



# JOHN'S LITTLE GREEN BOOK (sorry, Harvey)

## #1 PUTTING

*"Except for speed and direction, it was a pretty good putt."*

Here are some fundamentals of putting that if applied, I promise will take your next round to lower scores.

I hope and pray you have read these things so many times before that you say, "COME ON JOHN...this is all you got!"

This is nothing more important in putting than a routine BEFORE you putt. I suggest you do these things:

1. Know how far you are from the hole. To be able to know that you MUST walk along side your line and count the steps and multiply by 3: 15 steps = 45 feet.
2. When walking the line look for debris, pitch marks, spike marks, etc. Fix them! Please note there are only seven exceptions that allow you to touch the line of the putt. It's rule 16-1 in the Official Rule Book, and EVERY person should carry this book in your golf bag.
3. Pay attention to uphill, downhill, and the grain of the grass.
4. To the best of your ability find a line. The more you practice reading, the better you'll get, i.e. 2" outside right, 4 cups to the left, etc. Then aim the word on the ball, or a line on the ball on that line. This will help you align the face. Many, many putts are missed because the face of the putter is not perpendicular to the line. You have no chance if you're aiming wrong!
5. Once you have picked your line, PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE GET COMMITTED! There has never been an indecisive good putter. COMMIT TO THE PUTT! Whether you are an aggressive putter or a passive putter, get committed.

6. You know the distance and the line has been picked. Remember that incorrect distance leads to more three-putts than incorrect line, so imagine the ball coming to a stop a foot PAST the hole. Most putts that are short, don't go in (old joke, but a good rule). And the faster a putt is going, the smaller the hole becomes, so don't drill every putt. Ramming a putt so hard it ends up four feet past the hole if you miss, is going to add strokes to your score. Guaranteed.

7. And then...just putt, yes that's the secret...just putt.

8. And practice. The best putting tip I ever got was to practice. There's a reason that all golf courses have a putting green near the first tee. This is the only way you'll develop feel...and distance...and confidence.

If you follow these simple rules EVERY TIME you putt, it will help. It will help you "just get better".

## #2 **PUTTING PRACTICE**

*"You talkin' bout practice?"*

I would venture to say three billion people have gave putting tips in their life. The very best tip I have ever got I just mentioned in the previous tip on Putting. PRACTICE! Whoa, that's it? Yep, practice.

Now I want to give you some practice drills that have helped me become a better putter by staying still. You've got to be 100 percent still or **static** when putting. You've never seen a great putter that was moving his lower body or flipping his wrists while putting. Great putters are ALWAYS static.

I focus the big majority of my weight on my left hand side (right for a leftie), and I mean a big majority, maybe 80-90 percent. It starts there, stays there, and never leaves there. Most people move their body or head when putting. That's wrong. Remember STATIC, still.

The three best practice drills I do that help me stay still are:

1. **Putt with your eyes closed.** Set up 5 balls 10', 20', 30', etc. from the hole, go through your routine...line them up, weight on left. Then close eyes and putt. Then look at the result and try to "feel" how you can get the ball closer or even make it.

2. **Look at the hole only.** Everyone thinks Jordan Spieth started this. Not true, I am more than twice his age and have done it forever! I know a guy in his 80's who did it his whole life. The process is simple: line up the putt, weight on the left, then putt. Watch where the ball ends up and "feel" how you can get the ball closer or make it.

3. **Never look up!** This one needs a partner. Your partner lines up a ball for you. Step in with your weight on the left. Look at ball and putt without ever looking up. Your partner gives you the feedback, i.e. three feet long, three feet short, one foot right, etc. Try and "feel" the corrections being made. My guess is your partner eventually says, "MADE IT"!

These drills are to keep putting STATIC. A driver swing is a dynamic motion, but we have 30, 40, or 50 yards of fairway. The hole is four and a quarter inches wide, we better get our body still. Practice these tips, and you'll "just get better".

## #3 **CHIPPING**

*"Hit the bullfrog."*

First of all, understand the difference between a chip and a pitch. Simply stated a chip is maximum ground time and a pitch is maximum airtime. Let's talk chipping, an easier and safer way to get up and down. What club should you use? It's always an option, but seven iron through pitching wedge will generally serve you best. You want the ball starting off low and running, in order to do this:

1. Open your stance
2. Lean to the green
3. Hold your angle.

The first two are relatively easy to achieve, holding your angle simply means that your right hand will never cross in front of your left hand while you are chipping. So at address as you lean to the green, you will also have some forward shaft lean making an angle at your right hand sometimes as great as 70 to 80%.

