



Golf's Mental Game

An interview with Lanny Bassham

In the Olympics, you don't train every day, all day, for a chance once every four years to finish second. In the Olympics, it really is all about winning. Finishing second is exactly what happened to international rifle shooter Lanny Bassham at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, Germany. Disappointed with his performance in the Olympic Games, Bassham set out to find a program to help him better control his mind under pressure. Finding such a program proved unsuccessful, so Bassham turned to the people he felt could help — Olympic winners.

As a result of what he learned, Bassham created a system of mental control he termed mental management. This system helped Bassham dominate his sport over the next six years, winning 22 world individual and team titles, setting four world records and returning to the Olympics at Montreal in 1976 to win his gold medal. Bassham ranks third among all shooting athletes in total medal count with 33, and is a member of the Olympic Hall of Fame. For nearly 30 years, Bassham's company, Mental Management Systems, has helped produce Olympians and world and national champions. PGA Tour winner Fred Funk is among Bassham's new winning clients.

RG: Bobby Jones once said, "Competitive golf is played mainly on a five-and-a-half-inch course — the space between your ears." Why then do most of us only seek answers to the technical game, not the mental game?

LB: Most of us think we know all we need to know about the mental game. I thought I had it down and that my technical skills were what mattered most and mental skills were all about being relaxed and positive.

RG: Is that what happened to you in the '72 Olympics?

LB: Yes. My experience in Munich made me realize that I didn't know anything about the mental game. I was afraid that if I didn't learn about the mental game, that I would come back in four years and choke again.



RG: When you returned to the Olympics in Montreal, was the difference that resulted in a gold medal what you learned about the mental game?

LB: After the '72 Olympics I looked for a course on how to manage the mind under pressure and couldn't find one. So I went out and interviewed Olympic gold medalists to find out what they were doing. That information is the basis from which I started the mental management program. It's what I learned from champions.

RG: Whereas most sports are reaction based, golf and shooting seem quite similar in that nothing happens until the competitor initiates the action.

LB: Very similar. They are both very slow games and not having a consistency of thought allows for negative thoughts or no thoughts at all.

RG: When did Mental Management Systems begin working with golfers? What other groups do you work with?

LB: We coach a number of sports and performance areas. We have worked with the Olympic teams of about 12 nations. We have worked with the Secret Service, the U.S. Navy Seals and we have taught four of the five last Miss USAs. We have gymnastic clients and track and field clients. The biggest part of our business right now is primarily golf and shotgun sports. We have clients on the PGA Tour and several accomplished college players.

RG: There is a lot of negativity in the golf environment. Ask someone how they played and you most often get a shake of the head, "No good."

LB: Well that's right. It must be human nature to talk about what you're doing wrong instead of what you are doing right. What's bad is when a person asks, "How did you do?" And you go into detail about how you messed up shots and missed putts. Even when you play the vast majority of shots well, the conversation is always about what went wrong. That negative talk creates an imprint, not only in the person who is talking about it, but it may also hurt the person who is listening. The culture of the sport can be pretty negative.

RG: What's the basic outline of your mental system?

LB: The mental management system is a process of three concepts: Concept I is the conscious (what you think), the subconscious (your technical skills), and self image (your comfort zone). Concept II is anticipation (what you think immediately before you perform), the action (what you think about as you perform), and reinforcement (what you think about immediately after you perform). Concept III is what really is — the belief that you can do it. We teach what to do before, during and after a shot or round. Most golfers do not have mental consistency because they do not have a system. They use a lot of what the environment gives them instead of something that is planned.

I encourage you to take the time and explore the mental program for your golf game. Develop a simple mental program — a plan — that you run through before each shot. Once you have the right mental program it will help you perform at the top of your ability.

Lanny Bassham's system is available through products and seminars of Mental Management Systems. Check out www.mentalmanagement.com for more information.

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