

## The Composite Putting System:

Many golf teachers describe the putting stroke as a miniature version of the full swing. Just as with the complex motion of the full swing, one must understand the mechanics and develop a system to consistently produce a sound putting stroke. One may use a simplified image (e.g., "straight back and toward the hole," "low and slow", and "on line") and apply very little effort toward understanding the dynamics of a good putting stroke, but the only way to ensure success is to put forth this effort. This section will be divided into three parts—the set-up, how to make the stroke, and a composite swing images for a compact stroke.

"A man who can't putt is a match for no one, a man who can is a match for anyone."

Harvey Penick

### Part A: Putting Set-up.

Set-up principles are so important because they allow one to get into the same correct positions each time. One must learn to consistently make the same stroke, and getting into the same positions, at set-up, are the first steps toward achieving this goal. Set-up fundamentals strategically place the body, hands, and arms into positions to make an "online" stroke—that is, these fundamentals allow you to consistently control the putter face so that it is perpendicular, or "square", to the line of the putt, at the moment of contact with the ball (in face at all points during the stroke). Volumes of material have been written on putting set-up fundamentals, and these are listed repeatedly in most books and articles on the subject; many are listed, and illustrated, in Figures 17 and 18. Some of the most important fundamentals are the following:

- 1.) You should bend over from the hips, and your eyes should be either directly over the ball, or slightly inside of it.
- 2.) The back of the hands should be square, or perpendicular, to the line of the putt and place into a position where they oppose one another. The wrists should be in a downward-arched position so that the hands do not break down through the stroke. Tom Watson likes to feel like he mainly uses the left arm to control the stroke.
- 3.) The ball should be slightly ahead of the center of the stance so as to give a good consistent roll to it.
- 4.) Your head should always remain still, until well after impact with the ball.

- 5.) You should have a very quiet base (legs and lower body), which is steady and stable, and remains in the same position through the stroke.
- 6.) The shoulders and feet should always be parallel to the line of the putt.
- 7.) The angle of the left arm should stay the same throughout the stroke.
- 8.) The shoulders, arms, hands and handle of the clubhead should form a triangle and every effort should be made to maintain that triangle throughout the stroke.
- 9.) The blade, or face, of the putter should be square to the target line throughout the stroke. All power to propel the ball forward should come from the shoulders with the only function of the hands and arms being to keep the clubhead in that square position.
- 10.) You must accelerate through the putt, that is, through contact with the ball.
- 11.) You must keep a positive mindset and believe that you are going to make the putt.

There are many putting grips, but the standard is the “reverse overlap” where the forefinger is wrapped over the 2 smallest fingers of the right (for a right-handed golfer). This grip is superior to the Vardon-type grip, because it allows the back of the hands, and palms to remain square to the line of the putt while not “breaking down” at impact. Billy Casper, recognized as one of the greatest putters of all time said the following about the reverse overlap putting grip:

“A grip is no use at all unless it sets your hands on the shaft so that the back of the left hand, the palm of the right and the blade of the putter are all square to the same line, namely, the line to the hole. They should remain square throughout the stroke. This is absolutely essential if you expect to maintain any consistency in the direction of your putts. The advantage of the reverse overlap grip is that it not only achieves this desirable squareness, but also cements the hands together so well. With the left hand in a strong position on the shaft, but with the forefinger of the left hand overlapping the fingers of the right, neither hand can dominate the other to the extent of producing an uneven or inaccurate stroke.” (*Sports Illustrated, February 20, 1961 My Secrets Of Putting Bill Casper, Gwilym Brown*).

A very important putting set-up principal pertains to the angles of the upper and lower arms. To achieve putting consistency you must maintain the same elbow angles throughout the putting stroke. When you allow the angles of the elbows to change during the stroke, you throw consistency right out the window. Constant elbow angles allow you a constant arc throughout the putting stroke. I often imagine that the bones of my wrists and elbow area are broken, shattered, or held together by metal plates, and that it would be very painful if I change their position during the stroke; these images insure that I do not allow the elbow angle, or wrists, to break down during the stroke. All of this sets the stage so that the shoulders will completely control the stroke.

Two additional set-up concepts that are very important in my set-up routine, pertain to the left and right-hand positions. The left thumb (for a right-handed golfer) should be in the “lifeline” of the right hand. The left wrist should be arched and the clubshaft should be in line with a line that continues through the forearms. If you hold the putter in the palm and do not arch the wrist, then it is possible that the left wrist can “break down,” or change its position during the stroke. Also, both thumbs should be on top of the shaft.

