

PUTTING SPECIAL

# GROOVE A BETTER STROKE

How perfect balance and a square-to-square stroke are the two keys to holing more putts.

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**STEWART CRAIG**

Falkirk-based PGA pro Stewart Craig has worked on golf swing balance and stability with biomechanics expert Paul Hurron for the past eight years. His Pro Stance training aid is now used by 70 Tour pros including Padraig Harrington, Paul McGinley and Rory McIlroy.

**T**here are three generally accepted putting stroke paths. The first, in-to-in, sees the putterhead arc inside the ball-to-hole line either side of the ball, the face opening and closing in a manner often described as 'barn-door' style. Then there is square-to-square, where the putter tracks up and down the target line with the blade square to the hole throughout. Finally there is an in-to-square hybrid, favoured by several tour pros.

For an action based on precision not power, it seems common sense to me that the most effective putting stroke moves square-to-square. The putter travels down the target line throughout, and the face looks at the hole throughout. Your chances of success rise exponentially.

However, in developing their preferred stroke path, few golfers realise the central role played by balance and posture. In fact your posture and balance dictate the putter's path, and getting these right is the true way to building a square-to-square stroke. Let me show you how.





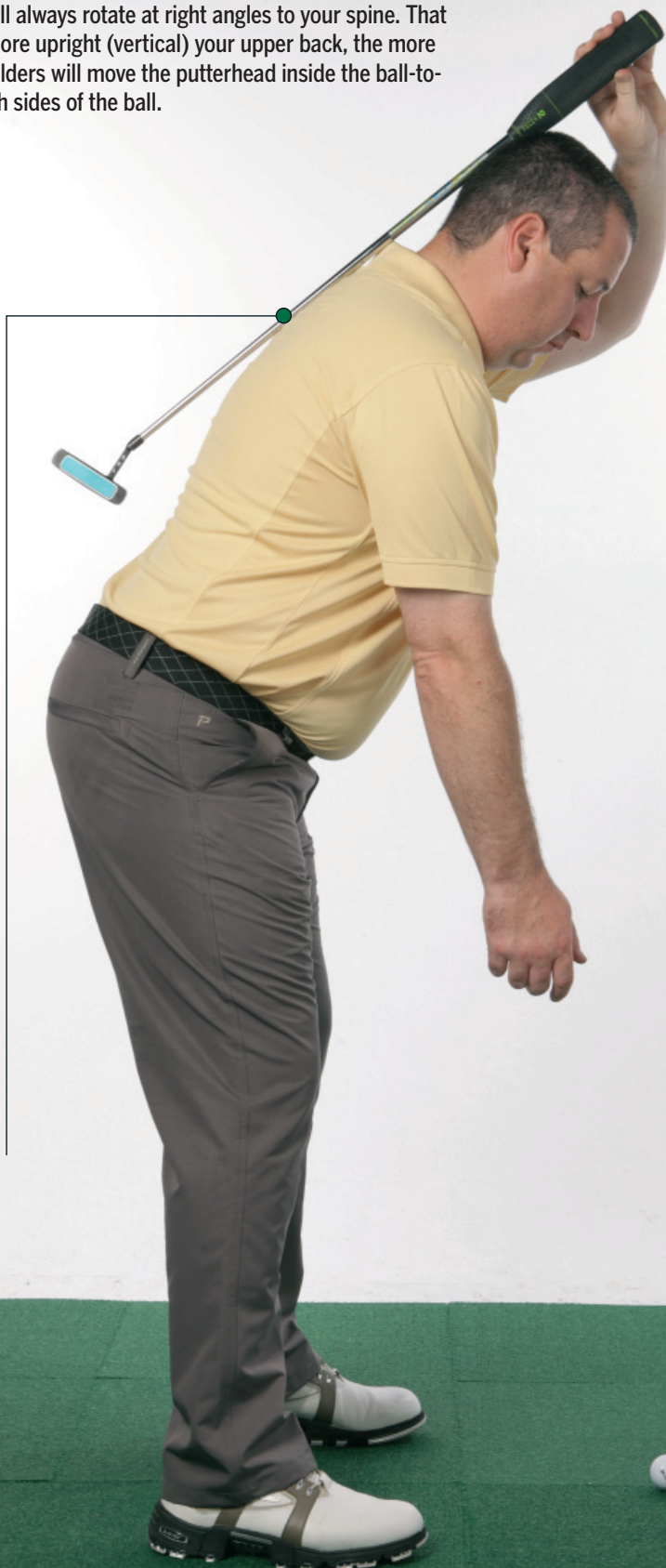
## STAGE #1

# BUILD THE POSTURE FOR THE SQU

Your shoulders will always rotate at right angles to your spine. That means that the more upright (vertical) your upper back, the more your turning shoulders will move the putterhead inside the ball-to-hole line – on both sides of the ball.



Here, I'm in a "conventional" putting address position – a line linking the back of my head and my upper back, as illustrated by the putter's shaft, is roughly midway between the vertical and horizontal. My shoulders will rotate around this angle.



