



Technical Game, Physical Game, Mental Game



Challenge Your Mental Game

The game of golf poses many challenges, but for those in the intermediate and advanced levels of golf it has more to do with your mental game than the physical and/or technical one. It follows that if the challenge is you, then to advance you have to learn how to challenge yourself in practice. We need a practical method for focusing our range sessions on the mental side of the game. Just heading out to hit some shots and roll a few putts is not going to be productive. Practicing to change habit must include the opportunity to improve your mental abilities as well as the physical and technical ones. Yes, we know that hitting shots on the range is not the same as playing the course, let alone playing a tournament, but still you have to intensify your sessions such that meaningful mental improvements can be made. Every trip to the range must include both the physical and mental components of the game

At first, when you were learning the physical and technical parts of the game you took small steps focusing on the fundamentals by doing drills to develop those skills. So too when learning the mental game. The physical aspect of the training exercise should be kept simple at first so that all attention can be directed to the mental side. Later on, as your mental strength increases, the physical demand may be increased in difficulty.

Basic example: A good way to start is to pick a club and yardage that you are comfortable with and then hit ten shots. Give yourself a realistic parameter around the flag to land the shots - don't be afraid to be generous starting out. If you fail to hit the target area during the climb to ten, start the count over until you have made ten in a row. There is no quitting this exercise until you have reached ten in a row - so you may be there a while . . . that's OK.

This drill creates several opportunities for enhancing your mental game and demonstrates a methodology to be used for future mental training sessions. First, by choosing a club and yardage that you are comfortable with you have minimized the physical component so as to concentrate on the mental functions. Next, you have set a goal within a time frame - ten in a row before you change clubs or go home. Most important you have created jeopardy or risk in that a miss causes you to start over. That coupled with the fact that you just can't stop until you succeed will help cause the mental weaknesses within you to come to the surface.

However, be aware of some danger with this exercise. If you make the physical part too demanding, that is, greater than your capabilities, you can overwhelm yourself to the point of mental frustration. A balance must be achieved between the difficulty of the physical act and the mental challenge. That is why it is best to start simple and work your way up.

As you participate in these drills your awareness should be directed towards several areas. Become consciously aware of the changes in your attitude, breathing, body tension, and thinking. Are negative thoughts entering your mind? Are you becoming nervous or experiencing tight or jerky movements? Are you impatient for the exercise to end? Has your breathing become shallower? Are you in denial and not focusing on the task-at-hand? When you become aware of these changes in your body you can now take steps to remedy your behavior. You should not try to fight them, but instead accept them as part of what makes you the person you are. The next step is to release the tension these feelings have created, and then re-focus on a specific feel or thought to start your swing.

For example, you notice "I'm so nervous my heart is racing." First, acknowledge to yourself the many times in practice rounds and matches that even when you were nervous you were still able to score well. Next, take steps to ease the nervousness by breathing slowly and telling yourself you can score without being anything close to perfect. You can make par, even birdie from imperfect spots on the course.

The real opportunity in these exercises is that they provide you with a chance in practice during social rounds to recognize those things that come up in your mind when you are meeting frustration, impatience, anxiety, and fear of negative outcome during a match or tournament. These weaknesses normally hide in the sub-conscious and we are unaware of them until they surface in times of stress.

These are the same frustrations that occur when we are playing under pressure, except now we can deal with them in practice. Once you get them to the surface of your thoughts, you can begin to learn ways to handle them. As you increase the difficulty of the physical challenge in this type of exercise you increase the chances that your mental, as well as physical, weaknesses will come to the surface. This is exactly what you want to happen to make your practice meaningful. These drills move you out of your comfort zone towards real improvement. Make this type of practice part of every one of your practice sessions and you will be challenging yourself to be on the path to success.

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Planning a trip to Florida? Plan to visit Randy at The Dye Preserve. The Dye Preserve is named for the designer of the club's immaculate golf course, the legendary Pete Dye.

Our golf course showcases a different side of Pete, a golf course contrasting challenge with opportunity offering enjoyment to players of all skill levels. The Dye Preserve is not "typical Florida golf" the property and design culminate in a beautiful, easy feel with quiet surrounds where every hole is framed by nature.

The clubhouse, which opened in the spring of 2005, has been well received by our membership, and we are justifiably proud. It feels more like a home than a club, elegant but comfortable, classically understated, evoking an era of simplicity and good taste. It was selected as one of the five best new clubhouses in America.