Innovation on the Green: Precision Putting with The Grail

2023

{Music}

Host: Podcasting from Orlando, Florida this is the Lowndes Client Corner where we highlight and celebrate our law firm clients and the many achievements. Who are we featuring today?

Stephen C. Thomas: Today we are interviewing Dr. William Mallon, an ophthalmologist and founder of the Center for Advanced Eye Care in Vero Beach, Florida. Dr. Mallon's lifelong love of golf led him to invent a training tool that enables beginner golfers or touring pros, everyone in between, to dramatically improve their putting game almost instantly. I'm your host Steve Thomas, and let's find out more about our guest Bill Mallon. Hi Bill, I'm thankful you're here and able to join us for the podcast.

William J. Mallon: Well, thanks Steve. Happy to be here.

Stephen C. Thomas: Let's jump right into it. This being Florida, golf is such a huge industry here in the state. Tell us a little bit about what inspired you to create this golf putter training apparatus.

William J. Mallon: Yeah, I've been a golfer my whole life. I started playing when I was probably a little bit under five years old. My dad was a golfer. I grew up in Michigan, so golf season was short there, and I've been in Florida now about 24 years and play golf year round. I'm a competitive golfer. So I play tournaments and competitions. I've competed in three US (inaudible) and been very closer to multiple other US (inaudible) events. And so golf is a big part of my life, and I play any time I can get out and play, play competitively.

I've played at some pretty high levels. But there's always been a little bit of an issue with my putting. It's kind of been one of the things that's kept me from having even more success.

And so over the last few years I've worked at it. But I've – and I've spent hours and hours putting, but I've never really understood putting. I've never really gotten better at it. So no matter how much I was practicing I just kind of reached a level of – I hit a ceiling. So about a year ago—and I worked with one of my coaches—who suggested a putting coach for me to go visit down in Boca Raton.

And so I took a drive down and met with this putting coach, (sounds like: Gavin Stanmore) who was coaching some collegiate players and some high level juniors and a pretty well known guy. And within an hour I had completely blow up every thought I had about how I was supposed to putt. It was literally a life changing moment. And I've always been a believer that you are supposed to accelerate through the ball in every aspect of golf. That deceleration was the death of anything, whether it be chipping, putting or any other aspect of golf. But within one hour (Stanmore) had convinced me that decelerating with your putter was the way to go.

And he demonstrated several things during that first lesson that made me understand exactly what he was talking about. But unraveling 50 years of programming is not so easy. Fifty years of muscle memory and repetition and probably millions of strokes of a putter with accelerate as the modus operandi. So I immediately came back to Vero Beach, which is about a two hour drive. Went to my golf course and sat on the putting green and I put two tees actually in the ground right in front of my putter so that my putter had to stop at the golf ball.

And it was quite interesting to watch how the ball started to roll. So it wasn't very easy to do, and it was certainly, as I said, 50 years of programming to reverse. But when I was doing what he wanted me to do the ball was rolling in a way that I had never quite experienced. And that started my journey. I spent several lessons with Stan working on it. And then there were different aspects of the coaching that he was doing. He was telling me to take my putter back a lot longer. And the premise of this is you take your putter back longer to control the distance instead of accelerating through the ball. Most people will look at a putt. They'll say, well, that's 30 feet. I got to hit it – just by feel I'm going to hit it this hard, and they'll accelerate more through a ball that they have to hit further.

But the premise of the way that we putt and the way that deceleration works is, the longer your backstroke is, the longer the putt. So you control all of your distances very systematically by taking a backstroke that is longer for a longer putt, shorter for a shorter putt. And you want the same rhythm and timing through that. So there's just a process that you do, so your putt metrics are the same whether the putt is short or long. And basically you just take your putter back further, and you also take your putter through the ball relatively longer for longer putts and shorter for shorter putts. But there's a ratio, and it's essentially a reversal of everything I'd ever done.

So through the course of these lessons I was – Stan would say, "Well, take your putter back this long for this length of putt." He'd put a quarter on the ground or put a tee in the ground. And it just was hard for me to quite get that concept. I'd been paying attention to where my putter was relative to the quarter. Take it back this far. Take it forward this far. And I just found that – while understanding what he wanted me to do, I found it quite distracting. It was just not something for me the way I learned. It just didn't work for me.

So I just started this journey of trying to create a device that would allow me to do what he wanted me to do without having to think about it. And so I started the process of creating this putting trainer. And initially I got two long yardsticks and set them on the ground, and then I would put something across it. Say, okay, I'm going to take my putter back this far, and I'd measure it based on the length of the putt. There's a system that we can talk about how to do that. Then I said, well, I need some kind of a bridge. I need the ball to go under this area, but I need to set my parameters. So I need to set the length of my backstroke. I need to set the length of my forward stroke based on the length of the putt.

