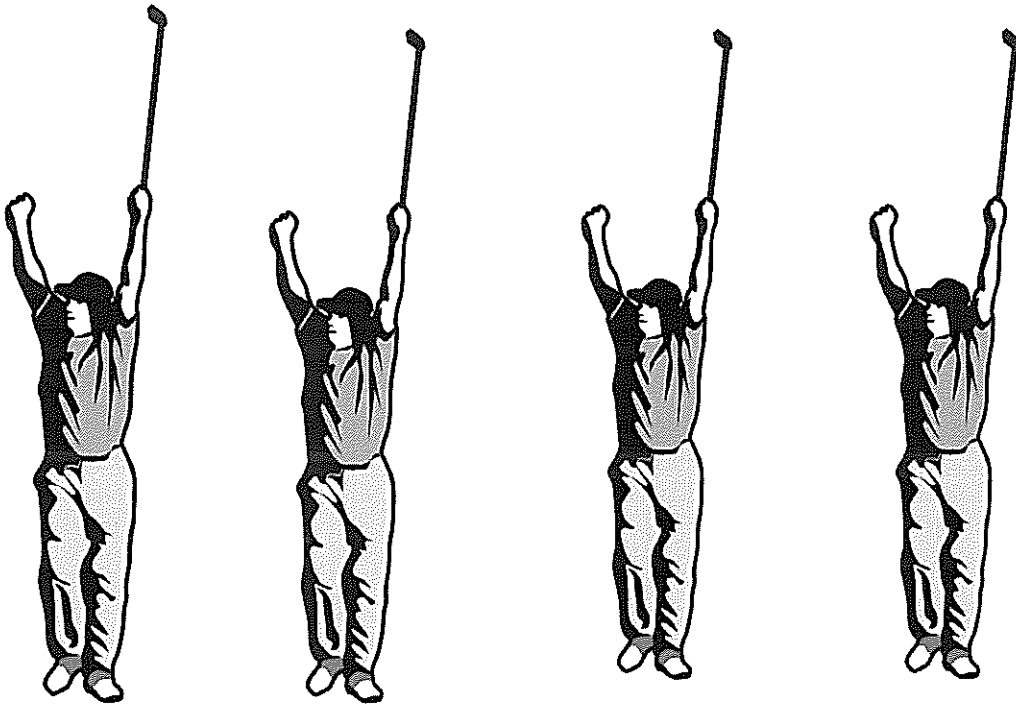


HOW TO PLAY BETTER GOLF WITHOUT PRACTICING



Written and Compiled by

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**Master Professional Thesis for the Canadian
Professional Golfers' Association**

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Dedication

To Sue, Sean and Erica for your love and your patience for all the hours I have spent over the years at the golf course.

Thanks to Ray Milne, for taking a chance and giving me an opportunity to start a career as a golf professional.

Thanks to Chuck Cook for all the time you have spent helping me become a better player and a better teacher.

Thanks to Millard and Sue for you editorial advice and suggestions.

Thanks to all my students over the years. Teaching golf is great fun and I may have learned as much from you as you did from me.

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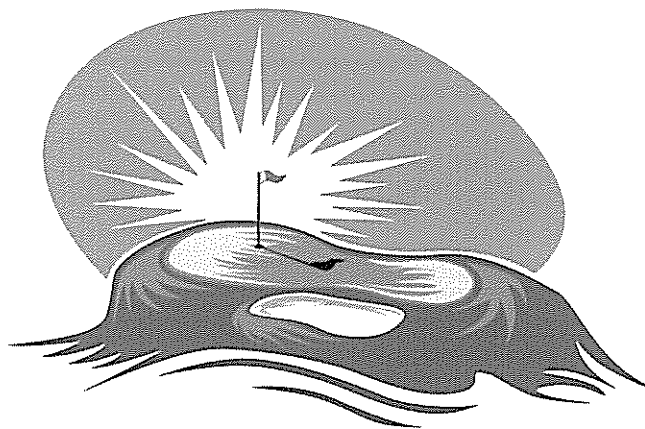
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Foreword



Playing better golf without practicing, isn't that every golfers dream? As a golf-teaching professional it is my responsibility to help my students have more fun and become better at playing golf. Experience has taught me that most people fail to realize that golf is played just as much with the mind as it is with the body. For many golfers improvement means buying the latest, greatest golf club or trying out a tip they read in a golf magazine or watched on television. Having more fun and being better at playing golf, in large part, requires an improvement in how a person uses their brain and chooses to think while playing golf. I am absolutely positive that anyone who chooses to incorporate the ideas that are presented here will be amazed at how quickly their scores go down and their enjoyment of the game goes up. In this thesis I will prove, through references to research, literature published by experts and examples of some of the worlds best golfers who are using these techniques to improve their games, that it is very possible to play better golf without practicing the swing.



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Introduction

It could easily be argued that of all the games we play, golf is the greatest one. Playing golf requires power and finesse, skill and an element of luck. It is a game that stirs our emotions; a golfer can experience elation and despair, confidence and fear, love and self-loathing, all in the 12 minutes it takes to play one hole of golf. The fact that the game has been played, with increasing popularity, for over 600 years is perhaps the most compelling testament to it being the greatest of games.

Over its 600 year history the game has changed immensely. Golfers have used technological improvements in their equipment as a way to find a better, easier and more efficient way to play the game. The wooden golf ball was replaced by the featherie, which was replaced by the guttie, which was replaced by the Haskell, which has been replaced by the modern solid core and the multi-layer balls. As the ball changed, so did the clubs. The bulger replaced the long nose playclubs of the featherie era. In the modern era, clubheads made of wood have been replaced by steel and graphite and now titanium alloys are replacing steel. Wooden shafts have been replaced by steel and graphite. It would be hard to imagine the game being as popular as it is today if we were still playing with featherie balls and wooden shafted clubs.

Improvements to balls and clubs also sparked changes to the techniques used to play the game. The featherie was fragile so the game was played with woodenheaded clubs that would be less likely to cut the cover of the ball. Because the featherie did not fly particularly well, the technique that was used incorporated a closed stance and flat swing that would hit low running hooks. The guttie, being cheaper and more durable than the

featherie, allowed the use of iron headed clubs. A more upright, open- stance swing was developed to help get the ball up into the air. The swing was brought further upright with the development of the Haskell ball.

Equipment and technique are not the only parts of golf that have changed. The terrain on which the game is played has developed from a rough landscape maintained by rabbits and sheep to the impeccable landscapes of today.

It would seem that the game has never looked healthier. Golf equipment manufacturers are designing and building clubs that are the most forgiving, easy to hit, and fun to use, in the history of the game. Golf balls are flying further than ever. With the new equipment, PGA Tour Professionals are routinely driving the ball over 300 yards and are shooting record-breaking scores. With the new clubs, balls, and better technique you would think that the handicaps of most amateur players would be going down easier than a tap in for eagle. But that is not happening. Why is that?

The Road to Improvement



In the 20 years that I have been learning, playing, teaching and observing the game as a golf professional, I have come to the conclusion that there are four areas a golfer needs to improve in order to reach his or her full potential. The four areas are:

- *Technology*
- *Technique*
- *Fitness*
- *Thinking*



Technology

Technology refers to golf equipment and that is usually the first place most people look to for improvement. Golfers continue to seek that one special piece of equipment that will magically create great golf shots. They desperately seek clubs that will hit the ball farther, straighter, and higher. Today golfers will spend hundreds of dollars to purchase a driver, wedge or putter if they believe there is a glimmer of hope that the club will make an improvement to the way they hit the ball. A pessimist would be inclined to observe that golfers are perhaps the most gullible of all the sporting people, eager to believe any and all the claims made by a club maker. On the other hand it could be argued that golfers are optimists, believing that despite how unorthodox their technique is, a new club will be the key to their golf game. It is not just the weekend golfer who falls into this category. The touring professionals also spend countless hours testing new clubs in hope of finding one that will outperform the one they are using. However you chose to look at it, the fact is it is human nature to try to find a better way to do something and in the case of golf to also seek the easiest way possible. If a person believes they can make their most dreaded golf malady disappear by simply purchasing some new pieces of equipment, then the new equipment he/she shall have!

Modern golf club technology enables golfers to hit the ball further, higher and straighter than at any other time in the history of the game. In the hands of tour professionals, the clubs can produce remarkable results. The better the swing, the better the performance. Unfortunately, high-tech equipment, with a low-tech swing still creates mediocre results. Buying a new driver, for many golfers, is buying the ability to hit the ball further into trouble. This is somewhat of a lighthearted look at golfers and equipment. The fact is properly fitted equipment is essential for every golfer but it still does not guarantee they will reach their full potential.