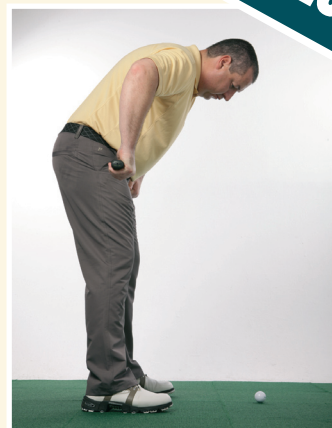
Even with a shortish stroke, the putterhead is pulled back inside the line as the shoulders rotate around the spine. The face has also begun to open to the target line, even if it remains square to the plane of movement.



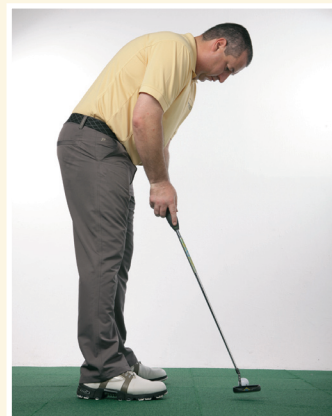
The throughswing mirrors the backswing, the arcing putter moving down the target line for the briefest moment before returning back to the inside. The face squares to the target line only momentarily as the putterhead concludes its journey from open (to the target) at the end of the backswing to closed at the end of the followthrough. In theory the stroke can work, but its reliance on pinpoint timing, on a shot reliant on precision, is why I prefer square-to-square.



# ARE-TO-SQUARE STROKE



Your putting posture does not need as much spine angle as your full swing; but you do need to tip from the hips slightly, then round the top portion of your spine until you get it flat and on a horizontal plane. This will allow your shoulders to rock up and down as opposed to in-to-in.



This time, the backswing sees my left shoulder drop and my right shoulder rise as the putter moves straight back along the ball-to-hole line. Because the plane of movement is along this line, the face neither opens or closes.



The throughswing continues along the target line, with the putter square to the finish. A further benefit to this technique is that the putter's sweetspot stays opposite the ball throughout its pre-impact journey; a pure strike becomes much easier. One straight swingpath with a square clubface throughout; could there be an easier way to hit your putts at the hole?

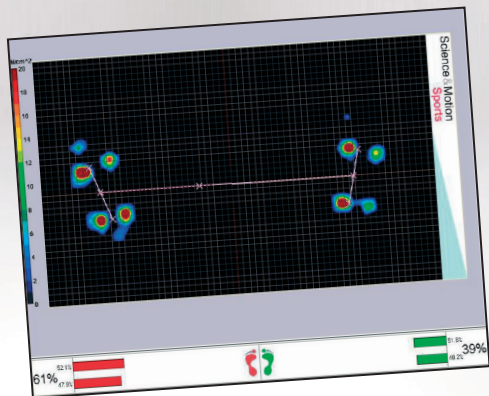


As the shoulders turn at right angles to the spine, I must make my upper back as horizontal as possible if I am to produce a true square-to-square stroke. This time, the line between the back of my head and upper back shows I have achieved that. It may look a little uncomfortable, but it's the only way to let your rotating shoulders take the putter up and down the ball-to-target line.



## STAGE #2

# CREATING THE BALANCE FOR THE



The Force Plate, technology from Science and Motion Sports, is a platform that monitors ground pressure through the feet. This image shows the ideal weight placement for putting at address. It shows weight evenly spread between the heels and toes in both feet, but favouring the front foot with a 60-40 split. So, why is this the ideal weight distribution?

### THERE ARE THREE REASONS YOUR WEIGHT SHOULD BE FORWARD:

# 1

This weight distribution helps your hands pull the putter head through. The putting stroke must be a pulling action in order to make sure the putter remains stable through the impact area. The easiest way to visualise this is to imagine a car and caravan. The caravan will follow in a straight line behind the car as it is being pulled; but if you try to push the caravan using the car it will go offline very easily. In your putting stroke the hands are the car and the putter head is the caravan.

# 2

Setting your weight into your front foot activates the muscles in that leg, which helps you anchor yourself into a solid, grounded position.

# 3

As the picture above left shows, having your weight forward encourages the putter to stay lower in the followthrough. That helps maintain true roll as opposed to the putter rising too much and almost chipping the ball into the air, with backspin.

