

# A quiet mind on the green

*Dr Brian Hemmings outlines a simple mental instructional technique designed to help coaches to develop focus and confidence in their players when putting.*

**B**en Hogan said that 'golf is one game and putting is another'. Putting can account for up to 45 per cent of shots played within a round and players of all standards recognise the unique psychological demands faced on greens.

However, players underperform at putting for a variety of reasons on any given day and it's my experience over many years that, too often, they cite poor technique as an explanation for too many missed putts in a round. Often inaccurate reading of the greens and mental factors are the cause. Indeed, some of the game's greats have often said that putting is largely about a state of mind.

The 'quiet-eye' technique explained in this article is one I often work on with players. It is based soundly on science, although we know there is also an 'art' to great putting and many individual styles have proved successful.

So I am not suggesting that this technique is a 'eureka' discovery and a 'solve all' solution to putting problems. However, my experience is that achieving 'quiet-eye' through the putting stroke leads to technical and mental improvements in players. So what is quiet-eye?

I hear many coaches talk to players about 'keeping their head still' through the stroke. For me, this is a misplaced instruction. This makes a player direct their attention to their head rather than to the ball. In terms of skill acquisition and movement we know that our eyes are critical for attentional control. For instance, science tells us:

- The eyes tell the body what to do
- Neural networks are informed by eye gaze, which in turn guide movement
- We know that eye gaze can wander significantly under pressure
- We can teach/guide attentional focus in putting by giving the instructional command 'keep your eyes still'

Note, for example, the thoughts of an accomplished putter such as Peter Hanson.



Accomplished putter: Peter Hanson

"It's very hard to stand still but an easier way is to **focus on the ball**," he says. "Keep your focus there throughout the stroke and you should see a little black shadow appear on the ground, under the ball, after you have hit it. Look at this even after the ball has gone and listen for the putt to drop."

Tiger Woods calls following the ball off the face of the putter 'peeking' and has commented that it has a big effect on the quality of the contact he makes. The difficulty is that many players 'peek' because they want to see where the ball is going.

Therefore, the cause of head movement is wanting to see what the **FUTURE** holds, the **OUTCOME** (has the ball gone in the hole, is it on line), and not the **STAYING IN THE PRESENT** (finishing the stroke). Of course, this problem is often increased when players feel under pressure or anxious about the result of a putt (particularly short ones).

### A QUIET MIND

- Make the **last** look a **good** look at the hole
- The best players seem to focus on the back of the ball (where contact is going to be made; see picture)
- Quiet-eye or keeping the eyes still through the stroke aids good contact and technique.

Generally players report feeling more still and stable and quiet eyes mean a quiet mind and so they also feel more comfortable about the putt with less distracting thoughts about the line, stroke or the outcome of the putt.



### Where do you focus?

The back of the ball seems optimal as this is where contact is made.

■ Brian's online Golf Psychology Coaching Certificate course is approved by the PGA of GB&I (100 CPD points) and PGAs of Europe, and has been completed with great reviews by PGA professionals. Go to [www.golfpsychologycoaching.com](http://www.golfpsychologycoaching.com) for full details. The course is full of information and practical activities for the PGA Professional to guide players through improving their mental game, and is endorsed by some of England's best coaches. Taking 25 hours to complete, coaches can complete the course at home so you will have no travel costs or time away from your work. All you need is a player to work with and the time to complete the course activities. For a price reduction type in the promotional code PGA to reduce the price from £295 to £215.



Dr. Brian Hemmings has been lead psychologist to England Golf since 1998. During this time he has helped develop the mental skills of the best emerging English golfers including the likes of Ross Fisher, Richard Finch, Danny Willett, Tom Lewis, David Horsey and Chris Wood. Brian is author of the book 'Mental Toughness for Golf: The Minds of Winners' and is also a regular presenter on the PGA CPD programme.