Technique

The next place golfers look to for improvement is on the lesson tee. Golf instruction is becoming an increasingly important part of the professional's job. Top instructors are charging hundreds of dollars per lesson and their appointment books are full. The trouble with instruction is that improvement, real, long-term improvement, takes time, patience and commitment. Unfortunately, many golfers do not have enough of these qualities. (That is why most would rather buy a club as a solution to their golf problems than to try to build a good swing.) Many golfers do not have the desire to make the commitment to change. They are looking for a quick fix. Spend an hour with a teaching professional or use one of the golf training aids the television airwaves are flooded with, and something magic happens. All golf sins are forgiven and all will be well for the rest of one's golfing days. If only it was that easy!

Even for committed students, over time it is easy to fall back into the old, bad habits and performance and enjoyment of the game deteriorate. The commitment is really a life long one. Now, do not take this as a call to eliminate golf instruction. I am a firm believer in instruction. Nothing can or will replace a technically correct and repeating golf swing. The time, effort and commitment put into lessons and practice with a good instructor will pay off with a lifetime of increased enjoyment of the game.

Fitness



Despite what many people would say, golf is an athletic game that requires strength and flexibility. Tour Players have recognized that improving their fitness level also improves their performance. There are few, if any, tour players who do not have a fitness program. A strength and flexibility program is very important for all golfers, it will help to hit the ball further, maintain energy levels throughout the game and help to prevent injury. There are many good sources of information about golf and fitness. A good place to start is with a book published by Human Kinetics titled Exercise Guide To Better Golf, by Dr. Frank Jobe.

Thinking



I have come to believe that the main reason people struggle to improve is because, despite the fact that they may be using the latest equipment, taking instruction to improve their technique, and improving their physical fitness, they are not improving their thinking. Golfers have largely ignored improved use of the brain as a way to improve their games and increase their enjoyment of golf. **Everything we do starts in the brain, a golfer is only as good as his/her thinking.** Every golfer can benefit by learning more about how to think properly while playing the game. I believe that golfers have a huge untapped potential that is just waiting to be unlocked. My goal is to help golfers find the key to that lock. **The beauty of these concepts is that they represent a simple, common sense approach to playing the game of golf. They are easy to learn and easy to apply.**

It is true that, right now, today, without changing your technique or buying another club, you can learn how to play better golf without practicing!

The Objective

My objective is to enable golfers of all abilities to reach their full potential and to have more fun by helping them develop an awareness and understanding of how to think properly about themselves, their golf games, playing strategy and equipment. And to inspire them to apply the concepts presented here to their golf games.

Playing better golf without practicing may sound too good to be true. How can it be that simple? Well, it can be. Reaching one's full potential in golf is much more than just hitting the golf ball. It is about "playing the game". Regardless of how a person goes about doing it, the objective of golf is to move the ball from the teeing ground into the hole in the fewest possible strokes. Everyone has a different way to get this done. Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. I believe that most golfers have not taken a look at the game of golf as they play it and given the topic any serious consideration. By understanding some basic concepts and by understanding themselves, golfers of all abilities can greatly increase their enjoyment of the game and shoot lower scores.

Golfers have recognized the psychological aspects of the game for decades. In 1890 Horace Hutchinson wrote,

"The best advice of all for nervous golfers is, that they should strive to concentrate all their attention upon the immediate stroke, banishing from their minds as much as possible all visions of its possible ultimate results." *Badminton Library of Golf*, page 211.

Unfortunately golfers have not considered psychology and improving the way they think on the course as a major factor in improvement. As we have seen, the traditional model of golf improvement has the player first relying on the performance of new equipment, then on golf instruction to improve the performance of his/her body. It is my suggestion that in order to reach their full potential, golfers must also use their brains to their full potential. Despite the fact that sport psychology has been around for decades, it has only

been in the past few years that tour professionals have started to learn and apply these psychological techniques. They have come to realize that at the PGA Tour level everyone has terrific physical skills. In large part, the difference between the great players and the good players are mental skills. Some players acquire the psychological knowledge through trial and error and others have the skills taught to them by their coaches or sport psychologists. Regardless of how the tour players learn these skills, it stands to reason that if they work for the best players they should also work for everyone else. For the most part, amateur golfers have never been exposed to these ideas. That is the reason why I am addressing this topic. Most golfers do not have the physical talent to be able to hit the ball like Tiger Woods or Annika Sorenstam, but everyone, absolutely, positively has the mental capacity to learn how to think like them! Listen to the tour players and the golf commentators talk about Tiger and nearly all will say that he has great athletic ability, but what sets him apart are his mental skills, especially his mental toughness. Annika Sorenstam has dedicated herself to learning how to think properly and it can be safely assumed that she is every bit as mentally tough as Tiger. Her 13 victories in 2002 are a testament to that.

Pause for Reflection



It is probably a good exercise to reflect back on why you play golf, what attracted you to the game, what you really like about the game, and what makes you excited about playing the game? Everyone plays the game for his or her own reasons; there is no right or wrong reason to play golf. The reasons could be companionship, competition, relaxation, fresh air and pleasant surroundings, business, to be with family members, or to experience that indescribably wonderful feeling of hitting the ball dead solid perfect and watching the ball soaring into the sky. Whatever your reasons are I hope the word fun is part of it. I don't know of anyone who looks forward to a round of golf because they can't wait to get angry and frustrated. Unfortunately, by the end of the round many people do find themselves angry and frustrated. If you find you have lost a

bit of the enjoyment for the game, read on and acquire the tools to enable you to enjoy the game regardless of the score.

It is also a good idea to take a look at what your strengths and weaknesses may be. One of the first steps in the process of improving is to **learn to love your game**. Loving your game can be difficult, especially for perfectionists, because they expect perfection and no one has or ever will be perfect at golf. Shorter hitters are seldom happy because they believe that to play better they need to keep up with the longer hitters. Not everyone is gifted with the talent to become a Professional Golfer, but **everyone has the talent to be a low handicap player**. Don't waste time trying to be something you are not. You can't play like someone else. Accept your limitations and focus on your abilities. **You don't have to be a great hitter of the ball to be a good player of the game**. This understanding and awareness is essential when it comes to determining the right equipment to use and to develop your playing strategy.

*"I see no reason, truly, why an average golfer, if he goes about it intelligently,
shouldn't play in the 70's."*

Ben Hogan, Five Lessons the Modern Fundamentals of Golf, Page 15.



The Mental Game

How many times have you had the experience of standing on the tee of one of the last few holes in a round of golf and suddenly realize that you have a great score going? You start to think that if you could just keep it going for the last few holes you might have a career low score. If you are like most golfers, once these ideas swept into your head, the next shot was probably a poor one. The swing that felt so natural now feels completely wrong. The pressure of trying to save the round and avoid hitting poor shots causes you to hit more poor shots ending your chances for a low score.

What happens to us when we feel pressure on the golf course? Why is it so hard to play to the best of our ability when we want to the most? For years I did not understand why some golfers would play better under pressure. Great players seem to thrive on being in pressure situations. The more important the situation, the better they play. Other players when placed in pressure situations fold-up like cheap tents in a windstorm. The pressure of the situation causes them to perform well below their ability. It seemed like some players had “it” and others didn’t have “it”, what ever “it” was. Perhaps some people were born with “it”. Perhaps the ability to handle pressure was a personality trait like being an extrovert or an introvert or like being good at math or being better with language skills. What ever “it” was remained a mystery.

My discovery of the solution to this mystery began when I had the opportunity to observe a 3-day program that Chuck Cook, 1996 PGA of America’s Teacher of the Year, hosted for members of a section of the Texas PGA. The program included presentations by Chuck and Dr. Richard Coop, an educational Psychologist from the University of North Carolina, about the brain, sport psychology and golf. That information was a revelation to me. It helped explain the problems golfers have in trying to handle pressure. It became clear that the ability to deal with pressure could be learned. Perhaps there was a ray of hope at the end of that dark tunnel.

Cerebral Combat



Chuck described the two hemispheres of the brain and the tasks that each of the hemispheres is responsible for. He then linked those tasks to golf. The following are from notes taken at that seminar.

The brain has two hemispheres, right and left. The left hemisphere is the analytical, rational side. It tends to prefer numbers and words. In golf, the left hemisphere is responsible for all the analysis that should happen before the swing starts. Lie of the ball, hole location, club selection, wind velocity and direction, target selection, aim and alignment are examples of analytical, left brain activities.

The right hemisphere of the brain is the creative, intuitive, athletic side. It tends to prefer pictures and feelings. In golf, the right side is responsible for visualization of the shot, the feel and tempo of the shot, imagination and creativity. It is the right side of the brain that sends the signals to the muscles to perform the golf swing.

Chuck went on to explain that people tend to prefer to function in either the left or right side of the brain. It would be my guess that artists, musicians and people in the advertising business would tend to be right brain dominant. That would fit with the creative nature of their work. On the other hand, it would be likely that engineers and accountants would tend toward preferring the analytical left-brain. Being analytical is a good trait for an engineer or an accountant to have.

