

> Gadgets and procedures that may (or may not) help, in golf putting

Summary: Learn how to deal with breaking putts. First, a quick review of procedures and devices not allowed, or not useful, or both and why they are not the solution for golf putting problems. After, a quick review of procedures allowed to deal with breaking putts, that are the solution for some golf putting problems.

Everybody agrees that golf putting is the most important part of the golf game. At first sight, however, improving the putting performance doesn't seem so rewarding as working with the driver or any other of the golf clubs inside the player's bag. No wonder that the great majority of average golf players don't devote any serious attention to golf putting. And when it comes to breaking putts, even fair and good players are usually, and understandably, moving in the desert. Believe me, the great majority of what you can read about this subject are laughable pieces of absolutely worthless text.

We have to deal with two main problems.

First: To read the green, that is, to evaluate the shape of that area between our golf ball and the hole.

Second: To know what to do, supposing the green was correctly read in the previous step.

There are some gadgets and procedures available to assist golfers in the first step that will be analysed in this article. Some of them are not allowed in the golf course because of golf rules and others are just useless. Only two are useful and permitted by golf rules and one of those two, as far as I can figure, has never been revealed before. But if any of my readers can prove that someone else has disclosed it before, please let me know because, in that case, I owe the author an apology.

Let's start our comprehensive review. If you are not interested in "solutions" that aren't useful or violate golf rules, skip to c).

a) Plumb bobbing. A procedure that is allowed but useless.

I won't give too many details about this technique. Those interested can "google" plumb bobbing in golf and get countless results.

Briefly, stand behind the ball and look straight to the hole, hold the top of the grip between your thumb and forefinger, extend your arm slightly and let the putter hang freely in your grip. Block the view of the ball with the lower end of the shaft of the putter. Only keep your dominant eye open. If the hole looks like it is on the left of the shaft, then you should expect the break to be from the right to the left and vice-versa.

All this is pure fantasy. It's always possible to position the shaft, the ball and the hole in the same alignment. If they are not aligned it's because the players have done what they needed to do in order to see what they wanted to see. It's a kind of confidence booster to reinforce what they probably already saw by careful visual examination of the putting surface.

If you are not convinced imagine the pin is in the cup standing vertically. Imagine also that you have a big door that turns around the pin. Rotate it, in your mind, till it is over the ball and stop. The door is a vertical plane that, if you were plumb bobbing, would contain the pin, the hole, the ball, the putter's shaft and your dominant eye. How can you measure any break in this situation? The answer is: you can't, unless you cheat and move your head a bit to get it "out of the door".

b) Devices to measure break and provide the direction of the fall-line. Very useful gadgets but not allowed.

We are now referring to objects, either electronic or air bubble based, which display the most important piece of advice needed for the management of breaking putts: the direction of the fall-line, an information that is critical to establish the shape of the curve the ball will follow after the putter stroke.

Fortunately, in my opinion, they are not allowed. However, due to its usefulness, they are currently used by golf professionals to map the greens before tournaments.

Here you have the names of some of them, not as an endorsement but with pure informative purposes:

"eez-read", an air bubble based break meter

"exelys break master", an electronic break meter

A quick reference also to "the green reader", a disguised sophisticated plumb bobbing device, not allowed by golf rules.

And now, let's see the solutions that are available to assist in green reading and that are useful in golf putting and in full accordance with golf rules.

c) Guessing the direction of the water flow. Very useful and allowed.

This is a very effective procedure I highly recommend. Observe carefully the ground close to the hole and imagine someone poured a fair amount of water in the cup till it overflowed. The direction the water would take is the fall-line or line of maximum slope. How to make full use of it is out of the scope of this article but it is carefully explained in my ebook *Golf Putting Lines*.

d) Marcel White's technique for green reading. Very useful and in total accordance with the rules. This is the one that has never been revealed before.

Let's start with the easiest feature this technique can provide. You are on a sloping green but you are not sure about your next putt being uphill or downhill because, as you move from one point to another, your perspective changes giving you misleading perceptions. Consequences can be devastating if you consider downhill a putt that actually is uphill, or vice-versa. Use this approach to solve the problem. Look for a spot that is roughly at the same distance from the hole and the ball and not very close to the ball-hole line. Standing on that point, you, the ball and the hole are forming a triangle, an isosceles triangle because two sides of it are equal.

Align yourself in order to let your shoulders parallel to the ball-hole line. Use both your forefingers to handle your putter and raise your arms, keeping them straight, till the putter's shaft is horizontal in front of you and parallel to your shoulders. Now, your eyes and the club shaft define a plane in which any straight line parallel to the club shaft is horizontal. So, just move slowly both arms, keeping the putter horizontal, till you see it touching the hole. Now, the image of the club shaft you see on the ground will tell you if the ball is above or below the hole and how much.



I agree this is not as accurate as an electronic meter but the choice is between this technique and nothing allowed by golf rules. Besides we can take some steps to improve it.

First, do it while the pin is in the cup. It's vertical and will help to see if the shaft is horizontal because both lines are perpendicular.

Second, you can train your eyes as much as you want because horizontal lines are everywhere to help you confirm your guesses. For instance, any house or building has horizontals on the top of doors, windows, walls, etc. Put yourself with your shoulders parallel to the wall and calibrate your horizontals.

And now, an interesting question is perhaps crossing your minds: if you line up with the ball and the hole, will this technique work to reveal the lateral break? Yes, it will!

So, get down, in line with the ball and the hole, and find two spots you can remember, on the grass, at each side of the ball and at similar distances from it. The two spots must define a second line that is perpendicular to the ball-hole line. You and those two points are now forming the isosceles triangle needed to use this technique. As before, the next step will be to raise the horizontal putter to discover which one of the spots is at a lower or higher level and how much. That is the lateral break. If you suspect of a double break repeat the entire process close to the hole. Just take care to avoid slowing the game.



As far as I know, this is the best and most reliable technique to improve your green reading without breaking the golf rules. With it you get a clearer picture of your putting zone in every situation. But don't forget that your objective is to sink the next putt, not to get a topographic image of the green. Provided you know how to use all the information you gathered, a nice putt is on the way. Otherwise, it will have been a waste of time. So, if the results don't show, I'm sure it's time to read *Golf Putting Lines* Ebook and discover the pleasure of making good breaking putts. It was one of my objectives when I wrote it.

Marcel White (2009/11/23)

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