

How to Master The Mental Game of Golf: 5 Ways to Play Better Now

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When your buddies or playing partners ask, how's your game do your responses sound something like this?

"I'm hitting it really well."

"My putting has never been better."

"I'm struggling with my irons."

These statements sound about right?

But what's funny is that most people *never* openly talk about the part of the game that plays a huge role in how low you can shoot.

It's not a new driver, it's not a new set of irons, and it's not a new putting technique.

It's the mental game. Yes, the mental side of golf is equal, if not more important than your technique.

I'm sure you heard these famous quotes about the mental side of the game:

- *"Golf is 80% mental, 10% ability, and 10% luck."* - Jack Nicklaus
- *"90% of golf is mental and the other 10% is mental too."* - Jim Flick

What are your thoughts on how important the mental side of the game? Do you really think the mental game plays that big of a role in your overall performance?

Personally, I couldn't agree more. While I don't think golf is 90% mental, it is at least 50/50 or more.

If you can control your thoughts, think positively, and help yourself when you have a blow-up hole, you will be able to shoot lower scores than someone who doesn't work on the mental side of the game.

Here's how to master the mental game of golf so you can take control of your mind and start shooting the best scores of your life.

Routines: Your New Best Friend

As top sports psychologist (and avid golfer), Dr. Bob Rotella said, "*Your routine is your wingman. It's your best friend on the course.*"

And he's right. If you watch the best players in the world, I'm sure you have thought the same thing. These guys do the same thing before every single shot!

Here's how your routines can help improve your mental game.

Pre Shot Routine

Without a pre-shot routine, it's easy to get flustered, think too much, and not have the right thoughts when you are standing over the golf ball. Instead, you want to make a simple and repeatable pre-shot routine to be confident over every shot.

The main point here is that you want to make it *easy and repeatable*. If it's long and complicated routine it'll be difficult to maintain throughout your round.

Ultimately, you want a pre-shot routine that lets you build confidence *and* give you certainty on the shot that you want to hit before you stand over the ball.

Here's a good example of a pre-shot routine that is repeatable:

Pre-Shot Routine For Mental Performance

- Get to your ball, identify how far it is to the target and how far you want to carry it. Identify any trouble but don't focus on it.
 - For example, if there is water short of the green, notate it but don't focus on it. More on why you shouldn't focus on it in the next section.
- Once you have your distance, pick a club that will allow you to hit it that number. Stand behind the ball, visualize or feel the shot happening, and take 1-2 practice swings.
- Take a breath and address the ball.

Swing Thoughts During The Shot

- If you've done everything correctly in your pre-shot routine, you should be 100% confident with your club choice, distance, and shot.
- Once you're over the ball, look at the target, look back at the ball and swing. The less time standing over the ball the better. Longer time means more thoughts and the potential for doubt to set in.

- If you need a swing thought, make sure you only have one and that it's not mechanical. Good examples could be "accelerate through" or "finish high." My advice is keep swing thoughts to a minimum during your round and save them for the range.

Post Shot Routine

Once the shot is over, accept it. Don't let your past shot affect your next shot. Most golfers let the last shot carry on to the next one resulting in emotional and wreckless decisions.

If you're an emotional golfer, use the glove trick. If you hit a bad shot let it simmer for 10-30 seconds. Get a little mad and vent over the mistake for a very short time.

Then, un-velcro your glove to initiate a trigger to your mind that the shot is in the past. Don't even grab your next club until you are 100% over the previous shot.

Another trick, think about other things *not* golf related in between shots. Talk about your family, work, the weather, anything not related to golf. Save your focus and concentration for when you are approaching your next shot.

Just like you would practice a new swing change on the range, practice your routine as well. It needs to become automatic when you're playing.

Now that I've covered the routine, here are some mental game tips that will help you shoot lower than you ever thought possible.

Mental Game Tips To Play Your Best Golf

1. Have the Right Mindset

Have you heard the difference between a growth vs. fixed mindset? If not, it basically means that a fixed mindset implies you're ability to learn is fixed and can't learn anymore. In the past, this was how most people accepted things, especially as they got older.