I do not want to give you the impression that it is all or nothing. We each have a tendency that we prefer, but are still capable of tapping into the opposite side of the brain when required. Neither tendency predisposes a person to be better or worse at golf. In golf, problems occur when a player has too strong a tendency toward one side of the brain. For example, a golfer who is too left-brain dominant may tend to be overly analytical and cautious. This type of player fears making a mistake and tends to focus on all the places the ball should not go. This player's swing is slow and timid in an attempt

to steer the ball carefully around the course. The result is often short and crooked shots. In order to hit the ball further and create some birdie opportunities, this type of player needs to loosen up a bit, worry less about where he doesn't want the ball to go and swing with some reckless abandon. In other words, get more into the right- brain when it is time to swing the club.

Golfers who are too right brain dominant tend to pay little attention to details. Their style of play is often characterized by poor target and club selections, an overly aggressive strategy and long crooked shots. Right brain dominant players have little interest in learning about swing technique. These golfers play entirely by feel, like to gamble and play an aggressive, bash-it and chase-it style of golf. In order to eliminate the big numbers from the scorecard, this type of player needs to pay more attention to details and make better decisions regarding their playing strategy. In other words, get more into the left-brain before swinging the club.

Both sides of the brain play an important role in golf. The ideal situation is a balance between the two, to use each side of the brain at the right time for the correct tasks. A golfer should use the left side of the brain for analysis and decision-making, then turn it off and allow the right side to perform the task of hitting the shot.

Perhaps the best example of being able to separate the two functions of the brain has been Jack Nicklaus. He was terrific at evaluating each situation and determining a strategy. Then he switched into the right side of the brain and visualized the shot and his swing.

"I never hit a shot, even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head. It is like a color movie"

Jack Nicklaus, Golf My Way, Page 79.

People who tend to fold when the pressure is on stay in the left-brain when it is time to swing the club. Unfortunately the left-brain believes it is the smarter of the two and does not trust the "dumb jock" right brain to do its job of making a good swing. In an attempt

to over-control the swing, it sends out word-based instructions, such as, keep the left arm straight, keep the head down, shift your weight, follow-through, don't hit it in the water, and so on. This type of situation is the classic example of "paralysis by analysis". The right hemisphere of the brain and the muscles have a difficult time converting word-based commands into physical actions; they respond much better to visual and feel images. The right hemisphere just wants to be left alone to control the swing and it will do a very good job if it is allowed to. **When the left hemisphere is allowed to take control of the swing, it creates the exact problems it is trying to prevent.**

There is scientific evidence to support these theories about the functions of the left brain and right brain. One example of a golf research project was published in the March 2001 edition of "Golf Magazine". Dr. Debbie Crews of Arizona State University conducted the research. In the study, 10 amateur golfers who's average scores ranged from 83.5 to 98, were given the task of hitting 20 five-foot putts. Each time they performed this task, the situation changed and more pressure was added. The golfers' heart rate was monitored and their brain activity was recorded on an electroencephalographic machine (EEG).

The golfers were asked to hit 20 5-foot putts and see how many they could make. (No pressure). Next they were asked to hit the same putts again, but this time they would be filmed for a television show that would be broadcast to a national audience. (More pressure). Last they were asked to hit the same putts again but this time if they matched or beat the score they had from the first set of putts they would receive \$300.00. If they made less putts they would have to pay \$100.00. (Lots of pressure.) Five of the golfers won the \$300.00 and five failed.

Dr. Crews came to the following conclusions:

"Players who perform well under pressure have as much anxiety as those who choke." *Page 95.*

“Our chokers had the left side of their brains doing most of the work when the pressure was increased. The successful golfers had a comparable increase in brain activity, but that activity was spread evenly through both sides of the brain.”

Page 95.

“Imagery and target awareness are created in the right brain, when the left brain is dominant, the golfer becomes self-aware: What am I doing, how is my stroke, am I aligned correctly and so on. That kind of thinking leads to trouble.” *Page 95.*

“In other words, get the more creative right side of the brain involved if you want to produce in the clutch.” *Page 95*

At some point in time, good or bad, right or wrong, it is essential for a golfer to learn to trust their swing. Of course, the better the swing the easier it is to trust it. However, regardless of ability, when a golfer trusts their swing they have the best chance of getting the full potential out of the swing. Trust helps reduce left brain interference and places more of the control of the swing with the right side of the brain.

Remember the earlier example of the golfer starting to collapse once he realizes he is playing well. During the early holes in the round, old lefty was hanging out in the background, doing a bit of analysis before each shot, not really giving too much of a care about the game or where the ball was going. Mr. Right was being allowed to get the job done. The realization of a good score is the wake up call for lefty. He tells the right side to get out of the way, that he is going to take over to make sure that no mistakes are made on the remaining holes. The right side tends to allow the left side to take control. Of course, as we know now, this exchange of control marks the beginning of the collapse.

The section describing the pre-shot routine explains how to use both sides of the brain at the correct times.

Interference



When golfers look for ways to improve, what they are looking for, whether they know it or not, is a way to reduce anything that is interfering with their performance. This leads us back to the presentation by Dr. Coop. He explained how interference had to be reduced in order for a person to reach his/her full potential. Less interference equals better performance.

The interference he described was:

- Fear.
 - Fear of failure: Trying too hard and caring too much about the result.
 - Fear of success: Being uncomfortable and insecure when playing much better than usual or being afraid of the additional expectations that success will bring.

- Expectations.
 - The unrealistic level of performance the golfer expects from each shot or each game.
 - The golfer allows the pressure of other people's expectations of his/her ability to have a negative effect on performance.

- Lack of concentration.
 - Internal distractions. Fear and doubt.
 - External distractions. Noise, movement, playing partners' comments, etc.

- Worrying about "what if".
 - What if I hit it into the water, bunker, trees, etc?
 - What if I miss this short putt?
 - What if I top it off the first tee?
 - What if I leave the ball in the bunker?

The above list refers to types of mental interference. There are many other things that could be interfering with your performance. Improper equipment, incorrect technique,

lack of practice, lack of playing, poor physical condition and flexibility, poor strategy, lack of a proper warm-up, and stress from work and home.

It is a good idea to write down all the things that could or are interfering with your ability to play your best golf. Once the interference is recognized you can start the plan to reduce or eliminate it from your thought processes and your game.



Mental Toughness

Mental toughness is the ability to stay positive and focused when things are not going well. It is also the ability to perform well in pressure situations. Mental toughness is both a learned skill and a personal commitment. It is about how a person decides to react to the events that occur during a round of golf.

"I refuse to yield to pressure."

Tiger Woods, How I Play Golf Page 263.

As humans we have the ability to choose how we react to the events that occur on the golf course.

When things go wrong, mentally weak players tend to choose to:

- Get angry and frustrated.
- Feel sorry for themselves.
- Complain.
- Focus on the poor shots that have already happened.
- Give up.
- Stop having fun.
- Ruin the fun for their playing companions.



When things go wrong, mentally tough players tend to choose to:

- Accept it as part of the game and continue to enjoy the challenge of playing the game.
- Stay positive and focused on the shot to be played.
- Stick to their game plan and routine.
- Never give up. The next shot could be the best one they ever hit, if they allow it to happen.
- Take pride in knowing they tried their best and got the most out of their abilities that day.



How do we learn to be mentally tough? First it is important to appreciate the things that a golfer can control and those things that are out of the golfers control.

What can you control?

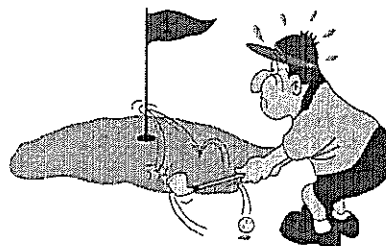
- Maintaining your enjoyment of the game.
- Attitude and expectations, how you think and how you react to the events that take place during a round of golf. Not getting too excited when things are going well or too down when things are going poorly. (Mental toughness)
- Staying with your routine and game plan. (Confidence)
- How much and how well you practice. (Preparation)



If something is within your control you should use it to your advantage.

What is out of your control?

- Bad bounces and poor lies.
- Golf course conditions.
- Weather.
- What other players are doing.
- Speed of play.
- Other people's expectations.



If something is out of your control, the time and effort spent worrying about it is another source of interference for your game.



Attitudes and Expectations

Bobby Jones, winner of the Grand Slam in 1930, had this to say about expectations.

“I was amazed to find that in some rounds, fairly good from a scoring standpoint, I could find only one or two shots which had not been miss-hit to some degree...the following conclusions were inescapable:

I must be prepared for the making of mistakes.

I must try always to select the shot to be played and the manner of playing it so as to provide the widest possible margin for error.

I must expect to have to do some scrambling and not to be discouraged if the amount of it happens to be more than normal.” Golf is my Game, page 69.

