



The Chore of Putting

By Jeff Thoreson

A friend says putting is fun. I suppose it is, if you broaden your definition of fun.

So now I consider it fun to stub my pinky toe on the coffee table leg. The next time I have to cross an asphalt parking lot in bare feet on a hot August day, I'll savor the pleasure. And when my wife says she's really had it and is moving to the Caribbean with a guy she's been seeing on the side for years, well, that will be my new definition of merriment and gaiety.

Putting is fun? Give me a break. Actually, don't give me a break. The straight putts are the only ones I feel I have chance to make. Putting, my friends, is a chore, no different from taking out the garbage, painting the trim in the living room or cleaning

out the gutters. The only difference is you can make your kids take out the garbage, you can hire a painter to do the trim or you can go to Home Depot and buy gutter guards.

Putting you have to do yourself. I can see how putting could be fun. If I had a chance to make every 30-footer like the guys on television. Putting would be a blast if every six-footer went in or if three-putts were less common than Big Bang Theory reruns, I'd rank putting right up there with sex, Guinness and scratching off instant lottery winners. But the sad fact is most of my 30-footers then require a six-footer, which I miss.

I love striking the ball, and I am somewhat competent at it. I love the accomplishment of executing an athletic endeavor far more difficult

than it looks. I love the result: the ball taking off violently then flying softly, gracefully, and in the end, landing near the intended target with a gentle thump and a nice little roll out.

So why is putting is such a problem? If the full golf swing is such a complicated process and I can do it with reasonable success, putting should be a breeze. If the full swing is Chopin's Fourth Symphony in E minor, the putting stroke is "Chopsticks."

You'd think that because the putting stroke requires so little athletic ability – really so little ability of any

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kind – that everyone would be able to do it reasonably competently.

My friend who says putting is fun, can't putt. It's just that he's such a terrible ball striker that when he finally reaches the green, he realizes he won't have to chase it into the woods or the sand or someone's backyard near any longer so he enjoys putting. Three or four stabs at it from 50 feet is pure enjoyment

compared to seven or eight strokes from 425 yards. Switchbacking around the hole a couple of times is fun compared to crossing the fairway three times on a cart-path-only day. You can't step in any mud on the green, the snakes have no place to hide and as bad of a putter as he is, he has yet to lose a \$3 Pro VI on the green. So I get it. I see where he's coming from.

The problem with putting is you have too much time to think about it. Other sports are read and react. Actions and reactions are made in an instant. Decisions can't analyzed to the point of paralysis. I have way too much time waiting for my turn on the green, so by the time I finally stand over my putt, I've decided it will break left, changed my mind and decided it will break right, then reasoned my way to hitting it straight at the hole and letting whatever happens happen because in all honesty I can't read greens any better than I can read Braille.



So I've taken the first step to solving my problem. I admit I have one. Hi, I'm Jeff and I can't putt. There, I said it. Of the three important elements of putting – line, pace and quality of the strike – I usually get two of them wrong. When I do make a long putt, and sometimes even short ones, I don't feel responsible. It's a lie.

Somehow I beat back the demons without knowing quite how I did it. I suspect many of my made putts are a case of two wrongs making a right – a miss-read and a miss-hit and the ball ends up in the hole.

So I've come to the conclusion that the secret to being a great putter is to believe you are a great putter. Embrace the mystery. Surrender to the perplexity and bemusement of this oh so simple task. Admit to yourself that putting is just guesswork and that sometimes it's going to take you three guesses to get it right.

