

“Child Like Mentality”

Wouldn't it be fun to go back and play fearless golf. I call it, “A Child Like Mentality”. Kids play without mental scar tissue. They try to make every putt without worrying about how far there next putt is from. They try to hole out every chip.

When I was a freshman at Washington State University, my coach set-up a weekly session with the Sports Psychologist to help me conquer some of my short-comings. Dr. Jim Bowman and I continued our relationship for the next 13 years. He taught me how to understand who I was as a person and a player. He helped me turn my weaknesses into strengths both on and off the field.

With my background in golf when I started teaching full time, I felt I had a pretty good grasp on all aspects of the game. I have a different perspective that I can bring to most students as someone who has been inside the ropes. As I began working with more competitive players with greater aspirations I realized my specialty is in the mechanical side of the game. While I could help them with full swing, short game, on course work, pre-shot routines and how to practice...I realized that some of them needed and expert to help them break thru. My dad always had a saying, “It's better to know what you don't know than to know what you do know.” I began looking for the right partner to help my students in the mental game. During my travels I came across Dr. Rick Sessinghaus. Rick was an instructor for many years before going back to college to get his Psychological Doctorate in Sport Psychology. He works with some the top amateur, college, amateur and professional players in the game. It was a match made in Heaven. Rick and I collaborate regularly after each student's mental session and collaborate on how to turn weaknesses into strengths.

Below is an article Rick has contributed:

Mental Game Skills

By: Rick Sessinghaus Psy.D, PGA

I have had the pleasure of coaching top junior, college, and professional golfers on the mindset skills that make or break performance. Most golfers agree the mental game skills are important, however many don't really know how to train them. Competitive junior golfers face the pressure of playing for ranking points, college coaches' attention, and parent's approval. This pressure can negatively affect performance. This is where a solid foundation of mental skills can benefit a junior golfer.

What do you think makes up the mental skills of golf? There are many different skills such as motivation, goal setting, practice habits, course management, and tournament preparation. However, the most important on course mental skills are focus, confidence, and emotional control. As a mental game coach, I train golfers to be focused, confident, and composed on a shot that leads to commitment. If you could use your pre-shot routine to be fully committed to the shot, then you would have high level mental game skills. I wish it was that easy. Junior golfers get distracted, experience doubt, and sometimes feel frustration during a round. This interference will get in the way of performance.

Each one of these vital skills can be trained. The first step is understanding that your routines can work for you or against you. Most juniors I coach claim they have a pre-shot routine, unfortunately it is not resulting in a committed mindset over the ball. Think about what gets in the way for you? Is it focusing

on what could go wrong? Are you obsessed with score, so you don't pay attention to the process of making the best decision? Are you still angry from the previous shot and having a difficult time being relaxed for the shot? These are all common interferences, and all can be minimized.

Once you identify your common interferences, it is time to develop a pre-shot routine that includes focusing on what is relevant, believing you can execute the shot, and getting your body to be relaxed to perform closer to your potential.

Here are the basics of a proper pre-shot routine:

1. Pay attention to what is relevant to make the best decision. This includes focusing on the lie, yardage, environmental factors that will determine the type of shots are possible.
2. Make a decision based on your skill set and the situation in that moment. Many competitive golfers allow their ego to get in the way of making the correct decision. This leads to a risky decision and potential poor outcome.
3. Visualize the shot to help stay focused on what you want, instead of consequences.
4. Positive self-talk to remain confident over the shot.
5. Use breathing and practice swings to get the body in the optimal state to swing the club.
6. Over the ball just focus on the target without excess swing thoughts.

These are just the basics, there are many details within each step that would help you be focused, confident, and relaxed over the shot and ultimately lead to commitment to the shot. This routine has different components that can be practiced on the range. Take some of your practice time to experiment with different elements of your pre-shot routine. For instance, some players use visualization to see a shot like a shot tracer, while others see a bullseye on the green. Find out what helps you remained focused on a target even under pressure.

There are many elements that make up the performance for a golfer. The mental game becomes more important as the pressure increases. Strengthening your pre-shot routine will help you rely on a system to minimize the interference and keep you focused on what is in your control. Golf is one of the few sports that the ball and target do NOT move. You can use this to your advantage. You have time to pay attention to all the aspects of the shot and make a decision that matches your strengths. Yet, having time can also lead to negative thoughts about consequences which leads to anxiety about the result.