The two things that you must watch when chipping are losing your angle and deceleration of your swing. With this in mind, understand that greens are very similar to pool tables as it relates to speed. Depending on your club choice there will not be a great amount of effort to hit the ball a great distance on the green. In fact, a chip is very similar to a putt other than set up. We must have a short backswing and a longer follow through.

Just to give you an idea, and this is not set in stone, but most chips will have a 9 to 12 inch backswing and an 18 to 24 inch follow through. This concept is referred to as short then long. The last thing we look for in a good chip is we simply want to give the grass a haircut. Do not take a divot, do not take ball only, and ACCELERATE. If we do not accelerate through every chip the results will not be consistent. At first practice 35 to 45 foot chips so that you can get the short then long motion down and make it consistent. The hardest chips to perform correctly are the short 10 to 12 foot chips because we tend to decelerate on those.

Here's a great theory on chipping. Think ABC, because it's as easy as ABC. There are three spots when chipping. The location of the ball is A. The pin is C. The most important point is B, because B where you land the ball with whatever club you are chipping...wedge or any iron. The lie, pin, wind, grain, slope, and game situation will dictate which club you choose.

When chipping with points ABC, I have always pictured a bullfrog sitting perched upon his lily pad trying to catch a fly. That is the picture I put in my mind of where I want the ball to LAND. I've determined that spot after calculating the normal things like slope, rollout after it lands, speed of the green, etc. If you've picked the correct spot to land the ball and actually hit it there, you'll have that kick away par. Many golfers get too focused on the hole (C), as opposed to the bullfrog (B).

The club you use to chip is your decision, but use the club with as little loft as possible. Less lofted clubs are a safer bet. Practice with an array of different clubs to see what is best for you. And remember, the key is to focus on point B. Know your landing spot.

The last thing I want to mention is that you obviously need to pay attention to the line or direction, but it's more important to have the correct distance. **DISTANCE OVER DIRECTION.** A shot slightly off line but with correct distance is still a save, but if you're perfectly on line but are off on distance, you're looking at tougher up and downs.

And this still applies: it's a 3 to 1 ratio when practicing. You should always practice three times the amount putting, chipping, and pitching, when compared to other shots. Do this and I'll promise...you'll "just get better".

## #4 THE DRIVER

*"I know it's out of bounds, but I killed it."*

This tip is especially for the men. The driver is only about 10 percent of your shots, but it is my belief that often a man's entire round is based upon how well he hit the driver. He'll swell up like a peacock when he blasts a 300-yard drive. He will also swell up like a peacock when he hits it 300 yards...OUT OF BOUNDS! Ever heard this, "man I killed that one". Yep, you did buddy, and you're on your way to shooting 105. If I'm not mistaken, the game is still about the lowest score, right? There's no place on the scorecard to write, "I made an 8 but I murdered my drive". But that's where many of you are.

My first swing thought when I'm hitting my driver is David Toms. I watched David during a round once and I couldn't tell if he was hitting a driver or a wedge. I was simply watching Rembrandt. The thought of that TEMPO will never leave me.

TEMPO, TEMPO, TEMPO!!!

This doesn't mean slower or faster, it just means the ratio of time for the backswing compared to the downswing is about 3-1. In rhythm. Don't force it, just think about that ratio or tempo. The club is longer, it will naturally generate more speed so just let that happen.

The driver is the longest club in the bag, therefore should be played roughly off the left heel (for a right handed golfer). Please have a friend check this for you. To do this alone you can lay a club down along your toes pointing at or parallel left of target. Then with another club make it perpendicular to the one on your toes where you have the ball teed. That will show you where the ball is in your stance. It has to be forward in your stance so you can hit the ball on a slightly ascending path. Hitting down on the ball will create excessive spin and poor contact and kill distance. The ball position forward in your stance will allow you to hit "up" on the ball without trying. You're naturally catching it on the upswing. Side bar: if you have bruises, nicks, and pop-up marks on the crown of your driver, you're very likely hitting the ball on the downswing, not the upswing.

