

## Playing Golf? Or Playing GOLF??

The essence of golf is to get the ball in the hole in the least shots possible, much like other sports its a target orientated sport, but because the ball is waiting for us to strike it, our minds and our thoughts have an enormous effect on that task. If golfers were able to simply stand up to the ball, look at where they intended to play their ball, and swing in that direction, they would improve dramatically. However the game most golfers play is known as Golf Swing which is played by breaking down the movement into as many parts as possible, completely filling our conscious mind with technical thoughts and then trying to hit a golf ball towards a target that we possibly didn't even look at or aim towards. Now this of course leads to very inconsistent results and a lot of frustration.

### Letting Go -

Because the golf course is a minefield of hazards and dangers, golfers can feel fear and anxiety about the possible consequences of their shots. This fear leads golfers to feel stressed and tense which in turn activates the conscious part of the brain into trying to control everything in order to produce a better outcome.

The answer to overcoming the need to control everything isn't a simple one, but we must begin by accepting the consequences and the possible outcome of the shot before we have played it.

Ask yourself some logical questions:

Will somebody get hurt? Unlikely (yes some of you are saying maybe 😊)

Will it be the end of the world if you hit a bad shot?

Will it destroy your day?

Will your family and friends stop loving you?

Of course not, hitting a bad golf shot isn't a life or death situation, so by accepting all possible outcomes of your shots, you'll begin to feel a little more relaxed and begin to play with a little more freedom.



“Giving up control in golf is the only way to gain control”  
Bob Rotella Sports Psychologist

We are wired up to detect danger -

One of the big problems we have in golf is that our conscious mind wants to control everything we do (because of trust or fear issues mentioned above). The conscious mind is talking to us all the time and works as a warning system for us, it will remind us of potential dangers linked to bad experiences like, "don't hit it in the water again" or "there is an out of bounds down the right-side here" etc.

Now here is where it gets complicated, when the warning signs are triggered we naturally think the opposite to what may go wrong i.e. "don't hit it in the water", however our brain cannot differentiate between a "don't" signal and a "do" signal, therefore the only instruction the conscious mind gives is "hit it in the water" and sure enough we do! Our brains are also geared 3-1 in a negative biased (this kept us alert and alive back in the hunter gatherer days) so we store more negative or "bad" experiences than we do positive and "good" ones

We cannot stop thinking completely, our thoughts are continuous, but we can channel our thoughts to focus on what we "do want" and not on what we "do not want"

Channelling Thoughts -

We will discuss more about awareness and understanding ourselves as golfers in my next article The Golf Recipe for Success, but let's say we have our emotions and arousal levels under control and we are focusing only on our thought process. Our Golf Routine is the key to playing golf shots focused, free of worry and control.

Planning a golf shot must be made with a committed plan of success (this plan has to be realistic for the level of golf that player can play) this plan only focuses on exactly "what the player wants to achieve" This step by step information gathering process may unfold like this:

- How is the lie of the ball? and what is possible from that lie?
- How far is the distance to the intended target? (including height Variation)
- Where should you aim for the best possible result, taking into account your typical shot shape and the hazards or danger areas of the hole?
- Which direction is the wind coming from?
- What are your capabilities as a golfer and are you hitting the ball well today? (can you really hit it 220 over a water hazard with a fairway wood from a downhill lie against the wind)

Once you have made a decision based upon the evidence above it's time to start the physical part of the routine.

- Stand behind the ball and make a practice swing (Optional - Practice swings can be very useful for feeling the intended shot or as a technical reminder.
- Now try and visualise the ball flying exactly to your target as you planned it in your mind (this takes practice and focus, but with time you will start to see the benefits of this exercise)
- Walk up to the ball and aim your clubface at the chosen target followed by your body, get yourself set and prepared for the shot
- Look again at least once at the intended target (the smaller the target the better as it focuses the mind more)
- Look back at the ball and Swing!
- Take a moment to observe the result and gather feedback about the entire process and the decisions you have made (known as the post routine or observation part)

Of course this process sounds quite stress free and easy, but many more parts will be added to this routine in order to prepare you physically and mentally to stay focussed during that process, including breathing exercises and sensory awareness exercises.

The key thing to remember is that if at any moment during the shot process you are distracted by negative thoughts, or by outside distractions, you **MUST** restart your routine from the beginning, refocus and play the shot 100% committed.



## Developing Skill -

The target for each and every golfer is to understand themselves better as a golfer; this is what is known as golf awareness or golf IQ. When we start to understand how we react to distractions, to stressful situations and what our tendencies and habits are, then we can begin to prepare ourselves to perform better in the future.

In order to begin your golf IQ journey ask yourself some simple questions:

Do I have a golf routine in which I plan my shots for success?

Which part of my routine do negative thoughts come?

Do I keep to my routine regardless of how I am playing?

What are the typical thoughts that race through my mind when I am stood over the ball? (Write them out)

The next time you play take a small practice notebook with you and record the answers to the questions above and try this task:

**"For 3, 6 or 9 holes after each shot, take a small moment to ask yourself what you have just learnt from that shot, and give yourself a score of 1-10 on how good your routine was in terms of staying focussed on a positive outcome"**

## Conclusion -

We are clear on the difficulties we face as golfers, the mind is trying to help protect us from dangers and doesn't understand the difference between what we "do" want and what we "do not" want.

As humans we need to work on understanding ourselves better, and the tendencies we have when we get stressed and under pressure, through this we can begin to build our own recipe for golfing success.

Our Golf IQ journey begins here with a clear routine, which takes into account as much information as possible about the upcoming shot, and leads us to a positive plan of action. As we work on this routine we start to understand what we need to be at our best and how we can control our emotions and thoughts. If we want to really PLAY GOLF then we have to control all the distractions both external and internal to play with freedom and unlock our true potential.

In the next article we will start to expand on our own golfing recipe and discuss tools we can use to prepare us for our best golf.

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