

Golf IQ – The Person behind the Golfer

There are hundreds of books written about the mental side of the golf game, and many of them focus on amazing stories of how famous players overcame obstacles on their way to achieving greatness. However regardless of how things may look from the outside, we are human beings and we have to completely understand ourselves before we can get to grips with the mental side of the game of golf. This article focuses on Golf IQ and understanding the person behind the golfer in order to understand why we act the way we do in certain situations.

Confidence –

We all understand that without confidence it is almost impossible to perform to our best in any given situation. Confidence has many faces and some people are more confident in one situation than in another. Maybe you are comfortable making a presentation to 150 people, but the thought of playing through the 4 ball in front of you makes you feel sick!

In order to build true confidence we must first understand some key things. We must learn what undermines our confidence and what takes it away, and then build a plan in which to combat these issues. Secondly we have to start building our confidence step by step in practice, which can only be done by experiencing small successes over and over again.

Example:

You miss a short putt on the first hole, automatically you know this is a weakness in your game and you think “oh no not again! Today my putting is going to be terrible” your confidence is hit and you are already worried about the next short putt! This is an example of how your confidence can be taken away.

How can you then prepare for this? The answer is in your initial reaction to the missed putt and in how you practice your putting. Your reaction has to be one based on your successes in practice – “ok I missed a short putt, and that happens to best players in the world too, but I have been practicing these putts under pressure and I have achieved a 70% success rate, therefore I just need to keep to my routine and my process”



Practicing for Success -

This means we have to integrate much more pressure situations into our practice regimes in order to prove we can deal with the pressure when we are on the golf course. So if we take the short putt example from above, we then need to find games in practice that constantly place us under pressure and teach us how to cope with it. (i.e. 10 putts from 1m and all 10 must be made in order to finish, then 12, 14, 16 etc.) If we are consistently practicing these pressure situations, and proving to ourselves that we can cope with them, our performance on the golf course will be accelerated.

Developing my Personal Success Recipe -

We face many stressful situations in life and how we react, learn and develop through these experiences shapes our nature and our character. We also learn what to avoid in the future through these experiences, and generally we learn more from the negatives ones than from the positive ones.

“Therefore a key ingredient to success in life and in golf is actually failure”



What does my worst golf look like?

In order to understand our success recipe we first look at what happens when we are playing our worst golf. Imagine for a moment a terrible golfing experience, one where you had an absolute disaster. Ask yourself these important questions:

How were my expectations going into that round?

How well did I manage my thoughts on that day?

Was I in control of my emotions?

Was there any negative self talk?

Was I walking and talking in my normal relaxed tempo?

Did I focus 110% on every single shot until the end of the round?

Was I only thinking about my target and not on my golf swing or technique?

Already with these questions above we will start to understand a little more about the habits we fall into when we are playing badly, but to build a personal success recipe we have to go even more into the details.

Ask yourself how these following aspects of golf game look and feel when you're playing awful:

Golf Routine –

Posture & Body language –

Self Talk –

Thought process –

Rhythm both walking between shots and swing –

Stress levels –

Breathing Rhythm –

Energy levels –

Enjoyment of the game –

You're Confidence –

Relationship with your playing partners –

Now if you can highlight how the above elements are affected by your own personal "disaster day" then you are well on your way to building a success recipe. As we start to understand our habits and tendencies when things are going wrong, we can begin to build a plan for how to deal with them.

Now picture one of the best golfing days of your life, when absolutely everything was excellent, and you felt like golf was easy! Ask yourself the same questions as above, how did it feel? How was your routine, your tempo, your thought process? This will start to lay the foundations of your success recipe.

Awareness – Is this my recipe for success?

As you start to see the differences between how you act on your best days and what behaviors send you down the road to disaster, you will begin to understand what belongs in your success recipe and what doesn't. A golfer who can manage his or her emotions and thoughts during a round of golf will always produce more consistent results than a golfer who doesn't have a clue about the elements that are holding them back.

This means we have to be constantly in a state of **awareness**, always asking ourselves where we are in terms of our success recipe. Are we doing the things that encourage our best golf or lead us down the disaster route?

Use the time in between shots, and in the analyses part of your routine to check whether your keeping to your success recipe or not. The secret to this entire process lies in the awareness of your current state, and the understanding of both your disaster habits and your success recipe.



How do I get myself back on track?

This is of course the key to the whole process, when you realize you're travelling down the wrong road you need to immediately stop and change your behavior. But how to change it and what tools you can use is very personal for each golfer. The secret lies in your best rounds, and to start doing those things that you highlighted when you play well:

Example:

Disaster golf habits – No routine or focus on the target, walk quickly between shots, poor body language and negative self talk

Great Golf – Routine is focused and always completed without distractions, slow relaxed tempo, positive body language, quiet mind

Rescue Tools – Slow down and walk slower, breathe deeply to quiet the mind, complete my routine on every shot with a full focus on my intended target. Walk tall and proud down the fairway, chin up eyes on the horizon. Use encouraging self talk to calm myself and switch the focus to positive outcomes not negative ones.

Here you see an understanding of what the potential issue is, then a reflection of how the success recipe looks, followed by active changes to the behavior in an attempt to get back to great golf. So when you start to feel stressed, under pressure, or your disaster habits start to show their ugly face, it's time to act now!. Use your success recipe to become a more consistent golfer and learn more about what needs to go into your recipe which will make the cake taste even better!

Make a mental golf game plan –

Before every round of golf it is useful to build a small mental game plan. In this plan you should highlight a couple of negative behavior traits you have noticed in your golf game, and which you understand doesn't belong to your success recipe. Then take this plan out every 3 or 4 holes and check whether you have been on top of these points or not. If you see that each time you're improving then great, change the plan next time out to something else. Use a scorecard to mark these points down, and you can even give yourself a score on each hole out of 5 or 10 for how well you managed that specific task.

Conclusion –

Golf is a difficult sport and can be very frustrating, it's a forever changing environment and our feelings, perceptions and abilities change on a daily basis. However if we begin to understand how we play our best golf and which bad habits lead us to disaster, we will begin to manage ourselves to the best of our ability and this will not only make us more consistent, but it will mean less disasters, less frustrations and more enjoyment of this wonderful game.

Happy Golfing