Check out the Golf Tip on "Staying on Plane" for more help, but for now remember that good tempo with the ball forward to create a slight upswing will improve your driving and you'll "just get better".

## #5 ‘DE PLANE, ‘DE PLANE

*“Over the top only works in acting.”*

Here’s a question every Professional Golf Instructor has got a million times, “why do I keep slicing the ball?” Golf magazines and instructors have made millions on this topic alone. Over my last 30 years of teaching, here’s what I think are the most common causes, but first we need to discuss the plane of the golf swing.

The best description of the swing plane that was ever given to me was to think of it as a rectangular piece of glass as wide as you are and as tall as you are. This piece of glass is basically a lineal identification of where your backswing and downswing are moving. To understand the meaning of plane let's look at a baseball player. Simply put, a baseball swing starts on the shoulder and moves forward horizontally over the plate, so the plane of his swing is roughly level with the ground or 180°. So try to envision a plane of glass going through the belly of the baseball player and straight out over Home plate. It’s a level plane.

But as a golfer, we’re hitting a ball on the ground and we have a lot more spine angle and shoulder tilt toward the ground, so our backswing and follow through would be more on a 60° plane. Now the interesting part, changing your plane or getting off your plane can cause spin on the ball, which will cause it to curve. As a golfer, if we want to draw the ball we must keep our hands and our plane below that lineal identification. So that piece of glass is on the ground at the golf ball and coming up through our belly and out our back, still at that 60° angle. If you take the club underneath that glass on the way back and keep the club underneath that imaginary glass without breaking it on the way down, you will be on an inside to out path which will help create a draw, or moving right to left for righted handed golfers...the opposite for lefties. Many of us will take the club inside on the way back, but at the top of our swing will cast it out “over the top” and break the glass on the downswing. This creates an “out-to-in” swing creating spin on the ball and the resulting slice. So what are some ways to stay on plane and stop the slice? Here’s my favorite two.

**First...transition.** PGA Master Professional Bob Hickman out of Medina in Chicago gave me a lot of lessons and we spent substantial time together. I’m a very high-strung human. I have difficulty waiting for anything. Bob’s tip was as simple as this to me. John...COMPLETE. Complete the backward swing before the forward swing starts. The simple thought of completing the backward swing helps. If you rush this transition, in other words hurry into the downswing without completing the backswing, your move will be "OVER THE TOP".

So be patient Young Grasshopper. Jumping into the downswing will get you off plane and you'll break the glass.

**Second...alignment.** This is really simple, but even the most seasoned players can fall victim to poor alignment. Your alignment is railroad tracks (read that tip). Your feet and shoulders are on one track and the ball/target line on the other. If you are aligned incorrectly, you will subconsciously correct your swing toward the target and get off plane.

I like playing with other people, especially friends because they can tell you if your alignment is off. Think of it this way, if I aim 40 yards right of my target I will naturally compensate and swing left, or over the top, and you know the result. I have played now for over forty years and you would think I would know how to aim, but sometimes I don't. Awhile back I was playing and hit a ball in the junk to the right. I thought this MUST be something complicated because I've been playing forever. How could I not know how to aim? Nicely, my friend said, "you were aiming WAY right". I wasn't pronating, my spine angle was good, I was connected, everything was PERFECT! But oh, I was aimed right.... So simple.

Make sure your alignment is good, complete the swing with a smooth transition, and I guarantee you'll stay on plane and won't break the glass. And oh yeah, you'll "just get better".

## #6 **PRACTICE IDEAS**

*"We still talkin' bout practice?"*

Many players struggle with moving during their swing. While a little movement will occur, it is the goal to minimize both lateral and vertical movement. In the afternoon as the sun is getting lower on the horizon, place a golf ball on the nose of your shadow that your body casts. Do this while you are in your set up position. As you take your club away to the top position and as you make your follow through, keep your eyes focused on the position of the ball you place on your shadow. Most of you will find that the ball moves across your shadow to your ear or beyond on your take away. This will confirm that you have slid laterally to your right (left for a leftie). The more you practice keeping the ball on your nose during the take away, the more solid your base will become. This will add distance and consistency to most shots.