Very often a golfer's expectations set the person up for failure before they hit a golf ball. The truth is, that for most golfers their expectations far exceed their abilities. Most golfers compare their performance to the best shots they ever hit or the lowest score they ever shot. If they once hit a 7 iron 160 yards then the 7 iron is their 160 yard club, despite the fact that, from 160 yards, the ball comes up short most of the time. Same thing with score, many golfers start their rounds expecting to be able to play to a score equal to or lower than the best score they have ever scored. Both of those would be nice but are not very realistic. These expectations lead to the necessity that the player hit almost every shot perfectly. If they do not hit every shot perfectly, then it is going to be impossible to meet their expectations. When expectations are not met, anger and frustration sets in. The truth is no one is going to hit every shot perfectly; in fact most every shot we hit is, to some degree, a miss hit. In 2000 Tiger Woods had, what could be argued, as the greatest season in the history of professional golf. How many perfect shots do you think he hit that year?

“I won 12 times around the world in 2000, including three majors, and I only remember hitting one shot I would call perfect – a 3-wood on No. 14 on the Old Course at St. Andrews in the third round of the British Open.”

Tiger Woods, How I Play Golf, Page 5.

So, the best player in the world, playing some of the best golf in history hits one perfect shot in a season. Where does that leave the rest of us? Granted, Tiger’s standard for perfection is different from ours, but the point is still valid, perfectly struck shots are the exception not the norm. Expecting perfection sets a person up for bitter disappointment, frustration, anger and failure.

“To play well you need to let your expectations go.”

Tibetan Lama, Kanga Rinpoche, Golf Digest, November 2002

Think about what you expect to have happen when you play golf and how you react when those expectations are not met. Are your expectations unrealistic? Are they causing frustration and anger? The following is a list of realistic expectations that will help a golfer play better, maintain a positive attitude and have more fun:

- Expect to enjoy yourself.
- Expect to try your best on every shot.
- Expect to make some great swings.
- Expect to make some poor swings.
- Expect to have good bounces and bad bounces.
- Expect some lies in the fairway to be poor.
- Expect some lies in the rough to be good.
- Expect to miss some putts you thought you would make.
- Expect to hole or come close to holing, some putts and chips you thought were unlikely to sink or get close.
- Expect the good and bad bounces to even out over time.
- Expect the unexpected, both good and bad.

When a golfer arrives at the first tee with realistic expectations it is easier to maintain a positive attitude during the round and to have more fun. By accepting the fact that we are not perfect and expecting both good and bad things to occur during a round of golf a player rarely gets surprised regardless of what happens.

The challenge for us is to learn to accept the result of each shot. Many golfers, especially those with a very competitive nature, find it difficult to accept the fact that some of the shots they hit will not turn out the way they wanted them to. Learning to accept the result does not suggest a person should play without a competitive passion, quite the opposite. To play to the best of their ability golfers must direct the competitive energy in a positive way rather than a negative and destructive manner.

Accepting the results allows a player to focus their attention on the shot to be played, not on thinking about the disagreeable results of past shots or worrying about the results of the next shot. In a presentation to participants in a CPGA Teaching Certification course, Moe Norman, Canadian golf legend, and perhaps the greatest ball striker in the history of the game, told us that golfers should play golf with a *“learned attitude of indifference to the result.”*

At first I had a difficult time understanding this statement. How can you care about your golf game and not worry about the result of your golf swings? It took some time and learning but now I realize that Moe is absolutely right, we have to learn to be indifferent to the result, it is not easy but it is essential. **It is much better to focus on the process of hitting good shots than it is to worry about where the ball might go.** We get in trouble when we care too much about the result and end up trying too hard. Think about a time when you were playing really well and then realized just how well you were playing. What happens next? You began to worry about your score and about trying to avoid hitting poor shots. Then the left side of the brain wants to take over control. My guess is you went from a state of relaxation to a state of tension, from swinging freely to swinging tentatively. The result, of tense, tentative, “please go straight” swings is, of

course, usually not very good. Before you know it, one bad shot follows another, putts miss the hole and the tension and frustration levels continue to rise.

I continually tell my students that they have to give up control to get control.

The more relaxed and confident you are and the less you try to control where the ball goes the better the chances are that the ball will go exactly where you want it to.

Make every swing with the same freedom as if you are standing on top of a cliff overlooking the ocean and all you want to do is hit the ball toward the water.

Accepting the results allows a player to focus all their attention on the shot to be played, not on thinking about the disagreeable results of past shots. **Never let a poor shot interfere with the next shot.** Walter Hagen, 5-time winner of the PGA Championship, was said to be the master of the recovery shot. I believe the reason for his uncanny ability to pull off spectacular recovery shots was the fact that when he stood on the first tee, he knew he would hit several poor shots during each round. He did not know when or where they would occur, but he knew at some point in the round he would hit several of them. Because he expected to hit poor shots he was not surprised or angered by them when they occurred. By being unperturbed he was able to focus all his attention on the recovery shot and pulled off some spectacular results.

When you watch tour professionals on television you will see them hit a poor shot, but very seldom do you see them hit two poor shots in a row. By the time they get to the ball, thoughts of the last shot are gone from their minds and their focus is entirely on the next shot to be played. How many times have you missed a short putt and still been thinking about that missed putt while standing over your tee shot on the next hole? What happens next? Because your attention was focused on the missed putt you probably hit a poor tee shot. The poor tee shot leads to increased frustration and anger, which leads to less focus on the next shot. Which, of course, results in another poor one.

The downward cycle has begun. A minor event, missing a short putt, has been allowed to become a major, game-destroying catastrophe.

Being able to stay positive and focused on the shot to be played is so important. **You never know, if you allow it to happen, the next shot could be the greatest shot you ever hit!** It is unlikely to happen if you have given in to anger and self-pity and are having a “cerebral melt down” over the last missed shot. Listen to PGA Tour players and you will frequently hear them talk about “staying in the present.” What they are referring to is keeping their focus on the shot to be played. No regrets about past shots and no projecting their imagination into what might happen in the future.

“...I am able to accept the fact that I am not perfect, accept the fact that I already hit the shot, and accept it as part of the game of golf. When I move on to the next shot, I’m not trying to fix anything; I’m trying to hit a good shot. Which is why I’m able to hit so many good shots and make so many birdies. A lot of people get stuck in the process of trying to fix things. That doesn’t work; it puts you in a negative frame of mind and inhibits your performance.”

Phil Mickelson, Golf Magazine, March 2003. Page 142

Anger and self-pity create a terrible state of mind. Also, and equally destructive, these mental states create physical changes in the body. Muscles get tense and weaker; blood flow and breathing are also affected. Think back to the last time you were angry on the golf course, or had a fight with a spouse or your boss. Remember how you felt both mentally and physically. Being in that mental and physical state is definitely not going to allow you to produce your best golf shots.

“Anger makes us stupid.”

Lynn Marriott

Think back to when you hit some of your best shots. My guess is words like relaxed, calm, smooth, balanced, and effortless would describe your best swings. The purpose of these mental skills is to get you into that state as often as possible.

The brain remembers any angry feelings created when poor shots occur. Here is an interesting piece of information that Lynn Marriott and Pia Nilsson shared with us at a PGA education seminar. (Lynn and Pia are ranked among the top 100 teachers by Golf Digest Magazine and have developed golf instruction programs called "Coaching for the Future.") The brain, perhaps as a self-defense mechanism, tends to remember the very bad things and the very good things that happen to us. When we are faced with similar situations the brain recalls these memories. When you think about it that makes sense. Thousands of years ago, as humans were evolving, it was not that important to remember all the mundane details of day to day life, but it was rather important for survival to be able to remember all the very good things and the very bad. If Thug and Ug go out hunting for food and Thug gets attacked by a saber tooth tiger, it is in Ugs' best interest to remember that event so the next time he comes across a saber tooth tiger he doesn't say "here kitty kitty."

The implication for golf is that if we have a severe, angry reaction to an event on the course, that reaction is indelibly etched in our memory. When faced with a similar situation, the brain recalls those negative mental and physical states. Part of the reason we choke, is our brains subconsciously and at times consciously, bring back all those negative images and they have a negative effect on us the next time we are faced with a similar shot.

How a golfer chooses to react to a situation is so important. **Do not allow negative reactions to infest and poison your brain.** Shrug off the bad shots, accept them as part of the game and move on. **Enjoy the good shots; remember the feeling of the good swings, fill your memory with positive reactions.** Tiger Woods had this to say about the best shot he hit during the 2000 season.

“Moments like that stay fresh in my mind, providing a positive image for future reference. Those images are critical when the game is on. They may even be the difference between success and failure.”

How I Play Golf, Page 5.

You must make the decision, before arriving at the course, that you will stay positive and not allow anything to change that positive mind-set. Positive affirmations, like the examples below, are a powerful way to reinforce your resolve. It is a good idea to review this list of affirmations before every round of golf as a way to keep them fresh in your mind and to help stay committed to them.

- I enjoy myself when playing golf, regardless of the score.
- I stay positive during my golf game.
- I focus my attention on the shot to be played.
- I do not allow other players, bad breaks or poor swings to bother me.
- I stick to my routine and game plan.
- I am good company on the course and people enjoy being in my group.
- I commit 100% to each swing and accept the result.

If you have been plagued by anger, self-pity, and negative thoughts, you will be amazed at how much more fun you will have and how much better you will play when you change your thinking.