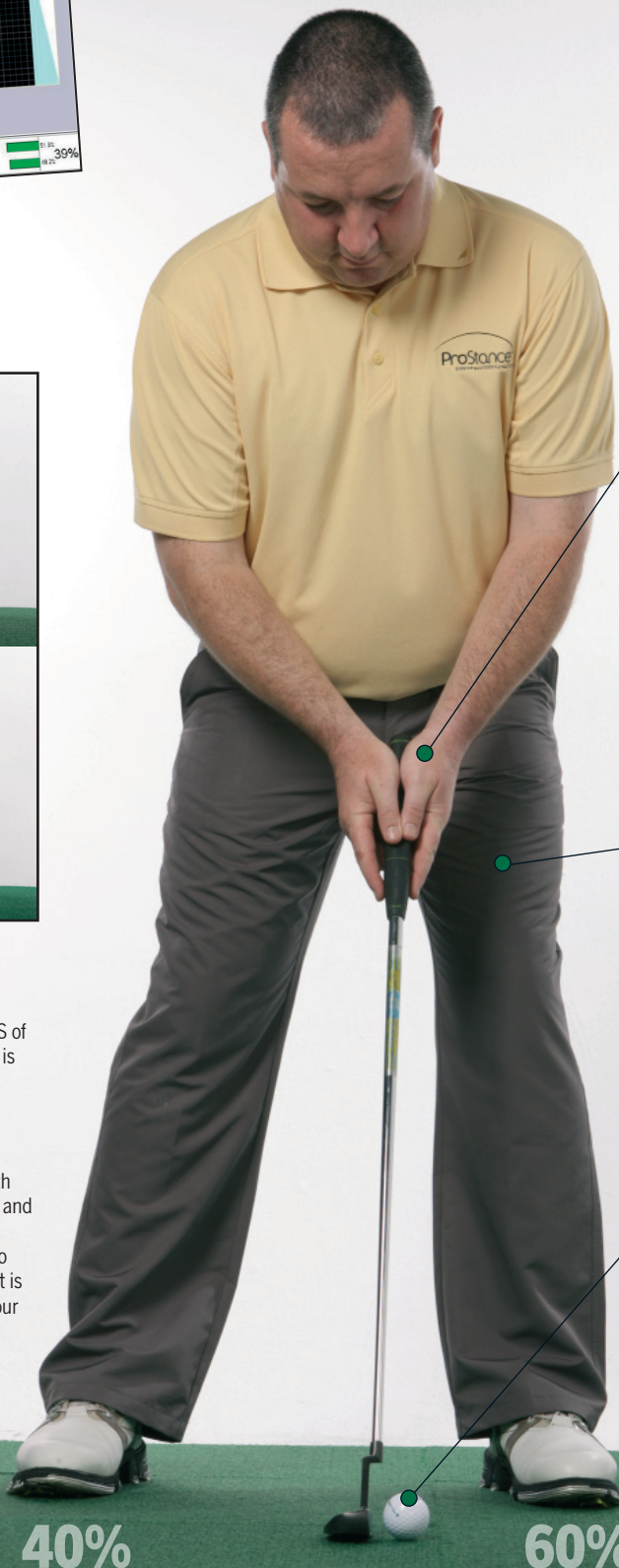


Now for a bit of spot-the-difference. What's changed in these two images?

If you said "the logo on the ball", congratulations. In the top picture above, the S of Srixon is higher than the N, indicating the ball is already trying to roll – and achieving true roll quickly is a sign of a smooth, well-struck putt which will hold its line.

In the lower picture the N is higher than the S, a clear sign the ball has been struck with backspin. Backspin makes the ball skip, jump and generally kick off-line.

So what was the difference between the two putts? Simply weight distribution at address. It is essential to have between 55% and 60% of your weight distributed on the left foot (though still 50% balls and 50% heels).





# SQUARE STROKE

## HOW YOUR WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION AFFECTS THE STROKE'S PATH

Your stroke path is at the mercy of your balance. Setting your weight evenly on the toe-to-heel axis is the only way to promote square-to-square stroke path. That means...

■ If your weight is **back in the heels**, the putter will tend to move from in-to-in.

■ If your weight is **in your toes**, the putter will want to move back outside the line.

■ **Right-heel-left-toe** twisting will promote and in-to-out path for the right-hander.

■ **Left-heel-right-toe** weight placement encourages a cut across the ball.

## FOUR MORE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR PUTTING...

PUTTING SPECIAL

1

### SPREAD YOUR KNEES TO ADD STABILITY

Putting is about precision, and that accuracy can only come from staying very still over the ball. Add stability to your stance and action by developing the feeling you are pushing your knees out, away from each other, at set-up.



2

### PRACTISE WITH YOUR TOES UP

As with the full swing, the pressure down through your feet should be evenly spread between balls and heel pads. Practising with toes curled up – toes can mask bad weight distribution – is a good way to ensure you are properly balanced.



3

### CHOOSING THE PUTTER – GO FACE-BALANCED

A face-balanced putter is weighted to avoid rotation and so to keep its face looking at the hole through the stroke. That makes it the ideal wand for the square-to-square stroke. Check the putter by balancing its shaft across your palm; if the leading edge is horizontal, face looking at the sky, the putter is face-balanced.

### WATCH PADRAIG

This image shows how Padraig Harrington bends right over the ball, the back of his head flat, to put his shoulders in a position to rock the putter straight back and through. It also shows how the blade of the putter faces the line of the putt till the end of the stroke; there's been no closing rotation here. As a role model, it doesn't get much better than this.

4

