

POSITIVE MENTAL IMAGERY

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Improve Your Golf Game
Easily & Quickly
With Mental Coaching

MENTAL LESSON PLAN 6: Managing Expectations

By Joan King

Since November 2002 I have been outlining a six-month mental golf plan to prepare those of you in non-golf climates for your re-emergence into golf in the Spring. For those of you playing golf now in the warmer climates, it will be a reminder of mental tools to use to enhance your present game.

Lesson 1 in November 2002: *Goal Setting and Physical Conditioning*
Lesson 2 in December 2002: *Stress Management and Relaxation*
Lesson 3 in January 2003: *Mind Control and Positive Self-Talk*
Lesson 4 in February 2003: *Overcoming Fear*
Lesson 5 in March 2003: *Changing Limiting Beliefs*
Lesson 6 in April 2003: *Managing Expectations*

This mental training is to prepare you so that you are ready to perform at your peak performance level when you are standing over the ball getting ready to swing. At that time you want your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual parts all to be in harmony. Then they act as one and the swing occurs without conscious effort or thought. This is called playing *in the zone*.

Expectations are different from goals. Setting goals charts your course toward obtaining the results you want. As you accomplish your short term and intermediate goals, you move closer to your overall goal. Expectations are thoughts that you tell yourself about your performance. These thoughts seem to come from a need to prove self-worth by "doing" or accomplishing something well.

Begin to become aware of your expectations that are sabotaging your golf game. Look at the different components that make up your performance such as how you think and feel, how you act on the golf course, the luck, the golf course and weather conditions that change every day. Here are some examples of the different kinds of expectations that you might encounter:

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

When you go to the golf course for a round of golf, what are your expectations of how you will play? If you had a good round the last time you played, do you “expect” to shoot the same score or better? Or, do you conjure up the pressure in your mind of others expecting you to repeat your good round?

If we look at all the great rounds, none of them are the same, and you don't know exactly what you did, because if you did, you would shoot those scores all the time. --Helen Aldredsson

If you have a good round going, this is not the time to think about it or about how you are going to make it better. This would be a good way to lose your momentum. *Never change a winning game.* Just keep doing what you are doing without thinking about how you are doing it.

One reason it's so hard to follow up a personal-best round with another low round is that you compare every round played to your personal best. Realize that your USGA handicap is based on your lowest 10 scores out of the last 20 you have played, which is your potential, not your average.

It's all right to have supreme confidence in your short game, but don't “expect” to get up and down from every shot. The pros only do this 50% of the time. Improvement is your goal.

LOW EXPECTATIONS

Often without realizing it, we often “expect” certain situations to continue or to play out in a certain way. For example, repeated generalizations can become self-fulfilling prophesies. If you have played poorly the last couple of times, it doesn't mean you will play poorly today. If you 3-putt the first two holes, it doesn't mean that you will putt badly all day. If you have scored high on a particular hole several times, it doesn't mean you will today. These low expectations are not healthy thinking. Know that every shot and every hole is a new opportunity to turn your game around. *Always change a losing game.*

If you have a poor warm-up don't be concerned. Many players don't concentrate at their best until they are actually playing. Remember the times when you did have a good practice session or warm up. Bring up the memories of the solid shots you know you are capable of executing. Stay positive right from the beginning. Reinforce every good shot and let go of the missed ones. The more you stay focused on the shots you hit well, the more confidence you will build.

UNMET EXPECTATIONS

Expectations are like icebergs. When we first create an expectation we just see the tip of what we could eventually create. The amount of possibilities that can

surface will depend very much on how we either help or interfere with its ability to grow and emerge. Stay open to all possible opportunities.

Some people believe they will only play well if they start out well. You have probably heard that indecision is an athlete's worst enemy. Unmet expectations must run a close second. If you expect too much of yourself and you must play well early in the round, you are setting yourself up for failure. If you don't play up to your expectations of a good start, you will feel as if you are a failure which then could destroy your confidence for the rest of the round.

