

Sink More Knee-Knockers

Real-golfer research on making the putts you gotta have

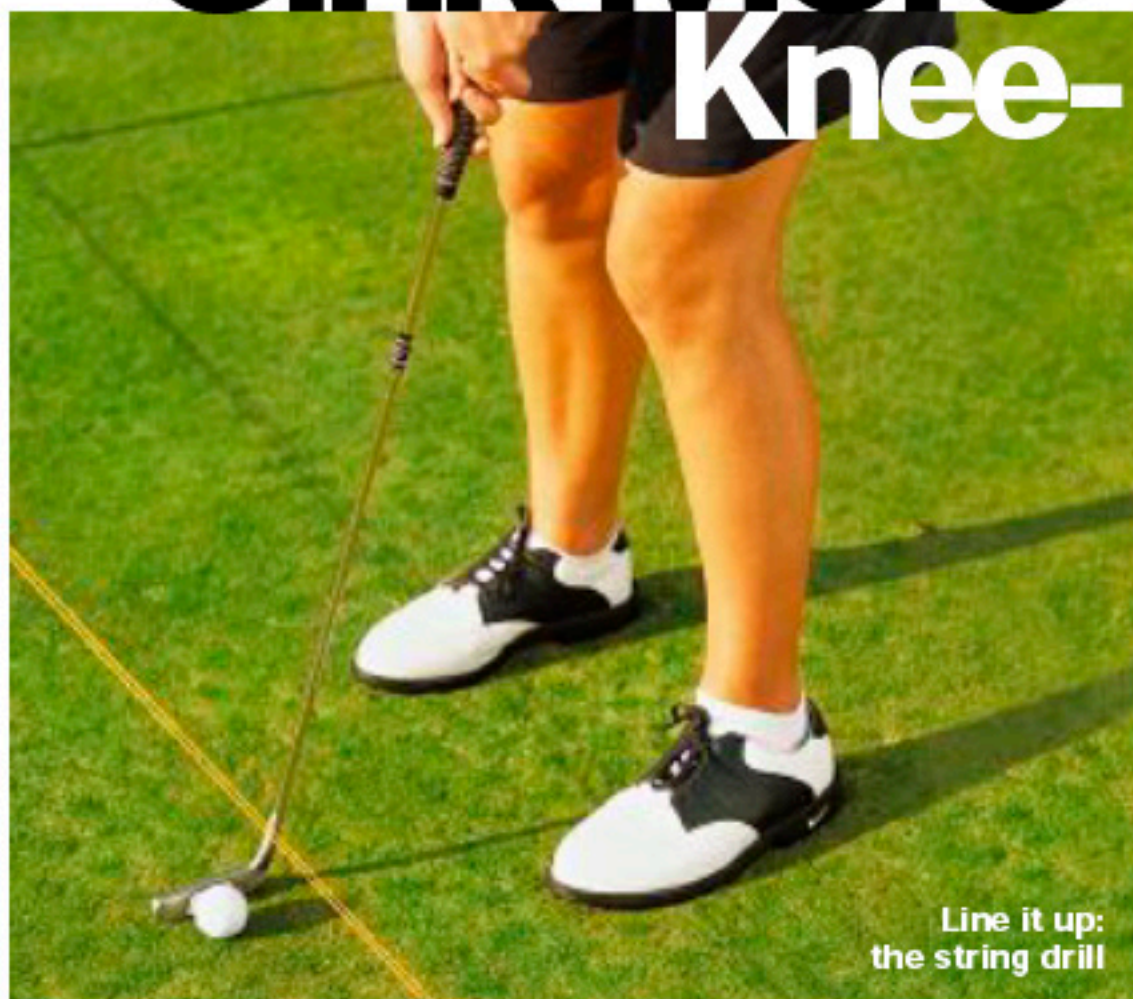
Have you ever walked off the 18th green feeling you'd sunk every makeable putt of the day? I didn't think so. But unlike hitting 300-yard drives or full-swing lobs, making more putts is a realistic goal. We evaluated three drills designed to help you hole more putts inside 12 feet.

First up: the string drill, in which a string is stretched six inches above the line of a putt and a golfer tries to roll putts under the string. Second was the chalk-line drill: A carpenter's chalk line is snapped on the green and the golfer tries to putt along that line. Third was the track drill, in which a pair of two-by-fours creates a track for the putter-head (with a half-inch clearance at the toe and heel); if the putter doesn't bump the boards, the golfer has made an on-line stroke.

