

7 Ways to Play Better Golf Under Pressure

By Michael Leonard

Do you play better golf under pressure or do you tend to hit shots you're not used to seeing, miss putts you normally make, and score higher than normal?

If you're in the second category don't worry, you're not alone.

Golf is hard enough, adding money to a match or competing in a tournament only makes it harder. But you can learn how to play better golf under pressure once you know what you need to work on.

People don't just magically become great pressure players, they work at it for months and years. They work not only on their swing but also the mental side of the game, routine, and managing their emotions.

Here are seven ways to calm your nerves and play better golf under pressure:

Show Up Prepared

"Train it, trust it." One of the oldest truest sayings to the game of golf.

If you can train (aka practice) enough you will become confident with your game and play better golf under pressure. Easier said than done of course, but you have to practice your swing and your attitude to thrive under pressure. Once you trust your swing you won't be thinking of mechanics the next time you feel pressure.

Golf Psychology 101

Here's a quick psychology lesson to make it clear. The brain is composed of the conscious and subconscious mind. The conscious mind is the mechanical side of the swing. This side is trying to make sure you practice with a purpose, have proper tempo, grip, etc.

While the subconscious mind is the side you need to trigger to play great under pressure. The subconscious areas of our minds do the best job of controlling our motor skills. If you let the conscious brain get involved you won't swing free and focus only on the target. Instead, you will be thinking about grip, swing plane, or whatever else you're working on. Doubt and fear are easy ways to trigger the subconscious mind.

You cannot play great golf if you are thinking about mechanics during the round. There should be no swing thoughts just your targets during your round. Whether you are driving, hitting an iron, chipping, or putting the target is the only thought.

Next time you are watching a PGA tour event and they interview the winner you will almost always hear how they were focused on the target only. They never say they were “trying to take the club in, keep their head still, accelerate through putts or other mechanical thoughts.” The only way to play better under pressure if you are not thinking mechanics and instead are swinging free. Think of this as autopilot.

Pre-Round Preparation

To play better golf under pressure you have to be prepared. It doesn't start on the first tee, it starts when you wake up. Before every tournament, skins game, or competition you need to show up prepared. Get to the course at least an hour early, pack snacks, extra clothes for inclement weather, and a fully stocked bag. Don't start the day off feeling unprepared or rushed.

Create a Great Routine

Think of your routine as your wingman for playing better golf under pressure. Of course, you have to practice your routine to be able to trust it under pressure. Every time you are playing a round, even if it's not a tournament, you need to practice your routine. Routines should exist for every single shot, not just tee shots or putts.

Your pre-shot routine needs to be automatic to play better golf under pressure. You should practice your routines when you are on the range, chipping green or putting green. Instead of hitting a large bucket of balls without any real goals grab a small bucket and do your pre-shot routine for each shot. Think about what your target is, where you take your breaths, how you address the ball, and how you pull the trigger.

Just like your swing, if you train your routine you can trust it under pressure.

Visualize

To be a truly great golfer you have to learn how to visualize success, not just during the round but before and after as well. Visualizing success can help anything you do in life, golf is no exception.

After reading, *How Champions Think* (INSERT AFFILIATE AMAZON LINK) by Dr. Bob Rotella I started doing these visualizations and seen incredible results.

Why? Because it helps feed these images to my subconscious mind and made me a more trusting, confident golfer.

Here are three areas of your game where visualizing can help you play better golf under pressure:

Pre-Round

To play impressive golf you can't just assume it will happen, you have to train your mind as well as your body. The night before your round spend 15-30 minutes by yourself, thinking about the round tomorrow. Turn off your phone, TV or any other distractions and find a quiet place to visualize your upcoming round.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself getting to the course. Think about how you will be calm, cool and collected during your warm up. Think about the first hole and what the tee shot requires. Is it a draw or cut? Driver or fairway wood? Think how you will feel when you stand over the ball, take a breath and make your first swing. Picture yourself with great tempo, consistent breathing, and a positive attitude.