Another thing that can occur is that the golf ball moves down your shadow and perhaps drops to your chin or neck area. This confirms that you have vertically moved during the take away. Again, practice until you have reduced this movement. Once you feel comfortable and you have reduced one or both of these movements, hit a few more balls and track your results. Repeat this drill if contact or consistency becomes an issue. Remember THE SHADOW NOSE!

I see most players go to the driving range and grab their driver and hit an entire bucket of balls. This may be a waste of practice time.... let's think about the logistics of this mentality. There are 18 holes in a round. Usually there are 4 par 3s and 14 other holes including par 4s and par 5s. If you hit your driver every hole but on the par 3s, that's only 14 times in a round. This means IF your score is an even par 72, you use your driver less than 20% of the total shots. But most of us will not shoot 72. If you shoot 90, that percentage is 15%.

Here is what I suggest: Start with short irons and hit a couple of shots with each club until you have hit all your clubs. As you hit each club, put it back in the bag if you're satisfied with how you hit it. Keep the ones where you need to hit a mulligan.

Finish hitting those and play the first few holes with the remaining balls. NO, don't take the range balls to the course. (I've seen it way too many times.) Just VISUALIZE the first hole. Hit your driver, then say you will be about 150 yards out take the appropriate club for you for that distance, pick a target and hit it. If you miss your target, get a wedge out and hit that small pitch. Go to the next hole and repeat this process until you are out of range balls.

Let's not forget the important part... Remember that 72 we talked about? If you shot that and hit every green in regulation then you would have 36 putts. That's 50% of your shots... right? I suggest you spend 50% of your practice time putting. It just makes sense!

Divide your practice time as it correlates with your play. Here is an average for most players:

50% Putting

20% Pitching & Chipping

15% Driving

15% Iron Game

This is a general guideline, but will get you on track to ***practicing with a purpose.***

And constantly adjust as needed. Track your own shots and learn YOUR game. Track what you need to practice. Define your practice sessions.



It's also good to remember the 3 to 1 ratio: 3 hours practicing your short game, for every 1 hour on all the other shots. Do this and you'll "just get better".

## **#7 RAILROAD TRACKS**

*"Ready, Fire, Aim...What?"*

As you set up for a shot, most people utilize the time tested "Railroad Tracks" theory for their alignment. This is easy to do.

Imagine your feet are on the inside rail, and your target line or the face of your club is on the outside rail. This concept is called "parallel left". This simply means that your shoulders, hips, knees, and feet are all parallel left of the intended target line. Your target line is the line that is perpendicular to the square face of your golf club, and parallel to your shoulders hips, knees, and feet. This is critical because if you are aligned wrong, a perfect swing will still be a miss. Plus, as discussed in the "Swing Plane Tip", a misalignment can result in swinging off-plane and can create slices and hooks.

So take care of a basic. Aim right, I mean correct. And you'll just get better.

## **#8 BALANCE**

*"Does your teeter totter?"*

Golf is a sport of athleticism. Yes, we are athletes. Now more than ever. In order to play this sport at your highest level, you must have an athletic position at the beginning and throughout the swing.

The athletic position in any sport is easy to find. It is a similar position to playing shortstop, getting ready to bump a volleyball, guarding the baseline in basketball, or even a linebackers position in football. Your knees are slightly bent, feet are about shoulder width apart, waist is bent, shoulders are forward and back is straight. The arms hang freely. Getting into this position is not the entire key to playing better golf, but it begins here. You start with balance, and during the swing and finish you must maintain that balance. The best test for swing balance is this: when you finish your swing can you balance for three seconds afterwards without taking a step. If this is true then you're swinging within yourself and maintaining good balance. You can swing as fast as you want as long as you maintain your balance. If you lose that balance, you have to reduce your swing speed to regain your center. Watch the tour players on Sunday afternoon and you'll see great balance, almost as if they're posing for the camera (many of them are).

How many times when you watch somebody like Ernie Els or Freddy Couples, do you say to yourself, “wow, that doesn't even look like he made much of an effort”. This is exactly what perfect balance during your golf swing can be like.

Lastly, there are two other types of movement that can cause problems with your balance and in your golf swing. The first movement is lateral movement away from the golf ball, often times referred to as swaying. Most of us are guilty of this move. The other type of movement that is negative is vertical movement. Reduce that too. Find your balance and reduce the excess movement in your golf swing and you'll surely “just get better”.