“I realize that a poor shot is just a swing away. I also realize that once I’ve hit a poor shot my only recourse is to hit a better shot on the next swing. In other words, I’ve learned to hit and forget it. There’s no sense dwelling on a mistake. You can’t hit the shot again, so forget about it.”

Tiger Woods, How I Play Golf, page 268.

Be your own best friend when things start to go wrong during a round. It is easy to beat ourselves up with destructive self-talk. Beating yourself up over a missed shot is not going to improve your chances of making a better swing on the next shot. Do not allow yourself to become negative or start badmouthing yourself. As soon as you start, force yourself to snap out of it and be positive. Even on a day when you do not play well, there

is great satisfaction in knowing you tried your best on every shot and got the most out of your game that day. **Never give up!** Use positive self-talk to build up your confidence and help stay positive. Keep your head up, shoulders back and walk with pride, you are what you think you are.

“Everything in this world with its head down gets eaten.”

“No gloomy guy dragging around looking at his shoe-tops ever won anything worth winning.”

Jackie Burke Jr. *Golf Digest Magazine*, March 1996, Page 83.



Pre-Shot Routine



As we have seen, the keys to playing your best golf lie in the ability to focus on the process of hitting good shots. We do this by staying focused in the present, focusing on good targets, not worrying too much about where the ball goes and accepting the results. It is important to remember that everyone, from beginners to the best players in the world, feels pressure when they play golf. The difference is the best players have learned the mental skills to allow them to perform well under pressure. When they have the lead during the last few holes of a tournament, outwardly tour players seem calm. During the victory interview the players often comment on how they felt like they were “choking their guts out”. Inside they felt incredible pressure yet they were able to continue to perform at a high level. An effective pre-shot routine is one of the most important skills to learn to help the golfer focus his/her mind on the right things at the right time and overcome their anxiety. Annika Sorenstam had this to say about her pre-shot routine and how it helped her to become the first LPGA player to shoot 59.

“I stick to this routine whether I’m playing good or bad, or when I’m very nervous, as I was over the last few holes. Not only is the routine a trigger point for the shot, it puts me in a comfort zone because I do it all the time.”

Golf Magazine, June 2001. Page 59.

The pre-shot routine is the process that is used to help focus attention on the shot to be played. **The routine should be used for every shot!** Also, the routine should not become a ritual ceremony, from the time the club comes out of the bag until the ball is struck should not exceed 30 seconds. Once a person is comfortable with the process, the time it takes to go through the routine should not vary more than a couple of seconds, one way or the other.

If a player gets too quick, they are probably not paying enough attention to detail and run the risk of making a hasty decision and a reckless swing. If a player starts to take too much time, it is a sign they are becoming indecisive. Indecision usually causes muscle tension, which results in tentative swings. Tentative swings seldom create good golf shots.

Good players have a routine they use for every shot. If distracted during the routine, they will stop and go back to the start of the routine. Near the end of the 4th round of the 2000 WGC American Express Championship, as Mike Wier was about to start his backswing on an important tee shot, the wind blew a leaf across the tee in front of him. With his focus interrupted by the leaf, Wier stepped away from the ball. He went over to his caddy and, placed the club back into the bag. He took a few seconds to re-focus, pulled the same club back out of the bag, went through his routine again and hit a beautiful drive. Wier went on to win the championship, and the million-dollar prize, in no small part due to his ability to focus on the shot to be played and stick to his pre-shot routine.

Most golfers do not have a routine. Some golfers place all their attention on swing technique and clutter their minds with technical swing thoughts. As I described earlier, players who focus on technique will have trouble making a good swing because the brain has a difficult time translating word-based instructional commands into physical motions.

Others are obsessed with thoughts of where they do not want the ball to go. These golfers worrying about “what if.” Their mind is full of visions that strike fear into their hearts, things like, the ball sailing into bunkers, water, or forests, the short putt missing

the hole or the ball dribbling off the tee. Players who are fearful of where they do not want the ball to go are also setting themselves up for failure. The brain is very powerful. It is also, at times, rather difficult to control. **Whatever the brain is focused on, either where you want the ball to go, or what you do not want the ball to do, the brain will create a golf swing that will send the ball to that exact spot.** The brain does not understand the concept of “Don’t”. Don’t think about a red sports car. What did you just think about, a red sports car right? The more a person is obsessed about the hazards, the more likely they are to hit into one of them. The more a golfer focuses on good targets, the more likely they are to hit the good targets. Pay attention to the correct things, (good targets and good results) as the saying goes, “The mind is a terrible thing to waste”.

The pre-shot routine has two basic parts:

Part I (The analysis.)

- The player assesses the shot to be played; variables such as yardage, wind, lie of the ball, hole location, hazards etc. (Left brain activity)
- The player selects a target, ball flight, a club and then commits 100% to that decision.

Once these selections are made, part I is complete.

Part II (Target focus)

- The brain filters out external distractions; the player’s attention is narrowed down to the target. The player visualizes the ball going to the target. (Right brain activity)
- The player stays focused only on the ball and the target commits 100% to the swing and makes a fluid, smooth, powerful, balanced, tension free swing.

If at anytime during Part II negative thoughts about where the player doesn’t want the ball to go, indecision about club selection or technical swing thoughts enter the player’s mind, the process should stop and the player go back to the start of Part I and begin again.

Once you have gone through the process to select a target, it is important that you take the care to aim the club at that target. Getting aimed and aligned properly is much easier to say than to do. Because we stand to the side of target line, it is easy for our eyes to play tricks on us. From the side of the target line our eyes want to focus on the target and the brain wants to get the body to line up with the target. If the body is lined up at the target, then the clubface will probably be aimed to the right of the target. It is the club that is going to hit the ball therefore the club must be aimed at the target. If the club is aimed at the target, then the body must be aimed to the left of the target. (For a right handed player.) That is why right-handed people tend to set-up with the club aimed to the right of the target and left-handed people tend to line up with the club aimed to the left of the target.

If this is confusing to you, imagine you are standing behind the ball looking down the fairway at a green. Imagine railroad tracks running down the fairway onto the green. For a right-handed person, in a correct set-up, the ball would be on the rail on the right side of the tracks and that rail would run directly to the spot on the green the person wanted the ball to go to. The players' feet would be standing on the left rail of the tracks and, because the tracks are parallel to one another, that rail would be aimed to the left of the target. Many golfers hit the ball to the right of the target and they think it is their swing that is at fault. It is actually just improper alignment.

Because our eyes want to play tricks on us, the target selection process should always start from behind the ball. When we look directly down the target line from behind the ball our eyes work properly but it is still difficult to aim the club at a distant target. To help us to be sure we get the clubface aimed at the target it is a good idea to select an intermediate target. An intermediate target is a spot 12 to 24 inches in front of the ball and directly in line with the target. This spot might be a tuft of grass, a spot of discolored grass, a divot or similar mark on the ground.

Once this intermediate target is selected the player should keep this spot in his field of vision, step into the set-up, point the face of the club directly at the intermediate target

and then align the body and feet parallel and left of the target line (for a right-hander).
The sequence is always aim the club first and the body second!

Lets review the pre-shot routine:

1. Analyze the shot to be played.

- Yardage
- Wind
- Hazards
- Lie of the ball
- Select a target, ball flight and club, and commit to it.

2. Swing the club.

- The focus shifts to the target.
- From behind the ball, select an intermediate target.
- Step into the set-up, aiming the club then the body and feet.
- Look at the target, burn the image of the target into your brain!
- Commit 100% to the swing
- Make a fluid, smooth, powerful, balanced swing.

3. Observe the results.

- If the shot is good, remember the feeling of the swing and enjoy the result.
- If the shot is not a good one, accept it and shrug it off.



Swing Thoughts and Practice Swings

The time for the practice swing is before Part II of the pre-shot routine starts. The best use of a practice swing is to try to get the feeling of the shot to be played and to relax muscles. Unfortunately, too many golfers think about technical swing mechanics during

the practice swing. Then they carry those swing mechanics thoughts into the real swing and you now know how destructive that can be to your golf swing. It is permissible to make a couple of practice swings to try to correct swing problems, but once it is time to hit the ball, the focus is only on the target, not on swing mechanics. The practice range after the round is the best place to work on any swing problems that appear during the round.

Here are the swing thoughts Annika Sorenstam used to win her first major championship, the 1996 U.S. Women's Open. They are a terrific example of great swing thoughts because they focus on the process needed to hit a good shot. There are no technical thoughts about how to actually swing the club.

- *Pick your target and trust your aim.*
- *Maintain a smooth tempo throughout your swing.*
- *Commit 100% to the shot and don't worry too much about the result*

Golf Digest Magazine, January, 1997. Page 76.

Relaxation



You can be sure that at some time during the round you will experience muscle tension. It is important to find a way to reduce that tension. One very good method is to take a deep breath, in through the nose and slowly exhale through the mouth. As you exhale feel the tension flow out of the muscles. Another good method is to gently shake your arms to keep them loose, shrug your shoulders, and roll your head, anything like that to loosen up the muscles. The reason for relaxing the muscles is to help them perform better during the swing, so the closer in time you can perform these relaxation techniques to when you swing the club the better.