I make sure that the upper segments of the fingers (the segment closest to the palm) lay flat against the side of the putter grip and that the palm continues this flat plane. This puts the palm and back of the right hand into positions that are parallel to the putterface. These hand positions are very important in my stroke, because they allow minimal hand action by placing the hands together in a complementary fashion that promotes a perpendicular clubface (to the line of the putt) at impact.

Since putting is such an important part of the game, it is very important to become aware of set-up positions and swing thoughts that produce a consistent stroke. Through practice and experience on the golf course, you can learn to focus on specific movements and feelings that produce a consistent stroke. Nine-tenths of the battle is won by learning the set-up positions and muscular sensations, and the rest is won by gaining the confidence that comes when you experience success, “time after time.”

## **Part B: How To Swing The Putter.**

The goal in putting is to contact the ball when the putterface is perpendicular to the line of the putt. The best putting technique accomplishes this, more often, compared to other techniques.

Theoretically, the ideal putting stroke would swing the putterhead back and forward along the line of the putt. Since the putterface would always be “online” (perpendicular to the target), there would be no chance of error from trying to get it back into this position at impact.

In reality, we don’t want to use the hands-and-arms method required to take the putterhead along the line of the putt. The small, fast-twitch, muscles of the hands and arms make it too difficult to consistently get the desired results. In general, the smaller muscles contract faster and are much more difficult to direct during contraction. Also, the large number of muscles in the hands and arms make it very difficult to coordinate and repeat these movements.

If you watch some of the older golf films, such as *Shell’s Wonderful World of Golf*, you will notice that most of the golfers used a hands-and-arms putting technique.

However, this technique is not seen much anymore (except in the older players) because the shoulder-controlled stroke has been accepted as much more reliable. Bob Charles was one of the early professionals who proved the superiority of the shoulder-controlled putting stroke.

As in the full swing, the rotator cuff muscles are responsible for the shoulder turn during the putting stroke. You can become a good putter by isolating the rotator cuff muscles and by learning to take the putter back with them the same way for each stroke. By focusing down to the anatomical level—visualizing the rotator cuff muscles swinging the putter back and through—we eliminate a multitude of variables responsible for inconsistent putting. Although the movements of the shoulders (rotator cuffs) rotate the putterhead back and away from the line of the putt, the larger rotator cuff muscles are much more reliable to deliver the putterhead back to the desired impact position. Since there are fewer “working parts” with the shoulder turn (each rotator cuff contains four muscles), there is a lower probability that something will go wrong.

In the shoulder-controlled stroke, the hands, wrists, and arms function only to maintain the putterhead (face) in a “square position.” The force to hit the ball is solely the result of the shoulder turn; the hands, wrists, and arms keep the clubhead from turning out of position due to the centrifugal force that is generated by the shoulders. In short, the hands, wrists, and arms function to maintain the same relative position to the body as at address.

### **Part C: The Altered-Putter Swing Image.**

The final part of this putting system involves the visualization of using an altered putter (see Figure 21). This putter is identical to one’s regular putter, with the exception that approximately one-half centimeter of metal is missing from the putter face on both sides of the aiming line. The result is that a narrow strip, or island, has been left on the original putter face to contact the ball. If the ball is not contacted precisely on this strip, then it will careen either to the left, or right, of the intended line. Practicing with this aid, and visualizing it when using one’s regular putter, results in great stability and precision at the bottom of the stroke. Visualizing the use of this altered putter ensures that one drives the ball toward the hole with the shoulders, prevents the hands from getting into the stroke, and prevents the wrists from “breaking down.”