## **#9    *PICK A CLUB***

***“But not that one!”***

Golf 101 tells us the least number of strokes wins. It's not the longest drives, the prettiest irons, or the nearly holed putts. It's the total number of strokes. Period. So let's think about some things that can help you make more birdies, or better yet, avoid a big number.

When you find yourself between yardages, factors other than yardage will be a very critical part in deciding which club to choose. Let's say you are between a 7-iron and 8-iron in distance. Which one do you hit? You need to ask yourself, “where is the trouble?” If there is a bunker in front of the green, then 7-iron is the better choice. If there is deep grass and trees behind the green, then 8-iron is your club. AVOID TROUBLE!

Another scenario where we might re-think the situation is off the tee. Suppose we have out of bounds to the left and have hooked the ball all day long. The rules of golf do not mandate that we hit a driver off the tee. My suggestion is to apply that Golf 101 rule and hit a long iron or 3-wood. Golf would be so easy if our pride would just get out of the way.

I think golf is played above the neck, between the ears, with our minds. My theory is once you have struck over 20,000 golf balls, golf will become an autonomic function, so why radically try to change it on the course? “Dance with the lady you brung.” This just makes sense.

And that's the point. Be smart and be realistic when it comes to golf. We all miss shots, in fact very few of us hit pure shots very often. So it's important to understand your limitations and your strengths in order to play this game. Sure, changes can be achieved and that's why we seek help, but understand that no one will ever completely master a game that is unbeatable. Use your head to play smart and avoid trouble, and you'll have a better chance to "just get better".

## **#10    STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES**

*"My strength is my confidence, maybe."*

In order to play your best golf you must not only understand your tendencies but you must play to your strengths. In the mid 1990s our club champion was a 76-year-old man. He went about life with zeal and love for the game. This man would play every Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday with his group and always hit first after the tee ball. He was the shortest hitter in the group. And because of his distance from the green, he missed his fair share of greens. But he also knew that the scoring was designed around the short game.

Whenever we saw him at the course he was always putting or chipping or hitting short wedges. He once told me on our long par five that most people hit driver and three-wood even though they couldn't reach it in two. He revealed that he always hit 5 iron because it left him with 90-100 yards which was a perfect wedge for him. He realized that he didn't have the strength nor accuracy with the long irons or fairway woods, so he played to his strength.

As I get older, I find this man's understanding of his game is why he used to beat me like a snare drum. It took my pride over five years to figure out that even though I hit it by him some 50 or 60 yards off of the tee, he would beat me with his wedges.

Find out what part of your game is your strength, and if it is not your short game you need to learn it rapidly. If you are 225 yards away and there's trouble around the green, there is no rule in golf that says you have to try and hit it on the green. Divide the distance by two shots. Soften your ego. This is a hard lesson for most people. Don't wait for your sixth or seventh decade in life to figure this out.

Play to your strength and you'll "just get better".

## #11 **FITTING**

*"If it doesn't fit, you'll want to quit!"*

This is a baffling topic for me. I wouldn't buy a size 7 shoe because I wear an 11. And I wouldn't buy an XXL shirt because I wear a large. Typically, I buy things that FIT. Weird, huh?

But when it comes to golf, a lot of people buy all sorts of equipment that doesn't fit them or their needs. I could tell you stories that would give you belly laughs, even though it would be terribly embarrassing to the person I'm telling it on. But in short, it is astounding to me that we pay so much money for golf clubs these days and they don't FIT! Seriously, COME ON MAN!

There are three major aspects to fitting;

1. **Grip:** the size, texture, and color.
2. **Shaft:** the length and flex. This is huge.
3. **Lie and loft of the club.** This is super huge.

I personally think the major manufacturers are leaving out a few like aesthetics, feel, and sound. Karsten Manufacturing Company, PING, is a great family based company. I have nothing but admiration and loyalty to this company. But I personally don't like the way the driver sounds when the ball is struck, therefore, I've never played their driver.

If I asked you the FIRST thing that attracted you to your partner, many of you would say looks. So if a golf club doesn't look sexy to you, why play with it? Sexy may be a strong word, but I use that word because I don't love golf...I'm IN LOVE with golf. And I'm trying to make a point. If the club doesn't look good to you, or feel good to you, or sound good to you...you're gonna fall out of love with them soon. Those things are important too!