Consider how to stay emotionally balanced if things do not work out as expected. Know that there are often very good reasons why it didn't work out the way you thought it was going to. Enjoy the mystery of the game of golf and enjoy watching the magic unfold into the bigger picture. There is plenty of time after your round to analyze what happened.

Management of expectations is one of the keys to a good mental game. Learn how to change your expectations so you can maintain balance regardless of the external circumstances. Reacting to unmet expectations with disappointment or frustration can drain your energy and start the downward spiral of a series of missed shots.

EXPECTATION AND PERFECTIONISM

When you are complimented on a shot, do you answer with a "not bad" comment? Attempting to hit every shot perfectly can create a lot of stress. What you are really attempting to do is have a pattern of increased success rather than a perfect round. Even the best of rounds had opportunities to be better.

Do you get frustrated when you hit a drive better than you expected and it runs through the fairway into the rough? Do you get upset when you hit an approach shot so well that it flies the green? If you focus on the end result, you have missed the joy of experiencing the feeling of a great shot, and you wind up feeling bad instead. This down feeling could carry over to your next shot, and then you will be thinking about how to avoid hitting one that well in the future. Instead, congratulate yourself for hitting such a great shot. The feeling of hitting a pure shot is really what you are seeking.

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Now that Spring is here and the golf course beckons, what are your expectations about your first round of golf? You probably don't expect to regain your mid-summer form right away and are just happy to be outside playing again. You concentrate on swinging easily to make good contact and are not concerned with score as much.

After you have played a few rounds and have practiced, it is natural that you will "expect" to have improved. However, this isn't always the case. When you hit

the ball well on the range and then “expect” to hit the ball the same way on the course, you have created unrealistic expectations in your mind. It is more important to transfer the relaxed atmosphere of the range to the competitive atmosphere of the course.

As you continue to practice, your confidence will build when you hit a lot of solid shots on the driving range. Take the time to anchor each of these great shots into your memory with good feelings of success. This knowledge that you are physically capable is what you want to take to the golf course. Improvement in golf is a gradual process. Build your confidence and trust with a good mental game one step at a time. Don't try to force your progress. Keep a relaxed attitude about improving. The best and easiest way to learn is by having an attitude of fun. The harder you press to improve, the more difficult progress becomes.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

1. Instead of figuring out what score you are going to shoot, concentrate instead on the first tee shot. A good way to begin your round is on the practice tee. Play the first three holes on the range as if you were on the course. This will help you to focus and stay centered on starting well.
2. The difference between amateur players and pros is that amateurs focus on *avoiding* hitting bad shots and pros think about *executing* good shots. Be decisive about the shot you are going to hit. Carefully execute your preshot routine to prepare your mind and body and spirit.
3. To build confidence which helps you to stay focused, begin to talk to yourself positively with the preceding thoughts before you get to the golf course. Don't mentally “shoot yourself in the foot” by doubting your ability, by worrying about your score, or getting caught up in what you think others might be thinking about your performance. Use all your energy to focus on hitting the shot the best you can. Stay centered on getting the ball into the hole with the fewest number of strokes.
4. Adopt the attitude that golf is a game where an inch can make the difference between perfection and disaster. Sometimes it goes in your favor and sometimes it doesn't. When it doesn't it is called the “rub of the green”. Enjoy the times when Lady Luck is on your side.
5. Circumstances don't make you, you make you.
6. The formula for success is:

Practice + good mental preparation + trust = low scores.

Entrain Your Heart & Brain for Peak Performance!

“I use your tapes all interchangeably and love them. They make me more relaxed and more focused on the golf course. My game has really improved.” --S.B.

“I listen to your tapes 4-5 times a week and fall asleep at night to them. As a result I’m more relaxed. My poor shots frustrate me less often and I am getting out of sand bunkers more consistently” –FG., MD

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If you have a question or need help with your mental game, email Joan at POSITIVE MENTAL IMAGERY, info@mastermindgolf.com Also, please share with us how this website information has helped you improve your performance.

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