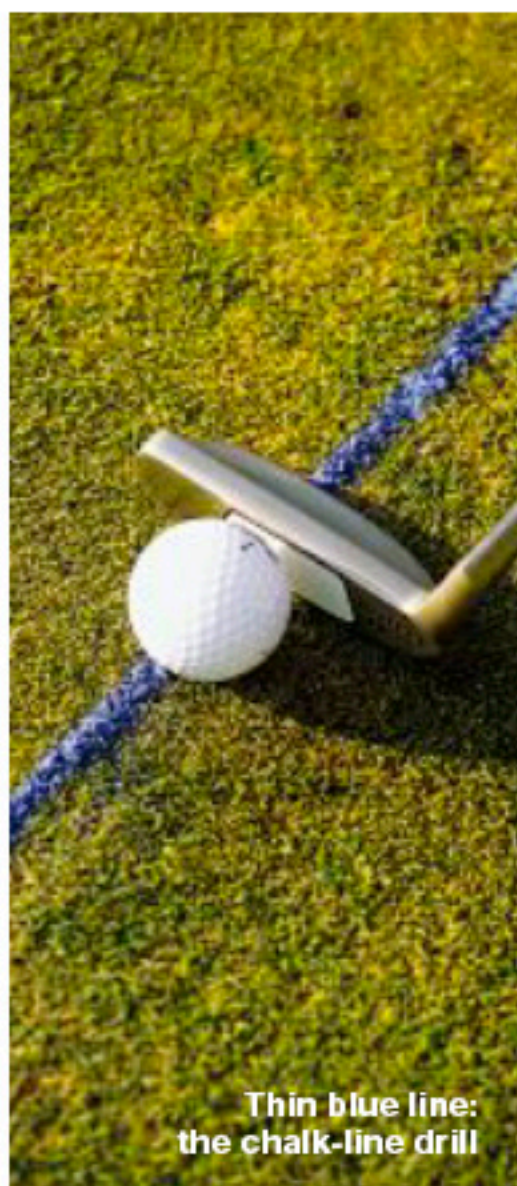
THE TEST

In research supervised by Dr. Bob Christina, 45 golfers were divided into three groups, which were randomly assigned one drill apiece. Each group was balanced for age, gender and handicap. During a pretest, participants putted from 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 feet, in random order.

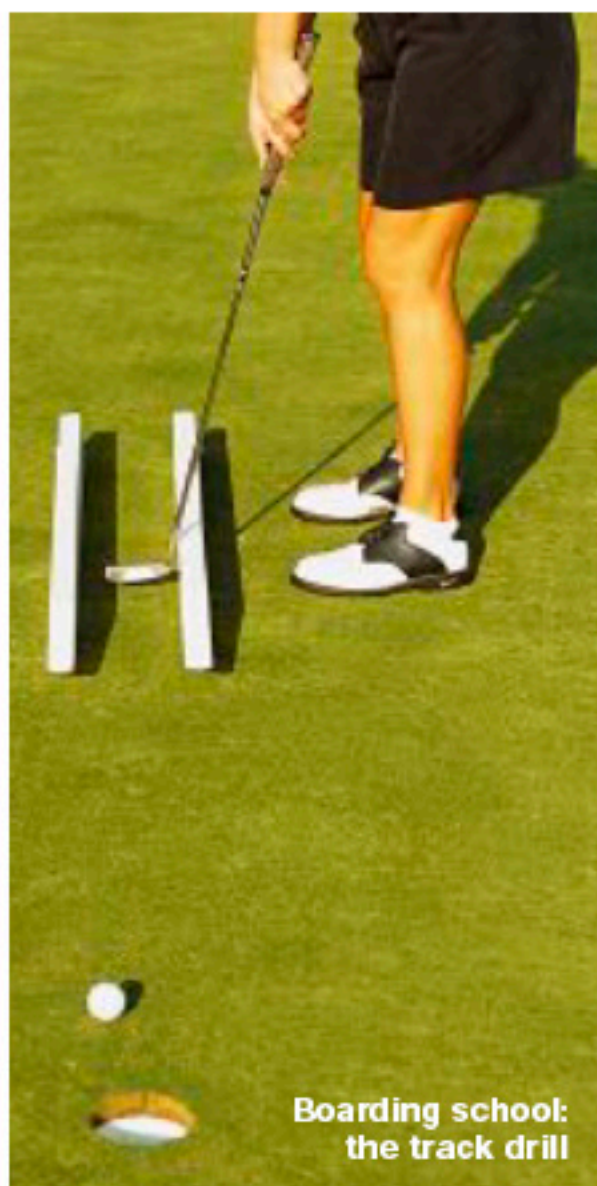
After the pretest, each golfer began training cycles, rolling putts of 2, 4, 6, 8 or 10 feet. Each cycle included a practice stroke using the drill, a putt using the drill and a putt applying it. After six cycles, participants took a three-minute break. Each golfer completed 18 cycles. Then a post-test was conducted under the same conditions as the pretest. The results might surprise you. *continued*



Line it up: the string drill



Thin blue line: the chalk-line drill



Boarding school: the track drill

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSSELL KIRK



WHY?

The string drill creates a strong visual alignment aid as well as a physical deterrent to lifting the putterhead. The more the putterhead moves up and down, the harder it is to roll the ball along a line. Putters are designed to impart the truest roll when moving horizontally at impact.

The chalk-line drill also offers a visual alignment aid, but provides no physical feedback. And while the track drill forced a good stroke during practice, bad habits returned when the boards were removed. —E.A.

Winner: The string drill led to a 40 percent improvement.

THE VERDICT

The string drill was best at reducing average putting error—the distance the ball finished from the hole. The exercise lowered the error 40 percent, from 9.30 inches to 5.53 inches. The chalk-line drill cut the average error by only 1.04 inches, while the board drill actually led

to a slight increase (0.35 inches) in the putting error. %

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