And there's a ratio that you also do. So the length of the putt back, if you take it back ten inches, for instance, if you were doing a ratio of two to one, your distance back two and one forward, you'd allow your putter to go past the ball five inches. And that's a ratio that's a little bit different for everybody. But a two to one ratio is a pretty good starting point. A guy like Patrick Cantlay, one of the best putters in the world, his ratio is about ten to three. So if he takes his putter back ten inches, he's going to take that putter forward three inches. And his ball is going to roll very consistently. And again, the ratio is a little bit different for each individual to get an optimum rolling of the ball. But what you want to do is start your ball rolling as fast as possible instead of skipping and bouncing and skidding, which the ball will do a little bit.

Stephen C. Thomas: So I want to clarify one thing. When you say "ratio," you're talking about the ratio of the distance the club travels from the back part of the swing to the ball impact.

William J. Mallon: Yeah, right. So if you took it back ten inches, you'd take it forward five. If you took it back 20 you'd take it forward 10 and so on and so forth.

Stephen C. Thomas: After it hits the ball, right? So the back part of the swing would be ten inches and then after you strike the ball, you're decelerating the club.

William J. Mallon: Club impact. So the putter is coming to a close, but it's going to hit the ball in a deceleration. But then it's going to have a little bit of a forward momentum just as a ratio of physics. You're not coming to an abrupt halt. The putter is slowing down as it gets to the ball, but it's going to have a little bit of a forward swing as it slows to a complete stop.

Stephen C. Thomas: Right, wanted to make sure that that was clear. So at this point you have experimented with different ways of laying things on the ground and coins and golf tees and things to try to control the distance of the club movement, to get the deceleration as it hits the ball. But somehow you transitioned from that to this finished product, which has a name now, right? What do you call it?

William J. Mallon: It does. We call it the Grail, and there's a Grail Mini. So there's two different versions.

Stephen C. Thomas: Where does the Grail come from, the name?

William J. Mallon: Well, it's a little bit of a play on – we always talk about what's the Holy Grail of golf, is putting. And just sort of that search, the eternal search for the best putting and to make putts. And it's kind of the Holy Grail of putting. You know, to be able to do something repetitively and to create this putting stroke that is so repeatable and allows even the worst golfer on the planet can sit and use the Grail and start making putts in a way that they've never made them before. It's really quite extraordinary.

We've yet to find anybody who gets inside and uses the Grail that doesn't start making putts. Whether they're an accomplished golfer or they've never

had a putter in their hand in their lifetime. It's a really interesting phenomenon. There's just something about it.

Stephen C. Thomas: So when we get to the end of the interview here we'll talk about where we can pick up a Grail. I'm sure that all the golfers out there are now pretty much thinking, I want one of those things. But maybe you could take us through the steps from the concept after you've laid the thing out on the ground and you know what you want this device to train you to do. You went through a series of steps then to get to this finished product. Tell us about that because that would be helpful to the other entrepreneurs out there in the world who are wondering, how do I – I have an idea, how do I get to a finished product?

William J. Mallon: Yeah, so that's always the challenge, right. We come up with these ideas and then what do we do with it? So initially, so I started with the yardsticks on the ground. I bought these metal yardsticks and I started putting things in the ground and working on that. And then came up with the idea of having some bridges so you have these moveable gates that you could adjust to the length of your putt. How do you do that in easy fashion so you're not clunky? If you want to practice five foot or ten foot puts, fifteen foot. But you don't want to spend ten minutes trying to set up something.

So it's got to be easy to use. I want something that's going to last. So I wanted something metal. But then I looked at making these rails for the cross rails of the little bridges you got to putt under. You don't want those to be metal because you're going to hit your putter on those. And so I needed some different material. First thing I did, I called up an engineer that had worked on another invention that we have and I said, "Look, this is what I want to have." I did the drawings and I said, "Is this something you can put together for me?" I tried to look for some parts online just things I could put together. I'm not the handiest person in the world when it comes to that kind of stuff.

So I contacted this manufacturer. He said, "Yeah, I think I could put something together." So he found some pieces and parts of other products that were already done. There were some rails and some other things. And he got me kind of a rudimentary first Grail just to give it a test. Did a cut out of the cross rail. So we had a – kind of a bridge where the ball would go under it, and then we had these little pegs and I could unscrew them and then move the Grail.

It was a little bit clunky but it worked, and the concept worked. So I started putting people on it. I was practicing with it. I cut some little – a little foam from packaging and I stuck it on the cross rail. So if you hit your putter on – I just taped it on there, kind of rudimentary, just so it was protecting the putter from hitting the metal. And I worked with that for a while, and then I called a bunch of different manufacturers. I took my drawing. I took the Grail and started talking to a bunch of different people and seeing if somebody could build it for me, and it was not so easy. I had to go to four or five different manufacturers.