It will take discipline to do this for every shot on every hole but it is absolutely necessary. Don't just think about great shots as that is unrealistic. Imagine how you would recover if you hit the ball behind the tree, have a ball plugged in the bunker, or miss a putt. Golf is all about recovery, no one hits every shot perfect.

Finish your visualizations by thinking of walking up to the 18th tee and being in a position to win the tournament. Imagine yourself sticking to the routine, hitting great shots, and winning!

During Round

While the majority of visualizations will happen before the round you will still want to visualize each shot. Before each shot make sure you pick the smallest target possible and imagine the ball going straight to the target. While you are standing behind the ball taking a practice swing think about hitting a pure shot directly at your target.

Post Round

Most people don't do any of these visualizations especially post round. Once you get home, make sure to think about your round in detail. Replay every single shot, good and bad. But once you get to your bad shots replace them with the positive version, how you intended it to go. If you hit an iron fat, missed the green and made bogey replace it. Instead, think about hitting a pure iron shot right at the target, making birdie and heading to the next tee.

Do this for every bad shot so you continue to program your mind with positive thoughts. Don't dwell on the bad shots, remember only the good shots and fix the bad ones in your mind so you will be ready for the next tournament.

Stay Positive

Attitude

To play great golf under pressure you have to stay positive. I know it sounds obvious and corny but it is 100% true. Negative thinking almost always works, so you have to remain optimistic and positive to give yourself the best chance of success.

You can't only have a good attitude if you are playing well, it has to be constant. Think of every shot as a chance to hit the best shot you ever have, even if you are playing poorly. Believe in yourself until you are shaking hands on the 18th green. Never stop believing!

Self-Talk

If you're standing over a shot in a pressure situation which swing thought will help you hit the best shot possible?

1. "You are a great golfer who is prepared and ready to hit a great shot at your target."
2. "You haven't hit a great shot all day, you have already made a double and today is just not my day."

Obviously, the first option will give you the best chance to succeed. We've all been the negative version and being negative almost always works. Instead, trust yourself, pump yourself up, and be your own best friend during the round.

Emotions in Check

This is much easier said than done but you have to keep your emotions in check on the golf course. Even one slip up can cost you a shot that could change the entire round. This is one that you will have to work at constantly and might not ever come easy. Golf is an incredibly frustrating game but if you get mad or depressed during a round no good will come from it. You need to stay as even keel as possible.

Again, I realize this is extremely difficult but ask yourself, when was the last time getting mad actually helped a round? If you launch a club back at the cart or slam a wedge into the worms I doubt it actually helped anything. More likely than not it probably put you in a bad mood and carried your negative energy into the next shot.

Not only does it not help your game it's also horrible to play with people who are headcases on the golf course. If you are slamming clubs, swearing, and getting mad people won't want to play with you. Keep your emotions in check by not putting too much weight on any one shot, sticking with your routine, and staying positive.

Go Somewhere Else

Golf is a long game compared to most sports. Staying focused 100% on your round for 4-6 hours is mentally exhausting. Instead of thinking about golf the entire round you have to shut off your golf brain between shots. Think about other things in life such as family, friends, or an upcoming vacation. Once you get within 30 yards of your shot or as you drive closer focus back on the round. Once the shot is complete go back somewhere else.

Here's how I go somewhere else in a tournament. I'll hit my shot, unsnap my glove and think about anything other than golf. Once I approach my next shot I snap back my glove which is now a trigger to my brain to re-focus. Once the shot is over I repeat. This might feel awkward at first and will take practice but it will help you be more relaxed, focused and enjoy the round.

Play Better Golf Under Pressure

Hopefully, you are able to start a few of these habits to play better golf under pressure. Understand that learning to play better golf under pressure is a process. It's just like improving from a 30 handicap to a 10 handicap. It takes time, practice, and persistence.

Remember to use these seven tricks to play better golf under pressure:

- Show up prepared
- Create a routine
- Visualize success
- Stay positive the entire round
- Keep your emotions in check
- Go somewhere else

Are you currently doing some of all of these tips to play better golf under pressure?

Do you have other things you do to stay calm?

Let us know in the comments!

For more work samples be sure to check out my portfolio

<http://michaelleenard.net/portfolio/>

Thanks,

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