I've received awards for club fitting and have been to a plethora of clinics and seminars. The best piece of information I ever heard about fitting is, "don't manipulate your swing to fit the golf club, just swing and I can adjust the golf club to you". BRILLIANT!

And here's another point that often applies. I have a friend that was on the verge of quitting because the golf swing hurt his back. He got fitted with longer and more upright clubs, which eliminated the "hunkered over" position he was in during the swing, and it eliminated the pain. Fitted clubs put you in a natural position, and non-fitted clubs can put you in a position that can cause pain or injury. That's kinda important...unless you really like pain.

SO PLEASE, before you buy any equipment go to a trustworthy establishment, get to know a trustworthy person, and ask about their fitting expertise. Then, and only then, purchase equipment. Know this too, just because you got fitted back in 1997 doesn't mean your measurements haven't changed. Bad knee, bad back, new swing, etc. can change your needs. If you still have the same body and strength you had 20 years ago, then this doesn't apply to you. But I have yet to meet that person.

I'm very passionate about this. You wouldn't buy a suit made for someone much larger or smaller than you, so why would you buy golf clubs that way. Get FITTED, and "just get better".

## **#12 SPIN THE BALL**

*"Do you wanna, really?"*

This question has been posed to many golf professionals over many years. Tommy Armour answered it best when answering that same question to an amateur. Tommy asked the amateur, "on iron shots, do you normally end up past the pin or short of the pin?" The gentleman replied almost always short of the pin. To this he simply said, "why do you need to spin the ball?"

It's been reported that Greg Norman used to ask for his yardages in half-yards. After he lost the 1996 Masters to Nick Faldo in the final round, he said, "I knew I was WAY OFF today when I missed my 9 iron yardage by a yard and a half". In a tournament once, Jack Nicklaus was waiting for yardage from his caddie when a member of the crowd yelled out "you're about 150 Jack". To this Jack replied, "we don't play 'abouts' out here". My point is this, those guys are good. Really, really good.

Yet, they miss shots too. Ben Hogan said he would only strike three or four balls totally pure during a round. His definition of "pure" may have been a little more critical than ours, but what this proves is that we do not strike the ball pure every time. The pros don't do it, how can we? Striking it pure, of course, is key to generating spin. So if you're one of those people who are constantly hitting it past the pin, let's look at the simple physics involved in striking it pure and applying backspin to your golf ball. Here is a simple way to find out if you are going to be able to apply that spin on a fairly consistent basis.

First of all, put a tee about 2 inches on the outside of your golf ball. Make sure the tee is directly in the center of your golf ball and that you will not strike it on your downswing. Now make a normal golf swing and look where your divot begins in relation to the tee that was on the outside of your golf ball. Note that most people's divots will begin just prior to the golf tee. This generally means you have not contacted the golf ball first. If there is no divot, then you have contacted the golf ball first but did not have a steep enough angle of descent to apply much spin.

The perfect divot will begin just after the tee, and will be relatively even and shallow. The perfect strike occurs when you hit the golf ball just below the horizontal equator and the divot begins after the golf ball's original position. For more spin you need to create a steeper angle of attack.

But let me end by where I began. Where do most of your shots to the green end up? 85% of shots from an amateur to a green end up short of the pin. Creating a lot of spin is really only needed for those who continually hit it beyond the flagstick, and that's not many of you. Stop worrying about juicing it back for style points, just make solid contact, probably take one more club, and "just get better".

There's a lot of big words, buzz words, paradigms, catchy phrases, and information in golf that can definitely make you "just get better". And I do believe that planning and thinking are bigger parts of playing golf than they are in playing any other sport, except chess (when you get old that becomes a sport). But sometimes, we have to put all that aside...and just play. Pull the trigger. Execute. Just play.

Sometimes you need to stop the "paralysis by analysis" by turning over execution of the shot to your intuitive, **subconscious** mind that runs your body. You play your best golf when you **plan** with your head, then **play** with your heart!

It's a game. Enjoy it. Most of you are not making a living doing it, so quit worrying about the shot! Have a plan, relax, and let it go. You'll "just get better".



John Rawdon, PGA Professional  
*"Just Get Better"*