The original one had a little slide to it, so the gates would slide. It was a little bit clunky. It was a little bit rough, and I figured if it's going to be out on the greens it's going to get dirt in it, and it's going to get sand in it. And that's just not going to fly very easily. It's going to clog up.

So kind of did away with that and then came up with this idea of having little plugs at the top that you would just punch in and pop it in. So these little pop in tips on the end that would pop into little holes that we drilled in the top of the Grail. So the cross rails would pop in, and then you could take them off and pop them on to carry it as a handle as well. And so we went through a couple of different versions of that. The manufacturer helped to work on a

couple of little modifications to make it better. We made the cross rail in a heavy duty plastic, or plastic-like material, so it wouldn't damage the putter. And then we had – I had him build ten. We did them in a bunch of different colors, a couple of different lengths.

We have a Grail mini that we call it that you can use at home for practicing anywhere from two to ten foot putts, and we have a putting matt that we created as well that has holes at every two feet. So it's really nice way if you're on the road, you're playing a golf tournament or you just want to practice at home in a small area. It's a great way to practice.

And then we have the original Grail, the long Grail which you can use for practicing putts up to any length on a green. And so we have a lot of different colors. I did ten different colors, and we have the full size Grail and the mini Grail. I have some pros using it. I get about a video every other day from a gentleman who is a teaching pro up in Orlando, Skip Kendall. He was on the PGA tour for many years. He's a well thought of teacher. He's a big believer in deceleration as well. So I met him at the Senior Open, the Florida Senior Open this year. And he watched me, played a couple of rounds together and he had noticed my putting stroke and that I had a decelerating stroke. And we started talking about it, and then I told him about the Gail.

And so we talked about our theory of deceleration, and he just loved the idea of the Grail. So he's been using it. He had a couple of champion tours events that he took it with him, and he's doing some golf schools. He's up in Michigan, and he's out of state right now doing a golf school. In fact he just sent me three videos about five minutes ago showing some of the students on the Grails. And every time he sends me a text he says, "This student wants to order a Grail. So please let me know when they're ready." So that's where we are. So we've got a device that's ready to go.

Stephen C. Thomas: What's amazing about this is it's usable by beginning golfers, but you even have pros on a tour who are using it. It's not very often you see a tool like that that's usable across the spectrum of experience and capabilities.

William J. Mallon: Yeah, it's very true. And I'll tell you a success story is Joe Kern who's a professional golfer in Vero Beach. And I've known Joe for years. He's a teaching pro, and he plays quite a bit competitively. And Joe got on board with this putting immediately after I introduced it to him last probably six or seven months ago. And as soon as I showed him that he said, "I'm on board." And he's been working with me. We've been working together on this, and Joe has been using the Grail. And he qualified for the US Senior Open and just played in the US Senior Open. He missed a cut by a few shots, but it wasn't because of his putting.

And it's really changed the game for Joe. He's a teaching professional as well, and he's the one who has yet to find a single student that doesn't get better with the Grail. He has it out at Hawks Nest where he's been teaching. He'll leave it on the green. People will come up to it out of curiosity and look at it say, what is this? And he'll just put them on it, and he really doesn't have to give them any instructions. He says, "Just hit a putt. Just get here. Put the ball right there and putt." And that's all they do, and they start making putts. And then they look up at him with this look of bewilderment. Like, what just happened? And he says, "Yeah, I don't know what happened."

It's really quite remarkable, I have to say. I did it for myself. I did it because I wanted to have something that was going to help me become a better putter. But I love teaching. I love helping people. It's part of what I do as an ophthalmologist. I get to fix things and help people. It's given me a lot of joy to actually watch people get on the Grail and watch them start making putts,

and it's universal. They look up and they look at you with this look on their face, like what just happened? You say, yeah, I don't know. It's hard to believe, but it just works.

Stephen C. Thomas: Yeah, as we've talked about this thing over the last few months, one of the things that jumped out at me was this phenomenon where if you have a long putt and you've been taught to accelerate the club head through the ball impact when you're putting, you almost invariably get this short period of time right after impact that it's kind of flying along not really touching the ground, but it's skipping. It never dawned on me that during that period of time the ball's not rolling and therefore it's really uncontrolled in terms of anything you can do to control the distance the ball's going to roll out. By decelerating the club head through the impact you're really minimizing the very short time that the ball is in contact with the club head, and also minimizing that ball skip that occurs. And you're just getting better control of the ball. So it's rolling more and flying less right after the club impact. And that way of controlling the roll out distance sounds like.