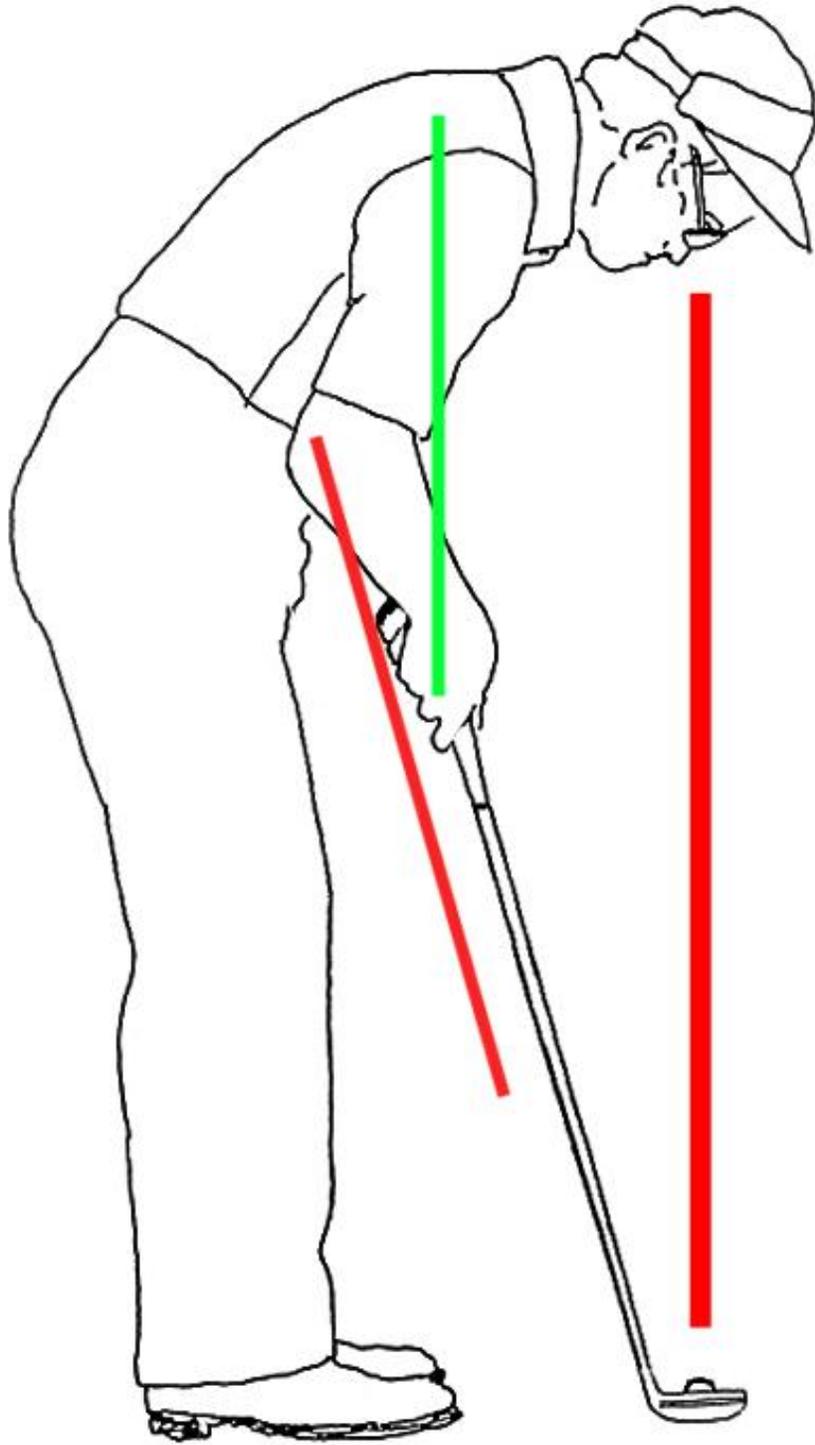
In conclusion, this putting system is effective because it teaches one to use the correct muscles each time, and it provides a visualization that adds great stability and precision to the stroke. The following is the routine for each stroke: First, proper set-up is learned, and employed, the same way each time. Second, consciously take the putter

back with both rotator cuff areas and make sure that the hands, wrists, and arms do not get out of position. Finally, both rotator cuffs take the club back through and make sure to contact the ball with the small strip on the clubface.

