

# POSITIVE MENTAL IMAGERY

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*Improve Your Golf Game  
Easily & Quickly*

## **EXPECTATIONS**

By Joan King

One of the most important mental tools for moving into “the zone” is to manage your expectations during your round of golf. Having expectations is different from setting goals. It is necessary to set positive long term, intermediate and short term goals so you have a plan to move toward success.

Expectations, on the other hand, mean to anticipate a desired outcome. In “expecting” a certain outcome in golf, you have put your attention and energy on the end result instead of in the moment. Your expectations should reflect the reality of your ability. You can expect too much from yourself, or too little from yourself depending on your level of self-esteem. If you expect to play well on the opening holes and don't, you will feel like a failure.

Expectations are like icebergs. By staying focused on one outcome, you seldom see the bigger picture and the many possibilities that may exist just under the surface. Whether it is expecting to score to your handicap, or expecting to miss-hit with your least favorite club, you don't know all that will eventually emerge. You can save a tremendous amount of energy by accepting that there is more than just the tip of the iceberg.

Managing expectations means managing your internal thoughts and emotions and keeping them in balance with your abilities. How good you are in golf is determined by how you react to the ever changing situations during the round, not about what you expect will happen. The more flexible you are, the more control you have.

Expectations can be negative or positive. Here are some examples.

### Taking it to the course from the range

A question often asked by amateurs and pros is, “Why can't I take my game from the range to the course?” One answer is -- your expectations.

### Fear of Success

The media has created an expectation for the general public that Tiger Woods will win every tournament he enters. When he doesn't the fans are disappointed, and the press then writes about him being in a "slump." When you win a tournament, do you believe that people will "expect" you to repeat? This can create a lot of mental and emotional pressure.

Some psychologists refer to this kind of thinking as a "fear of success." It is the anticipation of having a negative outcome. To change this fear you have to acknowledge and conquer it by turning it into a positive challenge. World class pros such as Tiger take the negative perceptions of others as a personal challenge to show them they are wrong.

### The "Yips"

I have worked with golfers who have experienced the "yips." This can happen not only in putting and chipping, but on the full swing where the golfer gets the club up on the backswing but isn't able to return it to the ball without considerable physical effort. These golfers have a real fear of the anxiety that it will happen again and they will look foolish in front of their friends. This phenomenon appears to happen mostly to skilled players who know they can perform these seemingly simple shots. They put so much pressure on themselves that their nervous system reacts with a jerky movement, sweating hands, muscle tightness and stomach tension.

### Embarrassment

As humans we are very creative and use our imagination to conjure up all kinds of possible outcomes. Every golfer I have worked with has had at least one fear that he imagined would happen in his golf rounds. Tournament players worry about seeing their score up on the board where everyone can see what they did. They worry about hitting someone in the gallery. Recreational players mostly worry about others watching them and what they will think of them.

### Fear of Failure

Almost everyone in their golf career worries about playing with someone with a much lower handicap. A good example are the executives who play in Pro-Am tournaments. They are out of their element and are nervous and worried about failure. This can also happen to a club professional who plays in a Pro-Am with his club members. He believes his worth as a pro is determined by how well he scores and puts pressure on himself to perform in front of his members.

### Avoiding Failure

There are some golfers who want to become good players but are afraid that their best effort will not be enough. So they expect to fail and reinforce that belief by not taking lessons, not practicing. They don't play by the rules and don't learn about themselves by the constant feedback that the game offers. They have convinced themselves that if they don't try, then they won't fail.

### Memories/Past experience

What is your favorite club? It is probably your favorite club because you have good memories of hitting it and positive expectations of doing it again.

What is your least favorite club? When you are forced to use this club on the course, you probably have negative expectations of the outcome due to memories of missed shots. The negative expectations will then produce a missed shot which then confirms your original negative expectation.

Which club do you practice the most with? Probably the one you like the most. Golfers seem to avoid practicing with the clubs with which they have low expectations of success.

### Low vs. High Expectations

The expectations you create will produce self-fulfilling prophecies. Expectations that are too big or too small can produce problems. If your expectations are too high, you might try too hard to make every shot perfect. If your expectations are too low there will not be any motivation to improve. How often have you heard someone say, "It's going to be that kind of (bad) day?" after scoring big numbers on a couple of holes.

### Comparison to your Best

The USGA handicap system is a complicated system that attempts to have an equitable way for golfers of varying abilities to play games with each other. Your handicap is based on your last lowest ten scores. In other words, it is your personal-best, not necessarily your day-to-day average scores. Expecting to shoot your best every time you play is unrealistic.

Here are some mental keys to modify your expectations:

1. Be aware of expectations that are affecting your self-esteem, motivation and desire.
2. Let go of all expectations of your performance. As the Nike ad says, "Just Do It!"
3. Stay "in the process" of creating every shot with a good pre-shot routine to prepare your mind and body.
4. Practice the clubs that you are least confident hitting. Remember the times you hit those clubs well.
5. Redefine your expectations. Change the labels you put on yourself that become limiting beliefs.
6. "Acting as if" is a positive way to overcome negative expectations. When a negative feeling begins to take over, make a conscious decision to "act as if" you are a confident, in control, knowledgeable player. Acting as if is a positive way to overcome fears, doubts, and low self-esteem.
7. Look at life as an energy economy game. Each day, ask yourself, "Are my energy expenditures (actions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings) productive or nonproductive? During the course of my day, have I accumulated more stress or more peace?"
8. Letting go of expectations means viewing the world around us from a new and more spontaneous perspective. By accepting the unpredictable nature of life, we can be more flexible and ready to adapt and respond to whatever may come our way with more intelligence, more creativity and more balance. Expect only the unexpected!
9. Be patient and bring your mind back to the present.

*"Just as your car runs more smoothly and requires less energy to go faster and farther when the wheels are in perfect alignment, you perform better when your thoughts, feelings, emotions, goals, and values are in balance."*

*-- Brian Tracy*

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