Understanding Yourself!



It is important to be able to identify what your playing style is like. Do you tend to be too aggressive or too conservative with your style of play? Do you play the “bash and chase” style where you try to birdie every hole by smashing driver off the tee on every par 4 and par 5 and fire at every flag? Or do you play the “please go straight” style where you are afraid to make a mistake, over analyze the shot and try to cautiously steer the ball around the course?

There are times when it is good to be aggressive and there are times when it is good to be cautious, but too much of either will have a negative effect on your golf score. The “bash and chase” player may make some birdies. Unfortunately, due to the overly aggressive nature of his swing he will hit many long and crooked shots. Couple that with an aggressive, high-risk strategy and the aggressive player makes too many double and triple bogies and not enough pars.

The “please go straight” player also has downfalls. Being too safe seldom sets the player up to make many pars and birdies. Being too worried about keeping the ball in play creates an overly cautious and fearful mind-set that creates a tentative and tension filled swing. Tension is one of the worst things for a golf swing. The result of a tense swing is usually a short and crooked shot. Being short and crooked is certainly no better than being long and crooked.

The great Bobby Jones, winner of the “Grand Slam” in 1930, wrote:

“It took some doing, I’ll admit, but it is a fact that I never did any real amount of winning until I learned to adjust my ambitions to more reasonable prospects shot by shot, and to strive for a rate of performance that was consistently good and reliable, rather than placing my hopes upon the accomplishment of a series of brilliant sallies.”

Golf is my game, page 68.

Think about how you tend to play golf. Here are some questions that may help you clarify whether you prefer to function in the right side of your brain or the left.

You prefer the right brain if you:

1. Swing by feel and are not too interested in technical swing theory.
2. You are imaginative, creative and aggressive with your golf shots and approach to the game.
3. You care more about how you score than what your swing looks like.
4. When learning new techniques you prefer to perform the whole motion focusing on the correct feel for the motion.
5. You do not need to know the exact yardage to the hole; you can trust your “gut feeling” about what club to use.
6. You like to hit the ball hard and do not care too much about missing fairways and greens.

You prefer the left brain if you:

1. Need to understand the theory of the swing before you can begin to perform it.
2. You consider strategy and having a game plan important.
3. You feel the need to swing well in order to play well.
4. When playing golf and correcting swing problems you focus on correct technique.
5. You want to know the exact yardage to the hole in order to select a club and feel confident in your set-up.
6. You prefer to hit the ball straight and do not like to miss fairways and greens.

If you tend to be too much one way or the other you need to get more to the middle of the extremes. How do you find this balance? The first step is to adopt the philosophy that Dr. Bob Rotella advocates in his book, “Golf is not a Game of Perfect”.

“I teach a conservative strategy and a cocky swing. You want to play each hole in such a way that you’re confident you can execute each shot you attempt. That gives you a cocky swing, which is another way of saying that you swing aggressively, that you swing with trust. It produces your best results.” (Page 148)

On holes with a narrow landing area, Tiger Woods often hits a 2 iron from the tee. That is the conservative strategy. He has selected a club that he feels will allow him the best chance to get the ball onto the fairway and still hit the ball far enough that he can reach the green with the next shot. When he swings the 2 iron he makes his trademark powerful, aggressive swing. He definitely does not make a tentative swing in an attempt to steer the ball straight. He rips at it!

A word of caution is needed here. An aggressive swing is not a swing that is so hard or so fast that the player is out of control. The swing should always stay in balance and be at about 85% of maximum power. An aggressive swing is a swing that is powerful, smooth, fluid, balanced, that the player trusts, and is 100% committed to.

Very often players will try to hit a shot that they have very little chance of pulling off. Part of their brain wants to “go for it” and another part of their brain says, “You couldn’t get the ball there even if you hit the best shot of your life”. An example of this would be attempting to hit a long iron out of the rough, from a downhill lie, to a green guarded in front by water. Consciously or subconsciously, the player knows it is an impossible shot but tries the shot anyway. The cognitive dissonance makes it impossible for the player to commit to the shot.

It is easier to be 100% committed to the shot if realistic decisions are made that both sides of the brain can agree on.

Playing the Game

“You can hit your shots great and still shoot 80 every day because of poor management. The shots are 30 percent of the game. Judgment is 70 percent.”

Ben Hogan



The objective of the game is to shoot the lowest possible score, keep the game as simple as possible and to have as much fun as possible. By now I hope you agree that it is inevitable that everyone will make swing errors and that when they do occur, you will be committed to being indifferent to them. An important goal to strive for would be to avoid making mental errors.

“Action before thought is the ruination of most of your shots.”

Tommy Armour. How To Play Your Best Golf All The Time, Page 22.

The first consideration, when it comes to playing the game, is to commit 100% to every shot. If a player is not committed to the shot it is nearly impossible to hit a good shot. A good example of not being able to commit to a shot comes from Davis Toms at the 2001 PGA Championship. On the par 5 finishing hole of the tournament, Toms had a bit of a downhill lie on the fairway for his second shot. He wanted to go for the green with the shot but just didn't like his chances of hitting the ball well enough to get it over the water in front of the green. Because he just could not commit to the shot over the water he was smart enough to play a shot he could commit to. He played an iron short of the water, hit a wedge close, and made the putt to win the championship. It is more important to be decisive than it is to be correct.

“As far as I am concerned, if you are decisive, you are correct. I guarantee you, I can hit a 6-iron 175 yards, a 5-iron 175 and a 7-iron 175.

All I need is to believe in the shot.”

Brad Faxon, Golf Digest, May 2002. Page 180.

So, play the shot you are confident with and have a high percentage of pulling off. If you believe you can hit the shot, there is a very good chance you will, even if you have the wrong club in your hands. If you are standing over the ball and do not trust your decision, it is very likely that you will make a poor swing, even if it was the correct decision.

Commit to the shot and make a fluid, smooth, relaxed, balanced, powerful swing.

“You might be wrong but never in doubt.”

Dr. Richard Coop

From the Tee



On wide-open holes, hit the ball as far as possible. This does not mean a person should mindlessly swing away with reckless abandon. It means that you select a good target in the fairway, select the longest club you have that will most likely hit the ball onto the fairway and then make a powerful, balanced, committed swing. On narrow, or shorter holes, find the best combination of distance and direction. The first consideration is to get the ball on the fairway! That might mean hitting a 3, 5 or 7 wood from the tee; it may even be a medium iron. The second consideration is to get the ball far enough down the fairway to reach the green on the second shot of a par 4 hole or third shot on a par 5 hole. If there are hazards down the side of the fairway, tee the ball up on the side of the tee that the hazard is on, this will make it easier to aim away from the trouble.

To the Green



Taking aim at the flag regardless of where it's located on the green or what club the player has in his/her hands, is a very difficult thing for many golfers to stop doing. There is something about the flagstick that seems to pull our attention toward it.

Unfortunately, aiming at the flag can get us into trouble. Few players have the ability to consistently control the ball with the pinpoint accuracy required to attack difficult hole locations.

Very often the reason that PGA Tour players make bogies is because they get too aggressive with their approach shots. They miss hit them just a bit and the ball ends up near the green but in a difficult situation and they cannot get the ball up and down.

When evaluating an approach shot to the green it is important to remember that the primary objective is to get the ball onto the green, no easy task, as even PGA Tour players, on average, miss one third of the greens they aim at. The secondary objective is to get the ball close to the hole. **Most players need to aim at the middle of the green to give them the greatest margin for error.** Virtually every shot we hit is, to a lesser or greater degree, a miss-hit and the ball seldom goes exactly at the target we are aimed at. These miss-hit shots often start out aimed at the middle of the green and have the good fortune to end up near the hole. A great example of this is the amazing story of 72-year-old Donna Duke. Since taking the game of golf up at the age of 51, she has recorded 53 holes-in one. This is what she has to say about her success? *“The key to why so many have gone in, I think, is that the half swing helps my accuracy, and I always just aim for the center of the green.”* *Golf Magazine, December, 2002. Page 50.*

Never aim at sucker pins!!

Webster’s dictionary describes a sucker as...”a person easily cheated or taken in”. In golf, a sucker pin is one that is cut very near the edge of a green that is protected by water, sand or steep mounds. This hole location tempts the unsuspecting “sucker” to aim at it, unfortunately its location requires a perfect shot. Anything less than perfect and the ball ends up in a very difficult lie that could cost the golfer one or more strokes.

Do not allow yourself to be cheated by sucker pins. If the hole is located in a well protected corner of the green, play to a safe spot toward the middle of the green. There are few advantages in attacking this type of hole location and many disadvantages.

Would you rather have a 25 foot putt or a shot out of a greenside bunker, or a pitch shot

up a slope with virtually no green between your ball and the hole, or worse, a drop out of a greenside water hazard?