William J. Mallon: Well, and that's where consistency comes from. That's where the consistency of the ball control. I mean, I'll sometimes make putts from 20 feet. I'll make ten, fifteen, twenty of them out of twenty-five. It's crazy. And the roll is just so consistent. I always say, you can – it's almost like you put a napkin over all the balls. Because once you take that putter back a certain distance and you've got the right stroke duration and ratio and your timing is consistent, the ball just rolls exactly the same. It's so repetitive. It's a micro second of difference between accelerating and decelerating with how long that ball's on the face.

But that micro second makes all the difference in the world in inducing side spin or awkward spin. So when you're decelerating that putter face it's

extremely square. When you're accelerating you're grabbing the putter essentially, and the putter's face is getting torqued. So even a few degrees of or a little bit of side spin, the next thing you know that putt over five or six or ten feet moves. So when you get that side spin what you want is over spin. You want that spin to happen quickly. You want the ball to start rolling as fast as possible on the ground.

There's always going to be a little bit of a skip or a jump with the ball when you hit it. You're going to hit it on a little bit of an upslope or an upward angle. So you're going to get the ball off the ground a little bit rolling. But the key is having that skip or that skid to be consistently the same, and then the ball starts rolling. One of the things that I found really striking early on was, when I started putting like this, the ball would roll out, like two or feet longer than I thought it would based on how I hit it.

And I started hitting the putter face squarely in a way that was just strange. I mean, you know when you hit a really good putt. But hitting it over and over again the same and having that feeling of a solid putt coming off your putter face over and over again, that was the part that was so interesting. Just that deceleration and how much better the ball was rolling, how much more control. And again, it's a lot of deprogramming. I mean, 50 years of deprogramming an accelerating putting stroke.

There are times where I'm still – it's a work in progress. But the fun part for me is, I now know I can get better. I broke through that ceiling where I was feeling like I could never get better with my putting no matter how much I practiced because I was practicing the wrong technique. I wasn't ever going to get better. I always putt better on fast greens because you didn't have to accelerate as much to hit a ball further because the greens were so fast. But if I got on slow greens and I had to really hit the ball, and in Florida you're going

to be prone to slow greens with grain. You've got to deal with grain in Florida. Whereas where I grew up in Michigan, bent grass greens, very fast greens. You didn't have grain. You didn't have to worry about that and the influence of grain and how much harder you had to hit the ball. So there's a lot of factors that play a role. But just consistently decelerating allows that control to be so much greater, and the quality of the putts are better.

Stephen C. Thomas: And you can even take one of these onto the putting green prior to a round, right, and calibrate your stroke for the day, right? So you can…

{Crosstalk}

William J. Mallon: Oh, totally. You can (sounds like: skimp) the greens by getting out there. So if you take the Grail and it takes literally ten seconds to put it together. There's – pop two side rails in and you're ready to go. So you can go out on the green, set your stroke parameter. Say you take it back ten inches and hit a putt and see how far the ball rolls. Set it at five, ten, fifteen, twenty and you just hit these putts and then you walk off. How far did the ball go? Now you know exactly how far you have to take your putter back for X length for the putt.

So if you're walking off all your putts, which you should be, you've got a ten foot putt, you know exactly how far you have to take that putter back to achieve a ten foot rollout.

Stephen C. Thomas: I think by now probably a fair number of people are going to want to know how they can get their hands on one of these things. So what are the plans for getting this out there available for purchase?

William J. Mallon: Our website is Precisionputting.net. We are taking pre-orders, and the ship date, it should be about ten days. So we've got 1000 that are on order. We've got ten different colors that will be available. I think our first 100, we're going to have 50 regular Grails and 50 mini Grails. And those will be probably in one color, black. It's anodized aluminum, so it's a really solid piece of equipment. It's something that's going to last. We actually can engrave it as well. So if someone wants to personalize that and have their name and any kind of information or anything they want to say on it, they're able to put that on the Grail.

So Precisionputting.net. That's where they're pre-ordering. And we should have them, like I said, I think our first batch is going to be here probably in about ten days or so. And then from there we should be fully stocked.

Stephen C. Thomas: Fantastic. Well Bill, I can't thank you enough for taking the time to tell us all about how the Grail was created and what it does. Working with you has been a real pleasure on this. And I just have to say it's exciting to see what you're going to come up with next because you have inventions in the software world and the ophthalmology world and the world of eye surgery and now golf. I'm sure there's going to be great things to come, but I want to thank you very much.

William J. Mallon: Well thanks Steve. Appreciate it. It's fun to talk about. I love it.

Host: Thank you for listening to this episode of the Lowndes Client Corner. Be sure to join us next time for another Lowndes Client Corner interview. Learn more at Lowndesclientcorner.com. Lowndes is a multi-service law firm advising public and private businesses across multiple industries. Proud to serve Central Florida and beyond. Learn more at Lowndes-law.com.

{Music}

THE END