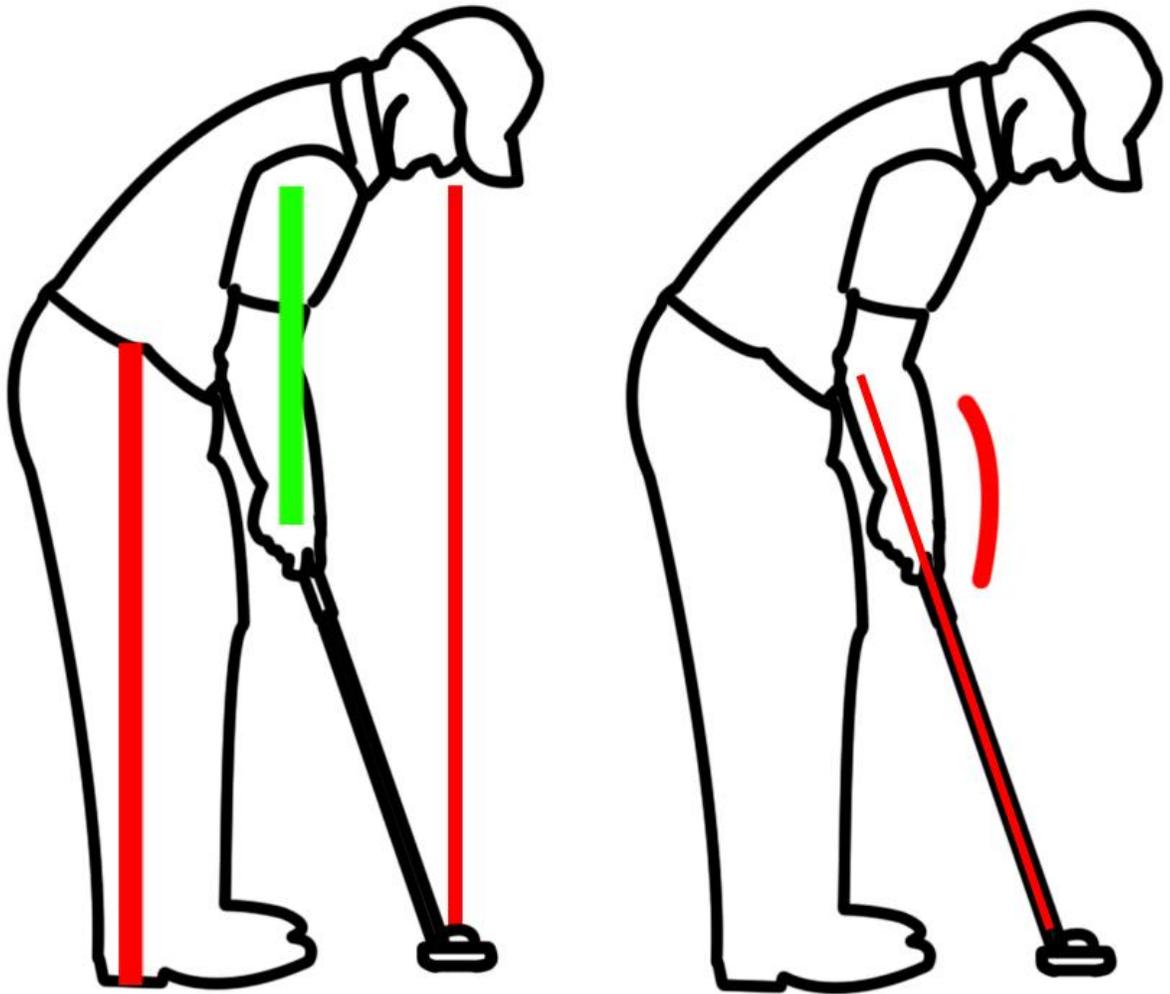
SAMPLE

**Figure 17—** A simple representation of sound putting set-up. Here, a line drawn across the top of the forearms should be parallel to the intended line of the putt. A line drawn through the hips should also be parallel to the intended line of the putt. Eyes should be either directly over the ball, or slightly inside the line of the putt. Shaft and forearms in a straight line. Hands straight beneath shoulders.

