

## The Mental Side of Golf

By [Patrick Cohn, Ph.D.](#)

### A mindset for making short putts

Do you find it harder to make a three-footer than a 10-foot putt? It's common in my work to see players who can putt well from longer distances but who think they are poor putters from short range. [Tom Watson](#) is a case in point.



**Tom Watson made 20-footers for birdie to win the Memorial.**

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miss short putts".

It's been well documented and observed that he does not putt well from the three-to four-foot range. This was evident at the recent [Byron Nelson Classic](#) when he was in contention the final round. Although Tom putts great from 10-feet and longer and makes his share, he is afflicted with the "three-foot curse."

If you suffer from the three-footer blues, there is help. Let's talk about where the problem starts. The problem starts when you label your putts or identify a length of putt that you "should" make-that "dreaded three-footer". Most golfers can handle a 10- to 15-foot putt because they are not always expected to make those, its OK if you miss, no one is perfect. That makes it easier to relax and focus on the task. But when it comes to the shorter putts, you are expected to make those, "only bad putters

This expectation in part is what causes you to change your approach. The tension begins to mount as you get closer to the hole. Thinking about a putt as a "must make" or a "should make" causes you to focus on the result, which increases anxiety and makes short putts more difficult than they really are. You say, "I must make this putt," or "I should make this putt, I'll look stupid if I don't." Does that sound familiar? You pressure yourself because of the fear of missing and embarrassing yourself.

Here are some ideas for instilling a better mindset for making short putts:

- First, don't label your putts. Don't think about as a par-putt ("I need this to make par"), birdie putt, or bogey putt. Look at every putt as just another routine putt. A putt is a putt. Simplify your putting and think about it as another simple task to perform. The task does not change-you are required to roll the ball into the hole the best way you know how. The only thing that changes is how you perceive the task!
- Second, forget about the result. Don't let your mind slip ahead and think about missing or three-putting. Worry about the result is where tension and fear come from. Stick to what you need to do to make a good stroke or hit your putt on line -- that's what helps you make putts. You make putts by sticking to the requirements of the task -- getting a good read, picking your line, and feeling the speed.
- Third, don't deviate from your normal routine. Do what you normally do with 10-foot putts. Stay focused on stroking the ball solidly on the line you want it to travel.
- Fourth, create a positive picture of the ball rolling on your line into the hole -- see or feel the ball go into the hole as you prepare to hit it. This reinforces a positive picture in your mind. Don't step up to hit the putt until you have a strong image or feeling of the ball rolling into the hole. Lastly, focus only on hitting the ball solid with good speed. A solidly struck putt rolls truer and will hold its line better than a off-center hit.

Understand that once you contact the ball, there is nothing more that you can do. The best you can do is read the green well, pick a good line, and hit it on your line with the right speed. If you do these things, you are successful! The outcome is out of your control at this point. Live with the results and move on. Don't berate yourself if you miss, that only makes matter worse because it reinforces that you are a bad short-length putter.

If you need help with your mental game, Email your questions for Dr. Cohn to [PGAPACK@aol.com](mailto:PGAPACK@aol.com).

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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