

Building Positive Momentum on the Putting Green

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This article deals with the subject of psychological momentum and how it plays a crucial part in every golfer's round. In this article I will explain how to create an attitude for building positive momentum from the moment you step up onto the green and how to keep it going during your round!

Momentum on the Putting Green

Momentum plays a huge factor in determining how well or how poorly you will score in an athletic contest. In team sports such as basketball and football, whenever teams have positive momentum, they usually are in control of their destiny and perform the way they "normally play or practice." Conversely, if a team experiences negative "mo" they often suffer mental lapses and execute a large number of physical mistakes. Negative momentum often turns a capable or "well-oiled" team into an inept one, where their performance doesn't match their true talent or potential. This, in turn, leads the team members to exhibit signs of reduced confidence and lack of trust in their physical talent and their teammates. But perhaps

more importantly, this inability to perform adequately due to negative momentum impacts their belief in themselves. If left unchecked or uncorrected, these feelings can alter a player's belief system and affect his or her athletic image.

These same feelings are also experienced in golf, and become magnified on the putting green. When I speak to junior golfers about building positive putting momentum, I emphasize that it involves not only psychological factors, but emotional ones as well. These emotional factors are vital to sustaining and building positive "mo."

For example, the exhilaration that accompanies a series of successfully holed putts (or putts that do not go in the hole, but are hit solidly and with the proper pace) provides golfers with feelings of confidence and control. These feelings of positive momentum allow them to "free it up" on the putting surface and know that for every putt they step up to, they will have a good chance of achieving the desired result!" When a player is flowing with positive putting momentum, the activity of putting becomes a truly enjoyable experience.

However, if golfers miss putts (and miss frequently) they often are ready to throw in the towel and say, "it's just not my day!" Or they say, "I'm a lousy putter and I just can't putt on these greens!" What usually

follows this negative self-talk are the feelings of failure, embarrassment, anger, and self-pity. These devastating feelings are the result of allowing oneself to be overwhelmed by negative momentum and not understanding how to reverse the effects of missing. If you have ever missed a short putt and felt distressed or thought that you were “losing it,” then you understand how putting can have an immediate effect on your emotions and in turn, your momentum.

Regarding negative experiences, many golfers tell me that when they miss putts early in the round, they experience an extreme feeling of disappointment and find it hard to recover. The pictures they see in their mind’s eye (before they putt) are of balls continually lipping out, sliding by the hole, or being way off of the target. In essence, negative momentum on the greens provides a poor taste in one’s mind for putting, while positive momentum “wets” the appetite for a putting feeding frenzy. Therefore, your focus should always be on building and sustaining positive momentum, no matter the outcome of any one putt!

Building Positive Putting Momentum!

- 1. Develop an attitude of taking something positive from each putt.**

It all comes down to this: your success on the greens is largely determined by having the right attitude of what constitutes putting success. For most golfers, success on the green is whether the ball is going in the hole or not. Fair enough, but consider that when you only allow yourself to feel good about your putting when the ball is dropping, you become totally outcome-focused. This is a very dangerous way to think and in the long term, will most likely increase your fear of missing and putting failure.

I suggest that a more professional way to view putting is that the outcome of missing or making putts should not have an impact on whether you feel successful on the green or not. Other factors need to be considered for putting success, such as: (a) the quality of your decision making; (b) your commitment to the line and speed of any particular putt; (c) your ability to stay within the fluidity of your pre-putt routine and stroke the ball solidly; (d) your overall belief that the ball will have a good chance of going in the hole; and (e) your self-discipline to accept the outcome without self-criticism and move on. All of these items are efficient ways to view your putting process as being successful and are separate from the outcome of whether the ball goes in the hole or not and help to develop positive putting momentum.

A story that I heard of a long time ago between Jack Nicklaus and Tom Weiskopf may help to illustrate the importance of having the right attitude to maintain your positive putting momentum. It seems that the two former Ohio State golfing greats were fighting for the lead coming down the stretch of the final few holes in a professional tournament. Nicklaus had a birdie putt of about 10 feet while Weiskopf was closer to the hole with a birdie putt of about 7 feet. Nicklaus proceeded to line up and putt his ball towards the hole. The ball nicked the edge of the hole and stayed out. Jack tapped in for his par and calmly watched as Tom rolled his ball into the hole for a birdie to take a one-shot lead. As they were walking to the next tee, Tom (in a spirit of good sportsmanship) said to Jack, “too bad about that putt, it looked as if you’d made it.” To which Jack calmly replied, “Oh, I made that putt, it just didn’t go in.”

What this story (which has been long celebrated among golf aficionados), suggests is that even though the outcome of the putt did not register success, Jack truly felt that he really did “make” the putt and did everything he could to insure the successful execution of that stroke. Thus, in his mind, he wasn’t affected negatively by the ball lipping out and did not allow a miss to affect his putting confidence or positive golf momentum. Judging from his verbal response to Tom, we can assume that Jack’s putting mindset for

success was not if the ball went in or not, but whether he did everything he possibly could to give the ball the best chance of going into the hole. I believe this is a great attitude for building long-term, positive momentum and a way to build a platform for enduring putting confidence!

Ultimately, this story teaches us that there are some things that you can control on the putting green and some things that you cannot. If you allow the results of whether the ball goes into the hole to determine if you are having a good day on the greens, you will surely be victim to negative momentum because missing is a large part of putting. Even though that is an astonishing statement, let me repeat it: missing is a part of putting, and the best putters on tour understand this simple concept. However, great putting is also about making putts as well. As LPGA Swedish star Helen Alfredsson told us when we did interviews for our book “The Mental Art of Putting” (co-authored with Dr. Patrick Cohn), she said, “I know that I am going to miss putts, but I am going to miss them by trying to make them!” What Helen is saying is that if you give your best effort on every putt, hit or miss, you are providing yourself with the best chance of becoming a great putter. Missing doesn’t affect great putters, because they know that if they keep on doing the same good things with each and every putt, coupled with a positive putting attitude, the putts will drop. This is known in basketball as a

“shooter’s mentality.” Basketball legends such as Larry Bird and Michael Jordan did not allow missing to affect their confidence or their shooting momentum. If they missed their first seven shots, their mindset was: “so what?...no big deal..... no problem...., I’ll get the next one.” They would continue to shoot and get on a roll and make the next dozen or so. The same principle applies to golf. Great putters may miss when they putt (shoot), but in order to make putts, they have to keep on shooting with the same positive focus of giving every putt the same intention and commitment for successful execution.

With this concept in mind, I believe that it is essential that you pull something positive from every putt you stroke, even if the ball doesn’t go into the hole. If you do this, you plant the seed for success on the next stroke and will not likely be affected by the debilitating effects of negative putting momentum

A Final Word

Putting is the ultimate make-or-miss activity in golf. In the longer approach shots to the green, we always have the idea that we can salvage a score. However, on the putting green, once we roll the ball towards the hole, we cannot “make-up” for lost ground or salvage our score with the “next

shot.” It is important to take the time after a missed putt, to organize your thoughts and get into the next putt without feeling or experiencing the miss by re-playing it in your head. The sooner you can eliminate the past and focus on the present, the quicker you will be on your way to lower scores.

Ultimately, the best way to build positive putting momentum is to give each putt your fullest intention and commitment and to always pull something positive away from every putt, on every green. By committing to this simple plan of always finding something positive to tell yourself about each putt you stroke will help develop an attitude for long-term confidence on the green and create a flow for positive putting momentum.

May all your putts find the bottom of the cup!

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