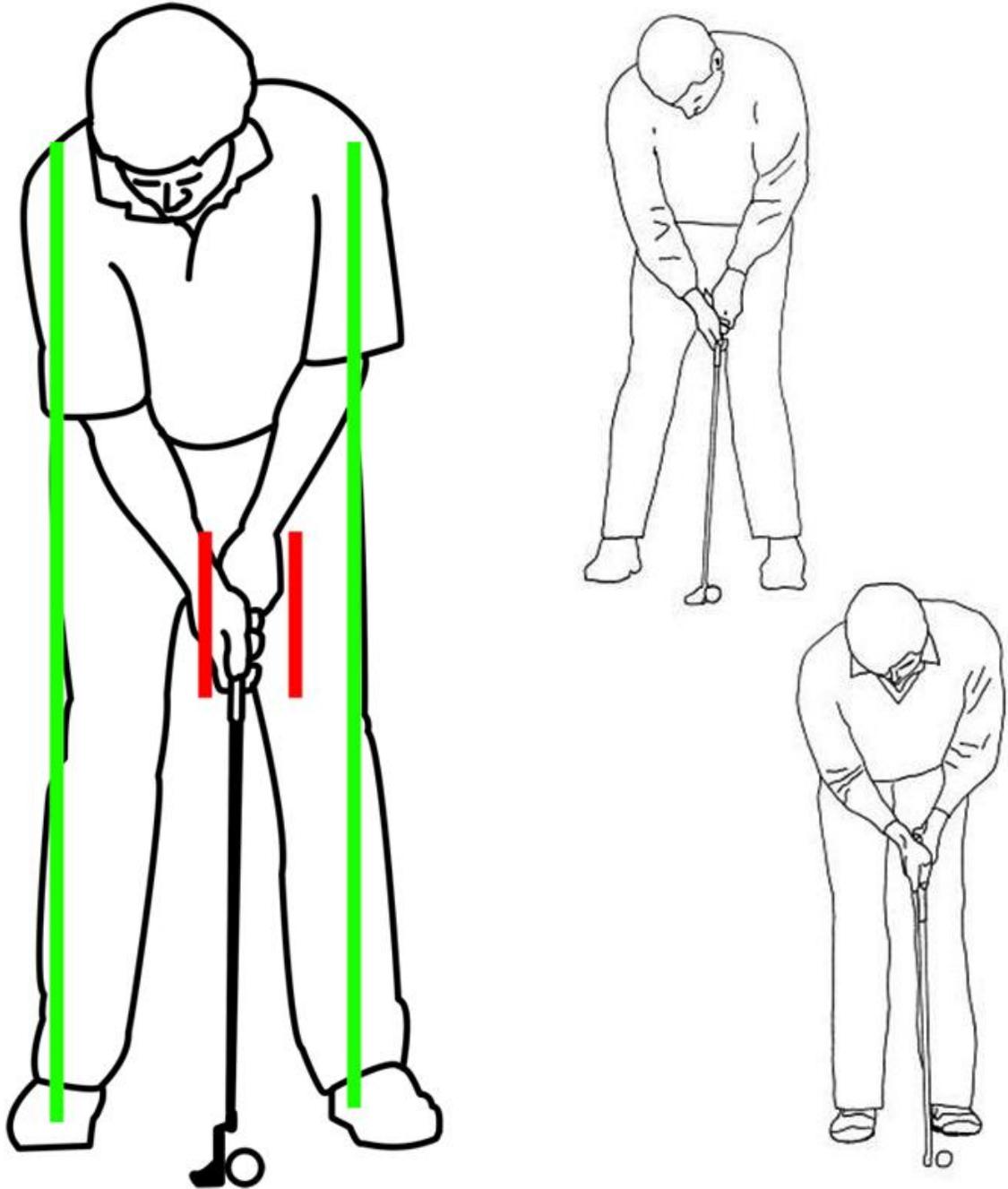
SAMPLE



**Figure 17a**— A simple representation of sound putting set-up. Here, a line drawn across the top of the forearms should be parallel to the intended line of the putt. A line drawn through the hips should also be parallel to the intended line of the putt. Eyes should be either directly over the ball, or slightly inside the line of the putt. The hands are directly beneath the shoulders. A line drawn extended from the shaft should pass through the hands and forearms.

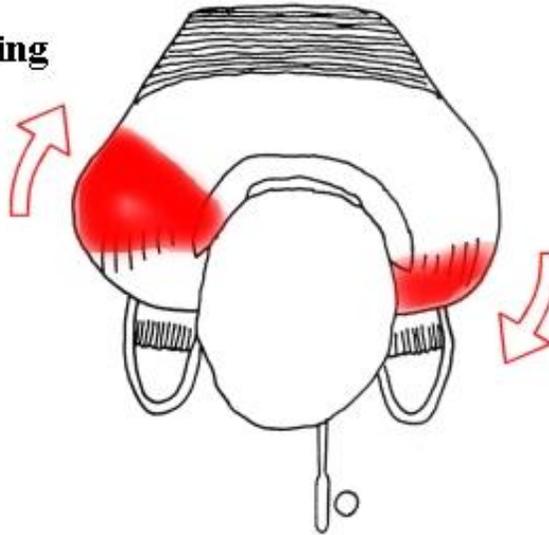


**Figure 18**— Illustrations of the rotator cuff areas, and examples of set-up positions. Each rotator cuff is composed of an anterior (front) and a posterior (back) portion. With practice, a person can develop the proper feel of taking the club back and through with these muscles, and will learn to call upon them to control the club on the course. Individuals may differ in their descriptions of the feelings of using these muscles, and each should develop a memory technique to reproduce the stroke. For example, one person may visualize taking the club back with their armpit areas, and another may pinpoint other areas near each shoulder.