From 25 feet most golfers can get the ball into the hole in two shots about 80% of the time. Good putters would get it down in two 90% of the time or more. The best players in the world get the ball up and down out of a greenside bunker about 60% of the time. My guess is for most amateurs it is well below 50%. For pitch and chip shots where the hole is cut very close to where the ball is or if there is a steep slope or deep greenside rough tour players might get it up and down in two shots 70% of the time. Again most amateurs would be well below 50%. With the one stroke penalty associated with a ball in the water, a person would have to chip it in from the edge of the hazard to make a par. Getting the ball up and down in two is highly unlikely.

Get the ball safely onto the green!

Avoid short siding yourself. If the pin is located on the left side of the green, it is always best to aim slightly to the right of it. If the hole is cut on the right side of the green it is best to aim slightly to the left of it. If a person misses the green on the same side that the hole is cut on, even if there is no hazard, there is usually so little green between the edge of the green and the hole that it is a very difficult shot to get the ball up onto the green and into the hole in two shots.

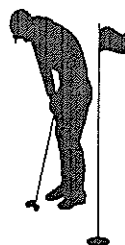
“But it is even more difficult to get up and down from the short side of the greens, which is where I have been missing too frequently.”

Phil Mickelson. Golf Magazine, March 2003. Page 145.

Given the fact that anything less than a perfect shot will almost always cost a player a stroke, why voluntarily allow that to happen? If the hole is in a sucker location aim away from it! Select a safe spot toward the middle of the green away from the trouble.

If you are the type of player who just can't aim at anything but the flag, here is another reason to aim to a safe spot. Dave Pelz, scientist turned short game guru, has conducted extensive research on putting and the short game. He tracked PGA tour players and charted the number of putts they sank from various distances. (Dave Pelz's Short Game Bible, Page 29.) The results will surprise you.

- ◆ From 6 feet they make 50%
- ◆ From 10 feet they make 30%
- ◆ From 15 feet they make 15%
- ◆ From 20 feet they make 10%
- ◆ From 25 feet they make 5%



From the above information it is easy to see that in order to have a good chance to hole out in one stroke, a person needs to hit the ball very close to the hole, inside 10 feet. Is it worth bringing all the trouble into play by attacking the flag when there is no guarantee that even if the shot lands on the green, that it will end up tight to the pin?

There are times to be aggressive. A golfer needs to create the opportunity to score well. The key is to be able to identify the right opportunities.

Most golf course superintendents use a system to determine the daily hole locations. In general they will make six of the hole locations difficult, six will be of average difficulty and six will be relatively easy. The holes will also have a balance of front, back and middle locations as well as left side, right side and center locations.

The six holes that are cut in "easy to get to" locations (near the middle of the green) are the holes that a golfer should be able to attack. The six that are cut in the medium difficult locations (toward the sides of the green but not too close to the edge) could be attacked as long as the golfer is hitting a short enough club that it is likely that the shot will turn out as planned, an 8 iron or shorter should be safe for most golfers. The six holes that are cut in the difficult locations (tucked right behind a bunker or very near the

edge of the green) should not be attacked. A golfer should allow the situation to dictate how aggressive to be.

One final thought about hitting shots to the green. Be sure to use enough club! You may have noticed that there are more hazards located toward the front of the greens than are located at the back. Also, most golfers overestimate the distance they can fly the ball with each club. Go out to a par 3 hole and spend a couple of hours watching where the tee shots end up. There will be way more balls toward the front of the green than toward the back. As a rule of thumb select enough club so that a shot that is hit dead solid perfect will reach the back of the green. A shot that is struck about average will find the center of the green and even a miss hit will carry the front hazards and fly onto the front portion of the green.

Even with the best of planning and target selection it is inevitable that some shots will end up off the fairway. **When your shots end up in trouble the first objective is to get the ball back into play!** Too often golfers try to play a hero shot to get the ball onto the green. They pile up the strokes by trying near impossible shots that just get them further into trouble. If you missed the 50-yard wide fairway what makes you think you can hit the ball out through the 5-foot wide gap in the trees? Accept the fact that the poor shot might cost a stroke; get the ball back onto the fairway, hit it onto the green. It is not a good strategy to take risks and end up having one bad shot to cost you three or four strokes.

“Hit the shot you know you can hit, not the one you think you should.”

Dr. Bob Rotella

“Play the shot you’ve got the greatest chance of playing well and play the shot that makes the next shot easy.”

Tommy Armour, How to Play your Best Golf all the Time. Page 14.

“Tools of the Trade.”



With the advancements in golf club technology and all the different styles, sizes, shapes that clubs come in today, a person can easily customize a set of golf clubs to match their ability. Properly fitted clubs are extremely important; they will definitely help you hit the ball further and straighter! Most of the major club manufacturers have custom fitting systems available. Before you buy another club go see your PGA Professional and get your set properly fitted. Despite what many people think, even great golf swings cannot produce great results with improperly fitted equipment.

The single biggest equipment-related problem that golfers have relates to their egos. They try to use clubs other people expect them to use rather than using clubs that are best suited for their games. For example, the 7 wood is a terrific club. It is easy to hit from a variety of lies. It hits the ball high, lands it softly and is fairly forgiving on off-center hits. Despite its obvious advantages over a long iron, many golfers call the 7 wood and “old man’s” club or some other equally derogatory name. Their ego will not allow them to carry one because they fear being teased by their playing companions. They continue to carry a 3 iron. Presumably it is manlier to hit low screamers with a 3 iron that plug into the face of greenside bunkers or never hold the green, than it is to hit high shots with the 7 wood that carry the front bunkers and stay on the green.

Never let your ego get in the way of lower scores and more fun. Evaluate the clubs you are using. If there are any that you cannot hit consistently well at least 50% of the time, replace them with a tool that will work better. Why pack around equipment that you do not or cannot use?

Let’s take a look at a set of golf clubs, starting with the **driver**.

For golfers who have a clubhead speed below 85mph, it is recommended that they do not use a driver. These golfers will hit the ball further and straighter with a 3 wood. A 3 wood has more loft than a driver, 14-16 degrees versus 7-12 degrees for a driver. This

added loft will help players with low clubhead speed launch the ball higher and the ball will carry further than with a driver. Also, the increased loft creates more backspin on the ball. Backspin helps to counteract any sidespin imparted on the ball by less than square contact. Less sidespin equals straighter shots. The 3 wood has a shaft that is one inch shorter than a driver making it easier to control the swing and increases the chances for solid contact, the more solid the contact the longer and straighter the shot.

Players who have a clubhead speed over 90 mph, should test as many drivers as possible until you find one that you can consistently make solid contact in the middle of the club face. The big mistake golfers make when selecting a driver are, too little loft, too stiff a shaft and too long a shaft. Start with a 12-degree loft, soft shaft and standard length. Then try progressively less loft, stiffer and longer shafts. You will be able to determine when the club feels wrong and the ball flight begins to get lower and the directional control declines. You should be able to make solid, centered contact and keep the ball on the fairway at least 50% of the time or the club is not right for you. Golfers with handicaps between 14 and 20 could consider a 2 wood or a strong 3 wood as an alternative to a driver. If your handicap is over 20 you will probably get more distance and consistency by using a 3 wood as your longest club.

Do not worry about what the shaft flex is! There is absolutely no standard in the golf industry regarding shaft flex. The "S" flex from one company might have exactly the same playing characteristics as an "R" or even an "A" flex from another company. Increasingly, when manufacturers are designing a new club head they also work with shaft designers to develop shaft characteristics to work with the new head design. The label on the shaft means nothing. All that matters is that the club works for you. Again, do not let your ego get in the way and don't assume that you need a certain shaft flex based on your handicap. Make your decision based on the flight of the ball not the label on the shaft.

Fairway metal woods:

Fairway woods, fairway metals, fairway metal woods, or what ever you prefer to call them, are essential tools for every golfer. They are much easier to hit than long irons. Their large mass helps make them more forgiving than long irons. Their increased loft and low center of gravity combine to hit the ball with a high trajectory and land it softly. They can be hit off the fairway, off hardpan, out of the rough, and fairway bunkers. You can even chip with them. Loft is your friend!

There are so many options available it is mind-boggling. There are strong 3-woods (12-14 degree lofts), standard 3-woods (15-16 degree lofts), strong 4-woods (16 degrees loft), standard 4-woods (17-18 degree lofts), 5-woods (18-20 degree lofts), 7-woods (20-23 degree lofts), 9-woods (23-25 degree lofts), there are also 11- woods and 13-woods.

Here, approximately, are the irons that the fairway metals replace:

- 3-wood = 1 iron
- 5-wood = 2 iron
- 7-wood = 3 iron
- 9-wood = 4 iron
- 11 wood = 5 iron
- 13 wood = 6 iron

The only players who should consider carrying a 1 or a 2 iron are ones who have a technically correct swing that generates fast clubhead speed. For most golfers, the 1 and 2 irons are best used to stake up plants in the garden. These long irons truly are implements ill designed for most golfers' swings. An increasing number of PGA Tour players are recognizing the value of fairway woods and are trading in their long irons for lofted woods or the new hybrid irons.

