back swing, the putter head will naturally swing slightly to the inside because of the length of the arc.

**Solution:** Take the club head away from the ball using your arms with no independent hand action while feeling a slight curling under of the left hand, as if the knuckles were turning up to the sky. This allows the putter head to stay on the line while the shoulders rock gently to keep the club moving. If you've been taking the club head to the inside, the correct move will feel outside, and vice versa.

**Drill:** Lay a shaft down behind the ball on the line of the putt. Start with a 3-foot-er and actually slide the putter head back-and-forth along the shaft as you putt.

## Another Ryder Cup loss prompts question: Why?

By CRAIG DOLCH  
Cox News Service

**West Palm Beach, Fla.** In the early 1970s, there was talk about the Ryder Cup coming to an end. The U.S. team kept winning the matches so easily against Britain, it didn't seem a worthy competition. So Ireland was added in 1973 to bolster the effort against the Americans, then all of Europe was added in 1979.

But after watching the U.S. team lose the Ryder Cup last month for the fifth time in the past six tries — again by a record margin — maybe it's the Americans who can use a little help. How about recruiting Canada, or signing up the Australians?

"I'm not going to say the U.S. can't win, but they have some serious scar tissue," said Dottie Pepper, a Solheim Cup veteran who covered this year's loss at the K Club for NBC.

How did this happen? Why does this continue to happen?

It's more than, as Tiger Woods says, the Europeans making the golf putts. On paper, the U.S. seems to have a clear advantage with the world's three top-ranked players (Woods, Jim Furyk and Phil Mickelson). So why do the Europeans keep trouncing the Americans, winning the past two Ryder Cups by identical 18 1/2-9 1/2 margins?

Raymond Floyd, who played on eight Ryder Cup teams and captained one, kept asking himself that question as he walked the K Club to support the U.S. team.

The answer he came up with had nothing to do with swings or putts. "What I saw was the Europeans were more enthusiastic, they were showing their emotion when they were out there," Floyd said. "Now, people will say it's easy to do that when you're winning. But what I saw is the Europeans just seem to have more passion than our guys. How do you create that?"

Billy Casper, who like Floyd played on eight Ryder Cup teams and captained one, said you can't create chemistry in a week or even during captain Tom Lehman's three-day "bonding trip" to the K Club last month. It's something that's acquired over months and years with strong personal relationships.

Casper thinks the Europeans have a built-in advantage because



BEN GRAY / Cox News Service

Tiger Woods has eight PGA Tour wins in 2006.

### Tiger on a roll

Tiger Woods' eight-shot victory Sunday at the American Express Championship was his sixth straight PGA Tour victory. His winning streak is the longest in one season on the PGA Tour since Ben Hogan won six in a row in 1948. Woods previously won six straight PGA Tour events at the end of the 1999 and start of the 2000 season.

Sunday's win marked Woods' eighth victory of the year, making him the first player in PGA Tour history to win at least eight times in three seasons. Sam Snead, Byron Nelson, Hogan and Arnold Palmer each did that twice.

Woods will take a break from competition this week. He has played seven of the past nine weeks, including a two-day trip to Ireland to prepare for the Ryder Cup.

their tour is set up to where most of the players usually stay at the same hotels near the golf course. The Europeans play together and also hang out together.

"Our guys are individuals," Casper said. "They play for so much money they take their families with them on their jets and when they get to the tournament there's a wonderful day-care setup where they drop off the children."

"The camaraderie is one of the basic factors in the Ryder Cup. The Europeans enjoy being with each other. It's so fascinating to look at their guys on TV and look at our guys. There always seems to be more of a separation with our guys."

The future doesn't look much brighter for the Americans. Not with three Europeans on this team in their 20s (Sergio Garcia, Paul Casey and Luke Donald) and three others in their early 30s (Henrik Stenson, 30, David Howell, 31, and Lee Westwood, 33). The youngest U.S. player? Woods, at 30. The only American in his 20s to win twice on the PGA Tour is Ben Curtis, 29.

Jack Nicklaus, who played on six teams and was captain twice, said that's a clear sign the United

States is not doing a good job of producing young golfers who are strong at match play. He blames the college system.

"The college coaches are always trying to get them to play conservatively, so kids are coming out looking to finish the best they can finish instead of trying to win the tournament," Nicklaus said. "They don't produce the kid who's playing to win."

Nicklaus said he tried to address this problem about 20 years ago when he started a match-play college tournament at Muirfield Village. But Nicklaus said the organizers had a difficult time luring schools.

"The coaches didn't want to play because that's not what they usually play," Nicklaus said. "They're trying to earn ranking points."

This explains why two of the players on the American squad — Brett Wetterich and Vaughn Taylor — made the team without having ever played match play. They were a combined 0-3-1 at the K Club.

"You're not going to learn how to play match play in a few weeks," said Pepper, who was 13-5-2 at the Solheim.

Woods. He was the original Iron Byron, which is what the United States Golf Association named a mechanical device to test equipment on an approximation of his swing.

Nelson always appreciated that compliment.

He won 11 consecutive tournaments in 1945, and wondered once in awhile about how much money that might have meant more than four decades later.

Not that he felt cheated. What he did earn that spectacular 1945 season was enough to allow him to purchase the Roanoke, Texas, ranch to which he soon enough retired while still in his mid-30s. It remained Nelson's home until he died.

Oh, how he loved that place. He loved talking about the sunrises and sunsets. He loved talking about the peace and quiet. He loved talking about how those deep-in-the-heart stars seemed to shine a little bigger and a little brighter in those wide-open spaces.

It's impossible not to wonder how empty the ranch feels now.

