

The Mental Side of Golf

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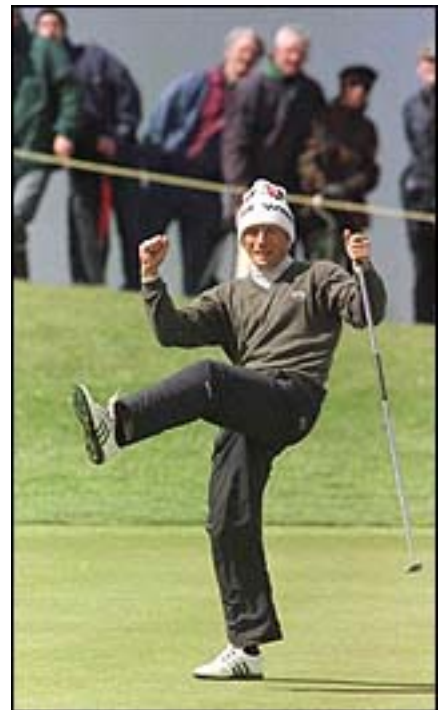
Tips for beating the yips

The "yips" are one of golf's most perplexing challenges. Putting is not fun if you think you have the yips. The yips have driven more good golfers to give up the game than any other golfing "illness".

When players labels themselves as having the putting yips, they think they have an incurable disease. Putting confidence declines and the fear of missing putts makes matters worse. Players who suffer from the fear of missing don't like to putt. The more they putt, the worse it gets, until it's intolerable. This leads golfers to believe they have an affliction that they must learn to play with. When golfers condition themselves into believing they have the yips, it is extremely hard for change to occur.

The yips start with poor results and missing short putts. The player then progresses to the fear of missing and the fear of putting. The player feels like it is a physical condition, which leads golfers to believe that it can be corrected with a change in technique or practice habits.

But the yips come from the golfer's inability to gain neuromuscular control due to poor attentional focus or anxiety. Intense anxiety or fear does not allow the golfer to control his muscles and putt smoothly. The player freezes and can't draw the putter back from the ball and initiate the putting stroke. The player wants to move the club back, but his or her hands and arms are in a vise. It's like a deer that freezes in the middle of the road by the fear of an approaching car. Another form of the yips occurs when the player tenses up at impact and feels like



he or she is stabbing at the ball.

Bernhard Langer celebrates at the Benson and Hedges International Open in May, site of his second straight win.

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The yips are curable. Several touring professionals such as [Bernhard Langer](#), who suffered from the yips have putted free again. The first step is to stop labeling

yourself as having a physical "illness" that causes you to jab at your putts. Next you have to realize that the physical symptoms of the yips come from a conditioned way of thinking about putting. Here are some suggestions for dealing with the yips:

- The fear of missing is where it starts. Throw away the fear of missing putts. Fear and anxiety come from what you think might happen in the immediate future. It's very important to not let your mind wander to outcome of the putt or missing. You need to stay focused on the execution of the putt and how you are going to hit a good putt. Forget about what might happen, good or bad.
- Forget about the past. You can't change the fact that you missed several short putts the last round. If you carry a poor putting round with you, you will have a monkey on your back. It's very hard to putt with a monkey on the back. Every round is different and every putt you have is different. You must look at each putt as a new opportunity for success!
- Simplify your approach to putting. Often the tendency when not putting well is to search for the answer with your method or putter. Often, this can make matters worse--when you have too many thoughts about how to putt. Prepare for your putt with only one focus--to hit your target that you selected. Think about throwing darts. Focus on the bullseye (or your target in this case) and let your body do the rest. Look at your target and pull the trigger as your eyes return to the ball. Continuous motion helps prevent you from freezing over the ball.
- See the ball going in the hole. How often do you imagine the ball missing as you are over the putt ready to start your stroke? It is very important that all your thoughts and images are focused on the ball rolling into the hole. As you read the putt and select a line, see the ball roll along that line into the hole. As you walk into the ball, stay focused on that image of the ball dropping into the hole. Over the ball, continue to have a powerful image of the ball rolling towards the hole, even if it is only for the last two feet of the putt.

Note: This article was adapted from the new book *The Mental Art of Putting: Using Your Mind to Putt Your Best*.

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