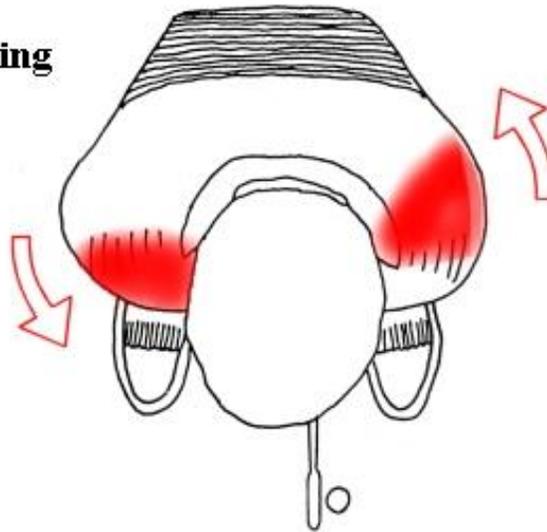


**Figure 19**— Representations of the rotator cuff muscles used for the backswing and the forwardswing. Since muscles contract, or shorten, the backswing results when the front part of the left rotator cuff (the Subscapularis) contracts, and the posterior portion of the right rotator cuff (the Infraspinatus, the Supraspinatus, and the Teres Minor) contracts. The forwardswing is the result of the simultaneous contraction of the posterior rotator cuff muscles (the Infraspinatus, the Supraspinatus, and the Teres Minor) of the left shoulder, and the front rotator cuff muscle (the Subscapularis) of the right shoulder. Here, the three muscles that comprise the posterior portion of the rotator cuff are represented by the shaded areas. Simultaneous, equal-force, contraction of the left-front and right-posterior, or left-posterior and right-front rotator cuff muscles, will result in the proper rotation of the shoulders. It is the goal to tone these muscle groups to equal strength, so that they can swing the club correctly and, in the same manner, each time.

