

THE “MENTAL” GAME OF GOLF

I hate this game! Why do I spend countless hours reading golf digest, watching the golf channel, practicing at the driving range and on the putting green to go on the golf course and get frustrated. Is all the effort I put into this game worth all the aggravation I get out of it? I often question if it is but I always seem to come back to the golf course for more punishment. Why, because I love this game, that's why.

Golf is the most humbling game I have ever played. Golfers seem to be a very intellect group of people. In general, golfers spend many hours throughout the year reading their favorite magazines, watching instructional tapes or programs to educate themselves to play better golf. When the golf season begins they spend hours upon hours perfecting new techniques in the attempt to score better once they play the golf course.

Talking to golfers on the range, I will ask them how they are hitting it. Most will say with conviction, that they are hitting the ball much better than they did the year before. All the time they spent learning how to hit the ball seems to have paid off. Now it is time to bring the course to its knees. Off to the first tee they go! The next day I talk to the same player and ask them how their game was the quite often the response I get is...I hate this game!

How is it that I spend so much time educating myself on how to perfect my golf swing, practice the new move on the driving range actually hitting the ball better than I ever have and feeling extremely good with my progress, but when I get to the course I score worse! Golf is a “MENTAL” game, literally!

Why can I not take my “A” game from the range to the golf course. The answer is simple, it is different out there. On the driving range you are hitting from a perfect lie every time, you have countless balls to hit, and the range itself is the widest fairway I have ever seen. No pressure.

It's not that easy on the golf course. First of all, you only have one ball to hit. If you loose it, you have to take a penalty stroke. Now you have trees, water, sand traps, out of bounds, un-even lies and narrow fairways to contend with. As a result, the way you think is what changes! Now you are not as relaxed, as a result your swing changes and your shots are not as good as they were on the driving range. Here lies the problem. It is the mind that we need to spend time training.

The “mental” game of golf is something that I learnt fairly early in my career as a golf professional. The next couple of articles that I will write will touch on the mental aspect of the game of golf and what skills you need to assist you in taking your “A” game to the golf course. Some of these skills include: pre-shot routine; your arousal level; visualization and the power of positive thinking. Before I write about these areas, I would like to share with you the best lesson I have on the mental game of golf.

Early in my career, I have the opportunity to travel to Florida to the Canadian PGA teaching and rules education seminar. This was a one week program where Apprentice Golf Professionals from around the country were taught by the country's top Professionals about instruction techniques and the rules of golf. The hi-light of the trip was that Moe Norman, arguably, the best ball striker in the world was there with us.

For those of you who have not heard about Moe, he played on the PGA tour in the 50 and won countless amateur and professional tournaments. He held and still holds approximately 30 course records around North America. He shot in the 50's a number of times and was truly one of the best golfers in the world. Best of all, he is Canadian.

Prior to leaving for this trip, I was completely unknown in the industry, just another one of the young professionals attempting to increase their knowledge on the game of golf. Due to my lack of mental strength, Scott Bergdahl was almost a household name by the end of our trip. I was known as the kid that nearly killed Moe Norman!

To make a long story short, a few days into our seminar, we all broke into groups. The idea of this drill was to pair off and we would use of newly learnt skills to teach each other. My partner and I went into the greenside bunker. He was teaching me to hit better shots out of the bunker. Keep in mind that the range was extremely busy and the only thought I have in my mind was if I hit a bad shot I might kill someone. **BAD THOUGHT.**

After receiving my instruction I started to hit some bunker shots. The first one did not get out of the bunker. The next two were somewhat better but the whole time my mind was thinking about all of those people on the range. Well, as a result of where my mind was, the next shot I hit was a skull, I hit the ball right in the middle. That sucker came out of the bunker traveling at mach 10.

I looked up to see where the ball was heading and to my amazement Moe was about 40 yard's away talking to a group. I had just enough time to say look out when the ball cracked him in the shoulder. I could not dig a deep enough hole in that sand trap to crawl into. Totally embarrassed! This is how I nearly became the most famous Canadian, by nearly killing Moe Norman.

A short while later I finally got enough courage to apologize to Moe. This is when he brought to my attention how important the mental side of the game of golf is. He told me that golf is 89% mental. Therefore the physical side of the game is only 11%. Yet we tend to educate ourselves on only 11% of what golf is all about.

This educational experience is no different than what most golfers experience on the golf course. Most of us cannot take our "A" game to the course because we are not confident! As a result of that lack of confidence we are not as relaxed on the course as we are at the driving range. The end result is frustration.