The 3 iron might be a good club to keep in the bag for people who play in windy conditions. The lower ball flight will help to penetrate the wind. For most golfers a 7-wood is a better choice, for reasons we have already described. As for the rest of the

fairway metals, evaluate your ability to hit the 4 and 5 irons and determine if you would be better off replacing them.

For those of you who prefer to hit irons, the new hybrid clubs might be the answer. These clubs are half iron and half metal wood. They hit the ball higher and are more forgiving than a long iron. These clubs are available in a variety of lofts, so it should be easy to find one that hits the ball the distance you need.

Irons:

Golf is a very difficult game and, as we know, no one hits perfect shots every time so it makes sense to use the most forgiving irons possible. Find a style you like. In order to get maximum performance out of the clubs, the clubs must be properly fitted. The main fitting factors to consider are, lie angle, shaft (flex, length, weight, and the material they are made from.) and grip size.

Wedges:

About 60% of the shots in a round of golf are played from within 100 yards of the hole. Given that statistic it makes sense for golfers to carry at least 3 wedges (pitching wedge, sand wedge and lob wedge) in order to have as many tools as possible to use for those shots. The sand wedge is not just to be used to hit balls out of bunkers. Use the sand wedge for shots off the grass around the green and for full swings from out on the fairway. The lob wedge is also a valuable tool for shots around the green. They are designed to have 58 – 60 degrees of loft. This loft helps get the ball high into the air and land it softly. Wedges are available in a variety of styles and designs. Experiment with several until you find the ones that work best for you. Be sure to get them fitted too.

Putters:

Putters come in all shapes, sizes and designs. The correct style is the one that works for you. You need to love your putter and believe that you are a great putter. From my observations, most people seem to have putters that are too long for them. As a result they tend to stand up too much in an attempt to get the putter to sit flat on the green. Find a putter style that you like the look of and have your PGA Professional fit it to you. Good putting starts with good posture, and a correct set-up with the putter sitting flat on the green.

The bottom line with clubs is to use ones that will help you. If you cannot hit a club, replace it with a club you can. This game is hard enough as it is; use clubs that will make it easier. Customize your set based on your ability. The better the clubs match your ability the better you will play!

The following suggestions are inspired by a study of 1200 golfers that Chuck Cook conducted. (The complete details of the study can be found on page 124 of his book Perfectly Balanced Golf) He wanted to see what clubs players with different handicaps could effectively use. Regarding tee shots he wanted to determine the longest club people could hit in the fairway a reasonable number of times. (50 percent of total shots) He found that no one with a handicap over 14 could hit a driver onto the fairway 50 percent of the time. No one with a handicap 29 or higher could hit either a driver or a 3 wood into play.

For advancement shots, shots that cannot reach the green, he found that no one with a handicap over 15 could hit a 3 wood in play and no one with a handicap over 28 could hit a 3 wood or a 5 wood in play.

For target shots, shots that one would expect to reach the green, he found that no one with a handicap of 8 or higher could hit the green 50 percent of the time from 150 yards. No

one with a handicap of 15 or higher could hit the green 50 percent of the time from 125 yards and players with handicaps of 30 or higher could not hit the green from 75 yards.

The following are club recommendations based on the findings of the study and a person's golf skills:

Beginners: Only use clubs that have the number 7 or higher on them. Your set should include 7, 9, 11, woods, 7-8-9- pitching wedge, sand wedge, lob wedge and a putter.

Handicaps of 29 to 40: Only use clubs with the number 5 or higher on them. Your set should include 5,7, 9 woods, 5-6-7-8-9-pitching wedge, sand wedge, lob wedge and a putter.

Handicaps of 14 to 28: Only use clubs with the number 3 or higher on them. Your set should include 3, 5, 7, 9 woods, 4-5-6-7-8-9-pitching wedge, sand wedge, lob wedge and a putter.

Handicaps of 13 and lower: Use whatever clubs will get the job done for you. Just be sure to select the clubs and their specifications based on your ability to hit them.

Summary and Review

- Go to the first tee with realistic expectations and the right attitude.
- Accept the fact that nearly every shot is going to be, to a lesser or greater degree, a miss hit.
- Accept the fact that there will be bad breaks as well as good breaks and that over time they should balance out.
- Use the pre-shot routine for every shot.
- Focus your attention only on the present shot to be played. Do not think about the results of past shots or worry about the results of shots that have yet to be played.
- Make strategic decisions based on your ability and the situation you are facing. (Rotellas' conservative strategy with an aggressive swing.)
- Commit 100% to every swing; do not worry about the result.
- Enjoy the good shots and immediately forget the bad.
- Use equipment that works for you.
- Have fun!!

Conclusion

By now I hope that you would agree that reaching a person's full potential in golf requires more than good technique and physical fitness, and that proper use of the mind is critical for success for golfers of all abilities.

The psychological techniques presented here are simple, based on common sense, easy to learn and apply. From the quotations you can see that these techniques are the same ones that the players on the PGA and LPGA Tours are learning and using in order to improve the use of their minds. They recognize that everyone at their level has terrific talent and skills and that physical ability is no longer enough to win. Learning these mental skills enable tour players to play to their full potential, especially when the pressure of competition is the greatest. It works for them and it will work for every other golfer too.

Think of it this way. To improve and get closer to reaching full potential there are four main considerations every golfer must incorporate into their golf games.

1. Proper technique
2. Physical fitness
3. Proper equipment
4. Correct use of the mind

If you were to imagine each of the above as one of the tires on a golf cart, in order for the cart to travel smoothly around the course all four tires would need to be properly inflated. If one or two were all but flat, the cart might make it around the course but it would not be a smooth trip. If a golfer is missing one or more of the parts to their games, they can make it around the course, but the trip would be so much smoother if all the parts were there.

The information presented here represents everything you need to know to be able to play better golf without practicing. Believe me they work! Mike Weir's terrific start to the 2003 PGA Tour season is a great example of how well these concepts work. In his first four events he had two wins, a third and a ninth place finish and was on top of the

PGA Tour money list. This early season success was a bit of a surprise, considering he had had a disappointing season in 2002. When asked about the reasons for his great start to the 2003 season he said.

“It was a committed decision to have a better attitude and enjoy the game more.”
“I think when you try to be too perfect in this game, you put too much pressure on yourself, and I think that’s what I fell into last year. Just trying too hard, basically, is what it boiled down to. And this year, I just said, let’s go out and enjoy the game, and just see what happens, not try to do anything outside of my capabilities, really.”

National Post, February 25, 2003.

Weirs’ comments are a great summary for many of the concepts presented here. I hope that you have gained an appreciation for the importance of the mental aspects of golf and the importance of using equipment that is right for you, and that I have proved to you that incorporating these concepts into your game will enable you to play better golf and have more fun without the need to practice your swing. Hopefully you will be inspired to evaluate your beliefs, attitudes and expectations, and to take a completely new philosophical look at you and your golf game. I recommend that you refer back to these concepts frequently to be sure you are incorporating all of them into your golf game. The better a golfer uses the brain, the better the golfer will play. It is as simple as that.

Wishing you all the best with your golf, and always be sure to...

Have fun out there!

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Recommended Reading List

The information contained in this presentation, although it is enough to help any golfer improve their golf game by improving the use of their mind, it is at best a cursory look at the complex and fascinating subject of sport psychology. If you are interested in exploring these concepts in greater depth the following is a list of excellent books that describe golf and psychology.

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Appendix I

One of the biggest areas of concern for students in the Professional Golf Management Program at Grant MacEwan College has been passing the CPGA playing ability test. For the past four years I have been presenting a seminar to interested students that is intended to help them pass the playing ability test. When developing the material for the seminar, I assumed that they all had the technical skills to play well enough to pass the test but were lacking the mental skills required to enable them to perform to the best of their ability. Much of the material contained in the seminar is also contained in this thesis. From 1999 to 2002, 69 students have attended the presentations. 52 of these students have gone on to attempt the playing ability test and 32 of them have passed. That is a 61.5% success rate.

This is a very good success rate when the success rates of all the golfers who attempt the test are considered.

In Alberta, in 2000, in the first test, 19 of 124 passed or 15.3%.

In the second test 10 of 71 passed or 14.1%

In 2001, 30 of 140 passed or 21.4 %.

In 2002, 31 of 84 passed or 37%.

From this data it would seem reasonable to conclude that learning and using sound mental skills leads to better performance, especially in pressure situations like the playing ability test.

I can also report from my own experience that these concepts work. About five years ago I was playing golf rather poorly and not having any fun at it. I made a dedicated effort to “practice what I preach” and have worked hard to incorporate these methods into my personal golf game. The result is I am having fun again when I play, the quality of my golf shots is better and the scores are lower. Perhaps it is my personal success with these concepts that make me so passionate about encouraging all golfers to learn about them.