## Commentary: Lord Byron always a gentleman

By GREG STODA  
Cox News Service

**West Palm Beach, Fla.**

What a joy it was to know Byron Nelson. It's as precious a memory as any when it comes to the catalogue of a sportswriter's career. He was more rancher than his nickname — Lord Byron — ever implied. He was kind and caring and as real as the Texas land he loved.

And it was my extraordinarily good fortune as the golf writer for the now-defunct Dallas



NELSON

Times Herald to spend a bit of time with Nelson every summer in the middle-to-late 1980s when the PGA Tour event bearing his name came to Las Colinas Country Club in Irving, Texas.

Some editor to whom a great personal debt is owed came up with the notion of having me ghostwrite a Nelson daily column

during tournament week. He always made the conversations so comfortable.

"Make it sound like me," he'd always say.

"Make it sound like I'm just talking to people."

He always made it so easy. Our meetings — sometimes he'd find me in the media room or sometimes we'd arrange a get-together elsewhere — never took prepared with thoughts on something or someone, and always took a gentleman's gentle approach.

He might agonize about Payne Stewart kicking away another chance to win, and sound as forlorn as the man who had lost.

Or he might talk about the anonymity of a Bob Eastwood or Mark Wiebe, and sound as genuinely excited about their successes as they did.

Never did he make himself the story, but Nelson was proud of his accomplishments as a player. Even now, he ranks sixth on the list of career PGA Tour victories behind Sam Snead, Jack Nicklaus, Ben Hogan, Arnold Palmer and Tiger



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## ASK THE PRO

**Q:** I'm not a good putter, and my husband says that you're either a good putter or not. Are good putters born?

— Leslie G., from the Web

**A:** Some golfers, like your husband, think putting is a mystical skill given by the gods. This is part of a common misconception that good putters are born not made, simply another way of saying that you can't learn to putt. Fortunately, this is not true.

You definitely can learn to putt well, and when you do, it makes a huge difference in your score. A good example is Gil Morgan who, while a de-

cent player on the PGA Tour, never reached his potential because he was a mediocre putter. But he worked for one entire year on his putting before joining the Champions Tour, and now he's a four star.

So you can get better at putting if you work at it. All you have to do is practice with the proper technique. You shouldn't become tied up in the mechanics of the stroke because the best way to putt is to forget about trying to make your putter "go somewhere" or "do something." But here are a few things you want to work into your stroke no matter how individualistic it is:

## SCHEDULE

All Times EDT  
**PGA TOUR**  
Chrysler Classic of Greensboro  
• Site: Greensboro, N.C.  
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday  
• Course: Forest Oaks Country Club (7,333 yards, par 72)  
• Purse: \$5 million. Winner's share: \$900,000.  
• TV: USA (Thursday-Friday, 4-6 p.m.; Saturday, 3-6 p.m.) and ABC (Sunday, 3-6 p.m.).

**PGA TOUR**  
Corona Morelia Championship  
• Site: Morelia, Mexico.  
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday  
• Course: Tres Marias Residential Golf Club (6,759 yards, par 73)  
• Purse: \$1 million. Winner's share: \$150,000.  
• TV: None.

**CHAMPIONS TOUR**  
SAS Championship  
• Site: Cary, N.C.  
• Schedule: Friday-Sunday  
• Course: Prestonwood Country Club (7,197 yards, par 72)  
• Purse: \$1.6 million. Winner's share: \$240,000.  
• TV: The Golf Channel (Friday-Sunday, 1:30-4 p.m., 9:30-11:30 p.m.).

**PGA EUROPEAN TOUR**  
Alfred Dunhill Links Championship  
• Site: St. Andrews and Carnoustie, Scotland.  
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday  
• Courses: St. Andrews, Old Course (7,279 yards, par 72), Carnoustie, Championship Course (7,112 yards, par 72) and Kingsbarns Golf Links (7,099 yards, par 72)  
• Purse: \$5 million. Winner's share: \$300,000.  
• TV: The Golf Channel (Thursday-Saturday, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; Sunday, 7:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.).

**NATIONWIDE TOUR**  
Mark Christopher Charity Classic  
• Site: Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.  
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday  
• Course: Empire Lakes Golf Club (7,107 yards, par 71)  
• Purse: \$500,000. Winner's share: \$90,000.  
• TV: The Golf Channel (Thursday, 5-7:30 p.m.; Friday-Sunday, 1:30-3 a.m., 5-7:30 p.m.; Monday, 1:30-3 a.m.).

## LEADERS

WORLD RANKINGS	
1. Tiger Woods	23.20
2. Jim Furyk	8.82
3. Phil Mickelson	8.58
4. Adam Scott	7.08
5. Vijay Singh	6.87
6. Ernie Els	6.21
7. Retief Goosen	6.14
8. Luke Donald	5.61
9. Sergio Garcia	5.50
10. Geoff Ogilvy	5.38

MONEY LEADERS	
PGA TOUR	
Player	Money
1. Tiger Woods	\$9,941,563
2. Jim Furyk	\$6,429,016
3. Phil Mickelson	\$4,256,505
4. Geoff Ogilvy	\$4,228,869
5. Vijay Singh	\$4,163,831

PGA TOUR	
Player	Money
1. Lorena Ochoa	\$1,874,122
2. Karrie Webb	\$1,873,753
3. A. Sorenstam	\$1,769,408
4. Cristie Kerr	\$1,472,112
5. Mi Hyun Kim	\$1,263,680

CHAMPIONS TOUR	
Player	Money
1. Loren Roberts	\$1,945,764
2. Jay Haas	\$1,930,427
3. Brad Bryant	\$1,585,625
4. Gil Morgan	\$1,403,005
5. Tom Kite	\$1,348,936