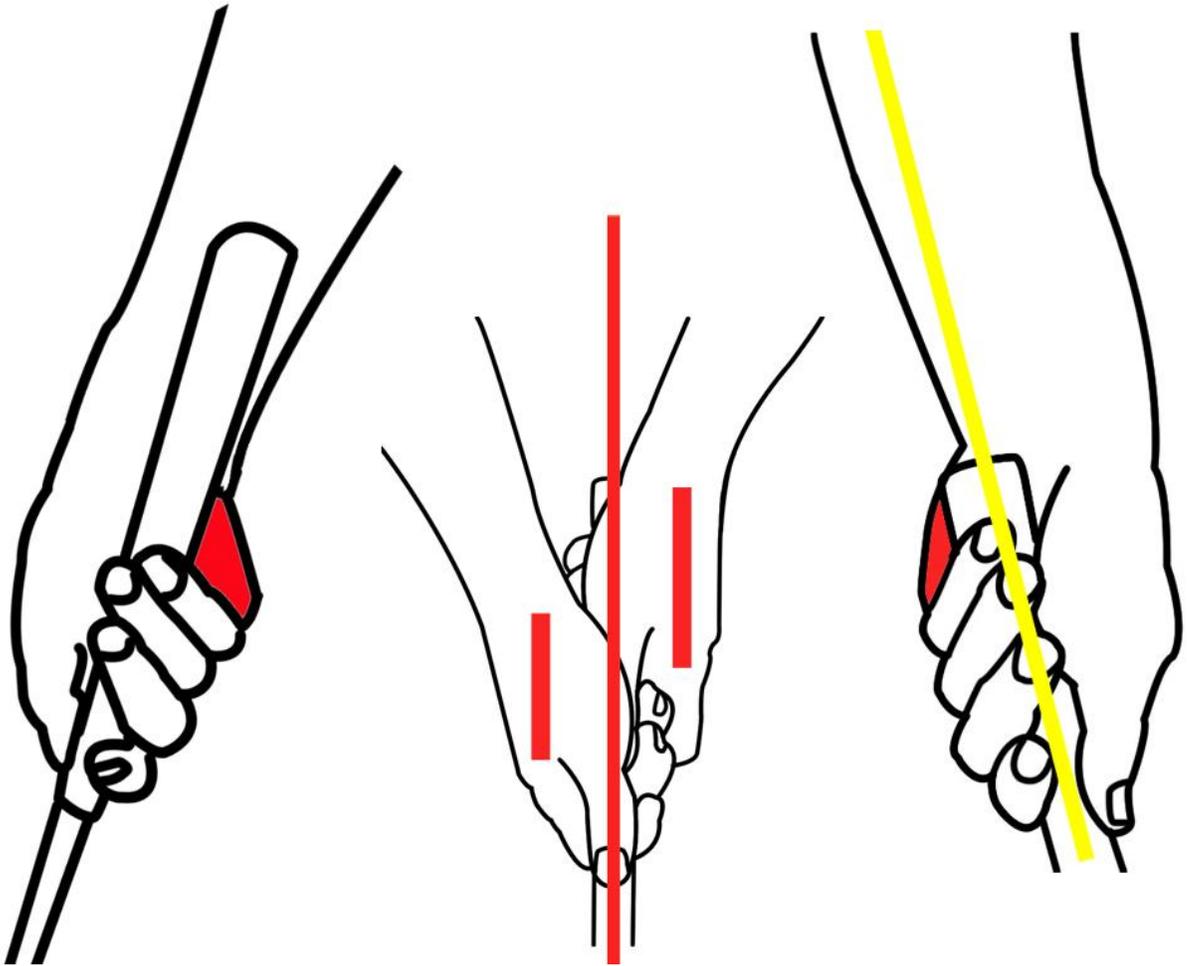
### Backswing



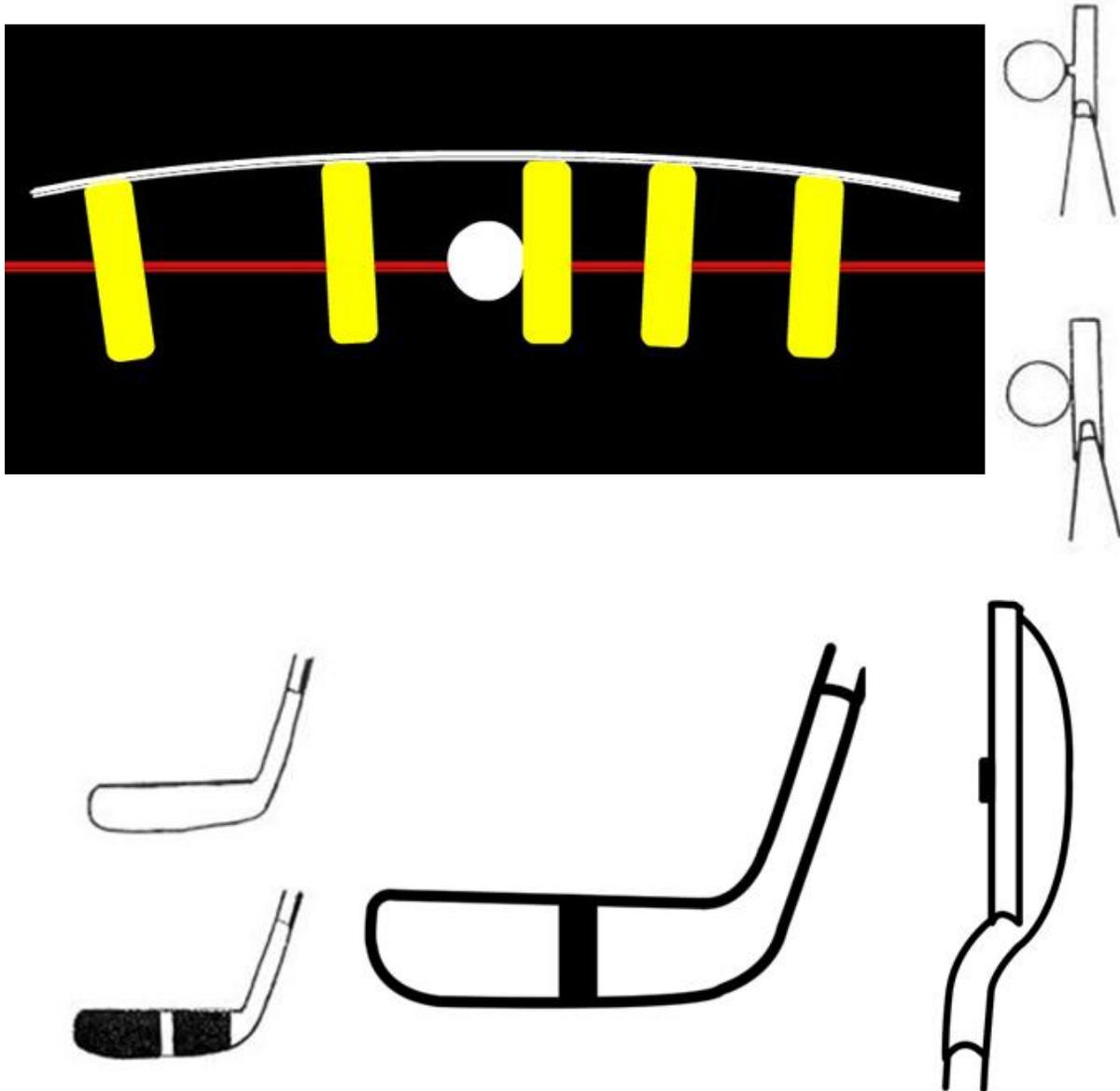
### Forwardswing



**Figure 20**— Illustrations of the left-hand, and right-hand, positions on the putter. I place the hand so there is control of the club and so that one feels as if they can perform an underhanded throwing motion such as pitching coins into a bowl placed some distance away. The main objective, here, is to have the fingers and palm flat against the sides of the grip; this places the hands together in a complimentary fashion that promotes a perpendicular clubface (to the line of the putt) at impact. Also, holding the left wrist in a high-arched position prevents it from “breaking down” at the bottom of the stroke. These positions allow the shoulders to control the stroke.

