

Winning the Mind Game of Golf, Part I

LI Golfer Magazine

What if you could lower your handicap? What if you could experience noticeable improvement in your mind game? What if you could make better use of professional instruction? Read on.....

Pick a time in the future, any time..... You can chose a time, a few weeks away, even a month or two. It might be interesting to go out further, maybe August or even August of next year. What would you like your handicap to be? I'll pick the middle of next summer..... 8/15/2000 you pick the handicap? It doesn't even have to seem realistic. Ultimately it will become an exercise in elevating your personal skills to the level of challenges that the game of golf puts between you and you desired score.

Tied into any goal, is an action plan. Action plans can be looked at in a variety of ways. I assist clients in viewing a course of action backwards. Where do I have to be on 4/15/2000 to reach my goal on 8/15? What actions do I have to be engaged in on 1/15/2000 etc. Certainly an interesting and challenging look at a goal. Spending some time with a calendar, a teaching pro, and a dose of reality, he or she can probably assist you to chart progress in reverse.

The commitment to follow an action plan, is a commitment to practice. Practice with a teaching pro, practice alone, physical conditioning, all translating into hard work. This is not news to a person who loves this game. What is also no surprise is the degree to which the golfers mind affects his or her game. How often have you heard "If there ever was a mind game, golf is it." How often have you said it yourself?

Over the next few months, this column will offer a roadmap for your mind game. Peak Performance Strategies are just that, ways that you can guide, direct and control your mind game. They are designed to give you increasing control on the golf course, make better use of instructions you receive from your teaching pro. The tips will be drawn from the experiences of golfers, world class skiers, people in business and the arts. Peak Performance goals are basically to enhance mental skills and reduce the blocks to success.

What tools will you have to choose from? Relaxation/ visualization, self hypnosis and hypnosis are basic, intermediate and advanced techniques used frequently and quite successfully by athletes and increasingly for business and academic performance. Where and when will you apply these skills? Racing coaches, working with world class skiers, in Vail, identified four key areas of focus. In a clinic conducted this past January, I address four issues that they felt were key to performance enhancement and assist their athletes developing strategies to neutralize their impact. They listed the following: Self talk [negative] and its impact on performance, peak performance zone management, refocus after a poor performance or distraction and finally pre- competition preparation. Since each applies as well to golf clients as well as competitive skiers, this is the direction we'll travel together in the coming months.

The importance of developing skills to enable you to relax, quickly and completely, is well recognized by people in business as well as sports. The ability to reduce or eliminate negative stress while maintaining positive levels of stress seems to increase as an athlete looks more closely at how he or she experiences these various dynamics.

Visualization, a common and well documented training tool for athletes, goes hand in hand with relaxation, as a method to improve your game. Begin to notice how often you visualize. As you look more closely, you may begin to observe the degree of detail that you experience. Some golfers chose to think about a shot, seeing the rhythm & tempo of their swing, watching the ball flight etc.

While some will see a putting green, others will actually feel the turf under their feet, they may smell the grass, feel the weight of the putter in their hands & the pressure as they place the putter head down on the turf. Visualization allows clients to play a difficult shot over & over, hit numerous shots out of the sand or repeat the perfect drive. It's a great training tool, give it a try.

Self hypnosis is a quantum leap for the athletes who use it. Relaxation, when one focuses on trying to relax, is randomly successful. Clients will say that sometimes they can relax and sometimes they can't. Results, when using self hypnosis, an intermediate strategy, are often rapid and routinely successful. Focusing intently, eliminating

distraction, turning down negative self talk, recovering from a poor shot, controlling his or her emotions are only some of the benefits of using self hypnosis. The athlete is in control. It's like selecting the right club for a particular shot. You chose the time and the application.

Self hypnosis is an extraordinary "walk away" tool for a golfer. As a hypnotherapist and performance consultant it is important to me that my clients enhance their mental skills just as your teaching pro helps enhance your technical skills. Self hypnosis can be learned from books & tapes just as you can learn to improve you swing from books & tapes. Here comes the however. Just as a teaching pro will tell you that nothing can compare to consistently working with one to one instruction, so it goes with hypnosis. Hypnosis, an advanced personal strategy, facilitates the rapid learning of self hypnosis. You will make better use of professional instruction and improve your game without conscious effort. More on these topics as we move along.

Let's focus on Self Talk/ Where do clients begin.

Immediate goal: Just notice & listen. Future goals: decontaminate negative self talk & discover ways to turn it down or off.

Begin by noticing. You will begin to notice that you are noticing more and more as you listen to your self talk. Of course you can apply this technique to areas other than golf but the following questions will focus on a variety of golf issues.

1. Listen to your self talk. Take notes if you wish. It's interesting to look back & notice the changes that have taken place.

2. Most importantly, for now, make no judgments about the self talk. Just notice the following:

When does it start? [before a round, waiting to tee off, when play slows, with a particular shot, with a certain club, playing with a particular group, tournament play]. What does it say? What do you tell yourself in particular situations? How long does it last? [Entire round ?] When does it end? On a scale from 1 to 10, how loud do you hear it? What stops it? How does it stop, does it fade out or shut off quickly? Is it your voice or someone else's? You may be surprised at how effective just noticing can be.

Upcoming issues..... What do we do once we've noticed our selftalk? Learn how to decontaminate, turn it down or turn it off. Develop positive self talk strategies.

Peak Performance Zone Management....recognizing when you are out of your zone and finding ways to get back in.

Refocusdiscover ways to cope with delayed or slow play, a poor shot or series of shots. quest to get you back in the game.

Pre competition preparation...how, when, where & why.