

Men'sHealth

[Click to Print](#)[Close](#)

How to hole the winning putt

MH shows you how to become a cool, calm master of the green



In the second of our articles on succeeding in high-pressure situations, we take to the green to show you how to beat nerves and hole the crucial putt every time. Golf is renowned for its ice-cool champions, but the game has also given us some of the most spectacular sporting collapses ever. Take Jean Van de Velde, so far ahead of his rivals at the 1999 Open that his name was already engraved on the trophy. After extensive flirtation with rivers and bunkers, he triple-bogeyed the 18th – and it had to be scratched off. Rest assured, *MH* is not

going to let that happen to you...

The situation

It's the 18th hole. Knock in this tiddler and you win the match, the bet, and the bragging rights until next month.

The science

According to Sian Beilock, psychology professor at the University of Chicago and author of *Choke*, the best way to tackle putting pressure depends on your talent and experience. "For novices," she explains, "paying attention is a good thing; you have to attend to every step as you're still learning. But once skills become automated, that same attention can really backfire – and that's when the choking comes out." The degree to which overanalysis can sabotage even the most innate of actions should not be underestimated. A study in the *Journal of Sports Sciences*, for instance, found that when runners were told to focus on their breathing or form, as opposed to their surroundings, their performance was adversely affected. And if thinking about breathing disrupts your flow, just imagine what thinking about your backswing does...

The solution

Possess a modicum of putting prowess? Then when the pressure's on, don't concentrate. Distract yourself. "There's a rumour that Jack Nicklaus counted backwards by threes when he was hitting putts," says Beilock. "Use anything that can focus your attention away from the step-by-step components of what you're doing – even singing a song to yourself can work." If you're just starting out, on the other hand, stop warbling and focus for chrissakes – this is important.

Another useful technique, regardless of ability, is a cunning twist on the classic mantra: practice (with forfeits) makes perfect. "The cool thing is that research shows you don't have to practice at the exact amount of stress that you're going to feel – because obviously it's hard to mimic that," says Beilock. "Just mild stress training can be beneficial." How best to emulate the fear of the eighteenth green putt in training? A basketball coach at Southern Utah University has the answer.

"A couple years ago the Utah team were 217th in terms of free throw success in US college basketball," explains Beilock. Then they got a new coach. "He implemented a procedure where in the middle of practice they would stop and a guy would have to go to the free throw line. If he missed, the entire team would have to run." Today, when it comes to free throws, very few teams can match Southern Utah.

So, every time you miss that three-footer, punish yourself with five circuits of the green. Soon, not only will you be sinking more high-pressure putts, you'll have consigned your huffing and puffing over the last few links to history, too. Cardio shy? Take note of perhaps the most truthful advertising slogan of recent years: it matters more if there's money on it.

See the first instalment of this three-part feature [here](#)

Words by *MH's* Ed Vanstone

Find this article at:

<http://www.menshealth.co.uk/fitness/sports-training/how-to-hole-the-winning-putt>

Click to Print

Close