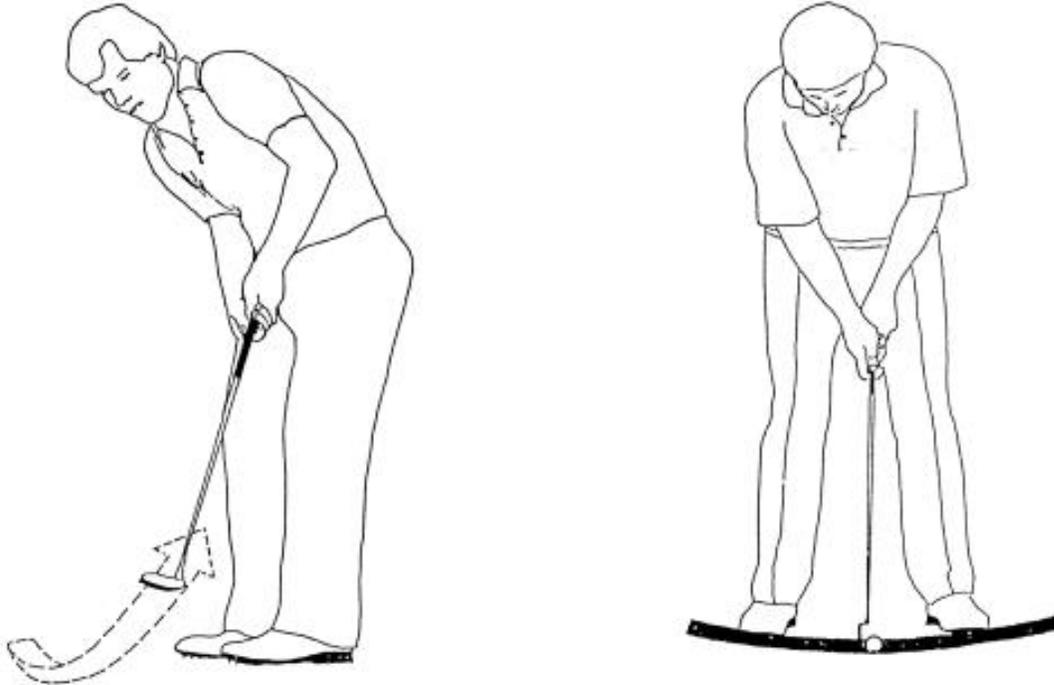


**Figure 21—** Illustrations of “the altered-putter” concept. All varieties of putters are possible, with the common characteristic being the altered putter face. A small portion, or strip, of the original clubface is left to contact the ball. Attempting to hit the ball on this small area will result in an on-line stroke that does not “break down” through the hitting area. Completion of the visualization fulfills the older swing thought of “continuing the putter toward the hole.” Below are additional putter styles.

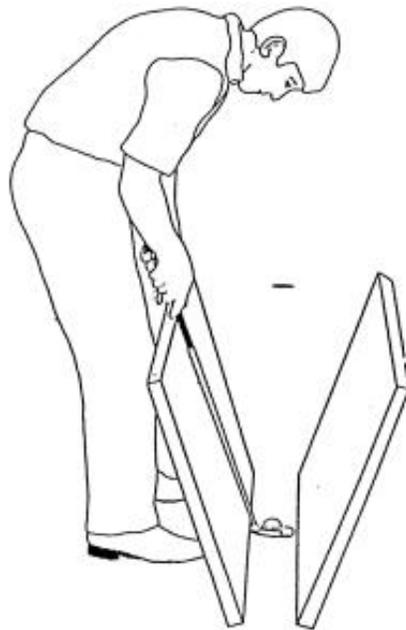


**Figure 22**— Illustration of the arc and path of the putterhead. Like the clubhead in the fullswing, the putterhead travels along a smooth arc. The shoulders rotate the putter backward, while the job of the arms, hands, and wrists is to maintain the address dynamics; that is, the shoulders supply the force to hit the ball forward, and the arms, hands, and wrists keep the putter in a “square” position throughout the stroke.

The arc of the putter does come slightly up (off of the putting surface), as a result of the angle at which the shoulders rotate.



**Figure 23**— Illustration of the putting stroke from directly behind. Many golfers visualize swinging the putterhead straight back and through. However, the inclination and rotation of the shoulders gives the putterhead an arc that comes upward (off the ground) and inside the line of the putt. Sound execution of the putting stroke will bring the putterhead up a slight plane, as illustrated.



**Figure 23a**— Illustration of the triangle formed by the shoulders and hands. If you try to maintain the triangle during the course of the stroke everything will be steady, which will produce a consistent stroke.