But science has shattered that belief. You can learn something until the day you die, including a new golf swing and new golf thoughts. **You need to have the right mindset to play your best golf.**

Otherwise, you'll always find a way to get in your own way when you're playing good or make it worse when you're playing bad. Focus on having a growth mindset and know that you can change anything with work and learning new skills.

2. Attitude & Confidence

Playing angry never helps. Your attitude will help you play better and be more fun to be around for your playing partners.

Help teach kids the right way by keeping a positive attitude throughout the round. Look at some of the best players and their reactions are the same whether they made eagle or triple bogey.

You are not your score, it's just a round of golf. Learn from your mistakes, practice on your weaknesses, and have fun. The right attitude will make the game more fun and you'll play your best round when you're feeling grateful to be out there.

3. Controlling Your Thoughts

Your mind can greatly impact your golf game.

Here's a great example that I'm 99% sure you've already experienced in the past.

You're on the first hole and notice a large pond on the right side of the fairway. Instantly you remember you were hitting a slice on the range and start to panic. Next you watch a guy tee off ahead of you and narrowly avoid the water. Now, water is on your mind.

When you get over your shot your mind is focused on water. You might even say to yourself, *"Don't hit it in the water."*

There's only one problem, your subconscious mind doesn't understand the word "Don't." Often time when you say, "Don't hit it in the water" you end up hitting it there! That is because your mind was focused on water and doesn't understand negative commands.

Instead, focus on what you want to happen! Notice the water but then pick a target on the left side of the fairway. Only think about the target and where you want the ball to go, not where you don't want it to go!

4. Positive Self Talk

I'm sure you have a friend that talks bad about themselves during the round. After they miss a putt you hear them say, "I'm just not making putts today", "I'm a horrible putter" or "It's just not my day."

Sound familiar?

Well, this negative self-talk is not helping you shoot lower scores. You need to be 100% opposite. If you miss a putt, think to yourself, *"It's just a matter of time before they start going in."*

Become your own best friend on the course. Arm yourself with positive words of encouragement throughout the round. This video does an unbelievable job showing the power of positive self-talk on the course

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dq4rB5RgzxQ>

Plus, you'll have more fun! Who wants to play golf with someone who is negative and in a foul mood all day?

5. How to Get Rid of Fear, Nerves, and Anxiety

Nerves will never go away and that's a good thing. Tiger once said, *"If I don't get a little nervous on the first tee then I shouldn't be out here. I want it to mean something to me."*

Yes, the best player ever still gets nervous, so why do you think you shouldn't? Instead, learn how to use fear and nerves to play great. Focus on your breathing, use positive words, and focus on your routine during the round.

The more consistent your routine is, the less fear and nerves you'll have on the golf course.

How to Keep a Mental Game Scorecard

Despite what golfers say, sometimes the numbers on the scorecard do lie. It's so easy to be results focused when you play. But oftentimes the number of your card after the round isn't telling the full story.

So how can you truly know how good or bad your round was? With a mental game scorecard.

Before you go out next time keep two scorecards. Your normal scorecard for your total score.

Your mental game scorecard is scored like this:

3 Keys to a Mental Game Scorecard

- **Calculate your shot.** Factor in the wind, distance, bounce, and conditions to determine the number you want to hit the shot.
- **Imagine the shot.** Whether you feel or visualize the shot, make sure you are committed to seeing or feeling it *before* you address the ball.
- **Execute.** This doesn't mean you hit the shot as intended, instead it means that you were 100% committed to the type of shot you wanted to play.

If you do all of these three that counts as one point. Score your shots based on how many points you get for each shot. You'll find that when your mental game scorecard is better you are more committed and probably score better as a result.

The mental game scorecard forces you to look at more than score and instead how prepared you are for each shot that you hit.

Conclusion

Golf is a wildly difficult game. You have to beat the conditions, your swing, and the course to play great golf. But even if you do all of those you can still shoot bad rounds because of a poor mental game.

Working on your swing, chipping, and putting without working on your mental game is like working out 7 days a week and eating McDonald's daily but expecting six-pack abs. Your game and your mind go hand in hand.

If you want to play your best golf and have the most fun ever, make a conscious effort to improve your mindset before, during, and after the round. Create powerful routines, speak positive words of encouragement, and learn from every round.

The more you do this, the more you will find it effortless to play your best golf yet.