

## The Mental Side of Golf

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

### When on the course trust your imagination

Great putting requires two different but important mindsets. The first mindset is needed to learn how to make a good putting stroke. Here, the student learns about proper mechanics, practices the putting stroke, and evaluates his or her performance.

The second mindset, ruled by the intuitive side of the brain, allows imagination and creativity to guide performance. Here, the performer imagines the line of the putt and responds to this powerful image.

It's easy for golfers to be students of the game, but it's more difficult to be performers. Once you have learned the fundamentals, you must shift your thinking from practicing to making putts. Great putting comes from imagination, creativity, and feel. These elements will allow you to make putts.

The ability to putt instinctively is critical to great putting. A free putting stroke develops from practice. The reason why you practice is so you can trust your stroke when its time to play. As golfers progress through the stages of learning a skill such as putting, they develop a memory program for putting. When the fundamentals are ingrained, a player has the feeling of a stroke that is natural or effortless.

The problem is that most players don't allow their stroke to be reflexive. They practice their stroke on the



**Larry Mize combines great technique and an imagination around the greens.**

Allsport File

course instead of focusing on making putts. Many players watch the putter head and try too much to make a perfect stroke instead of responding to the target.

Do you watch your putter head on the back swing? When you see that your putter is closed on the backswing, do you try to adjust it at the last second, steering the blade through impact and creating a push? This happens to the player who focuses too much on stroke. This player watches the putter head, consciously controls the putter and tries to force it on line. All this does is mess up a well-grooved stroke and throws off your natural rhythm.

The purpose of practice is to make the stroke reflexive and feel natural. When you play, let your instincts, that you have developed with practice, take over. Trying too hard to stroke the ball on line or make it only causes you to tighten up and interferes with your natural stroke.

PGA Tour player [Larry Mize](#) knows that you can't try to make putts. "When I want to make a putt real bad," Mize said, "I know that's when I am in trouble. That's just not a good way to putt, you start putting pressure on yourself when you want to make it real bad ... that is when you tighten up."

Some players can rely on their imagination and trust their stroke better than others. Great performance flows from imagination and reacting to the environment. When Michael Jordan jumps in the air to go for a lay-up and switches the ball to his opposite hand, does he have to think about it? No, he reacts to his opponent. Trusting your stroke means forgetting about the mechanics of your stroke and reacting to what you see and letting imagination take over.

Thinking mechanics on the golf course means you are practicing your stroke. You don't want to practice your stroke when you play golf. This is the time to let your creative mind take over. If you can stroke the ball solidly with your eyes closed, you can trust your stroke in a match.

Once on the course, you should become target-oriented. Focus on the tempo of your stroke or the feel of solid contact, but not swing path or face angle. The putter will square up to the target if you practiced your stroke enough and can let it go. Shift your focus to seeing your line, focusing on the ball, and launching the ball to the target. Use your imagination to "feel" the ball to the hole, don't "stroke it" to the hole.

**Note:** This Article was based on the new book *The Mental Art of Putting: Using Your Mind to Putt Your Best* by Patrick Cohn & Robert Winters.

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