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Mark O'Meara's near-flawless putting was a large part of his recent win at the Masters.

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Mental keys to a positive putting routine

By [Patrick Cohn](#)
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The use of preshot routines in sports is not new. Basketball players use a preshot routine at the foul line. Baseball players use a routine in the batter's box and on the mound. And bowlers use a preshot routine before executing each shot.

I use preshot routines in golf as a tool to help players eliminate doubt, focus on execution, and trust their stroke. Many players I've worked think that they have a routine, but most of the time they just go through the physical motions of the routine. To me, the most important part is the mental routine-or programming your mind and body for a successful putt. I teach players these 10 keys to a successful routine.

1. Get Your Best Read

Frankly, if you can't read greens--you can't make putts. Experience plays a big roll here. A practice round is the best time to get to know the greens. Also, observing other players' putts and chips can help you see the break better. Always go with your first instinct. And don't forget to get low to the ground--you can see the undulations in the green better.

2. Make a Specific Plan by Picking a Line and a Target

After reading the green, use your imagination to see a

line. As you squat behind your ball, see the ball rolling towards the cup. Did it drop? If yes, you have a good line, . . . if not, you need to adjust. Also, I prefer you pick a spot equidistant to the hole to aim your putter to. You don't want to just hit it "somewhere out there". This makes every putt a straight putt in your mind. Greg Norman said, "never hit a putt until you have a good vision of the path in which it will roll."

3. See and Feel the Ball into the Hole

Good putting is about vision and feel. After you select a line, now is the time to imprint a powerful image of the ball rolling on its line into the hole. Be sure to see the pace needed to keep the ball on that line. Some players are more kinesthetic and prefer to feel the ball into the hole. Bob Murphy is an example of a feel putter. He said: "I don't worry about position, I just walk in behind a putt, wiggle around until I get comfortable and then I hit it". The type of image is not what's important. What's important is that you use an image that's right for you.

4. Stay Line and Target Focused

Your eyes want to play tricks with your mind on the green. As you move from behind the ball and walk into address the putt, perception changes and so does your recognition of the line. It's critical that you don't take your mind and eyes off your target. Stay fixated on your line and spot as you walk into the ball. This way you won't lose target focus and trick yourself into changing your read.

5. Use Self-Talk to Your Advantage

No one can make you feel confident, but yourself, and now is the time. Great putters use self-talk to help them stay focused on execution and to be confident. Use self-talk to your advantage! Tell yourself: " I deserve to make this putt", or "I'm due to make one", as you go through your routine.

6. Use Practice Strokes to Ingrain the Feel

This is not the time to practice mechanics, but you want to feel the distance of the putt with your practice strokes. This locks in the feel of the correct distance. I want

players to match the putt they see in their mind's eye to the practice stroke. Don't watch the putter head, instead focus on tempo and distance.

7. Aim Your Putter with Your Eyes over the Line

Golf is a target game, and aiming is the key to hitting your target. Poor aim leads to compensations in the stroke. I want you to aim the putter first with your eyes over the ball and target line (you can sight the line better with this approach). After you aim your putter, then align your body around the putter head. Also, don't try to be too precise or perfect when aiming so that you can't pull the trigger when it's time to stroke the ball.

8. Use Your Mind's Eye to See the Target

Now that you are aimed and aligned well, what should be the last thought? Should it be the ball, the line, speed, feel, or a spot on your line? Golf is one of the only sports that we don't look at the target when we perform. We look at the ball. Your last thought (or image) should be to "see" the target in your mind's eye. Have a picture, an image, or a feeling of the target and just respond to that.

9. Fire Away Using a Natural Stroke

Most players' routines flow well until the moment of truth when it's time to pull the trigger. Doubt, hesitation, and indecision can ruin a great putting routine and cause you to control the stroke. Trying too stroke the ball on line only increases tension and ruins your natural stroke. LPGA player Vickie Goetz said, "I get over a putt and let my natural talent take over. I don't stand over it very long, I look at my target, I look at the ball and hit it." This is a great example of putting with freedom.

10. Accept the Results

Accepting the result is the final step in a solid routine. Your post shot or post putt reaction is very important. You need to release the past and get into the present moment before your next shot. Dwelling on missing won't help you make putts. If you want to putt well, be objective and accept what happens. I want you for the next five rounds to walk off each green with a least one thing you did well. This will help you make your most

confident stroke on the next hole.

Note: This article was adapted from Dr. Cohn's new audio "Great Putting-Right Now! Mental Keys to Confident Putting"

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