

Mental Golf Instruction Newsletter

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THE 2005 MASTERS

By Joan King

Spring signals the time for golfers to turn their attention to Bobby Jones' famous tournament in Augusta, Georgia; The Masters. If you watched any part of the tournament on TV, you experienced drama at its best on the golf course. The last nine holes turned into a match between Chris DiMarco and Tiger Woods for a story book finish.

Mother Nature decided to water the blooming azaleas, rhododendrons, dogwoods, and grass of Augusta National golf course causing daily rain delays. The golfers had to deal with early starting times, unfinished rounds, starting over again in the middle of the round and long days on the golf course.

Besides watching a wonderful exciting drama unfold, there are many things you can learn from watching the players. Here are some of the things I noticed that you can add to your mental game.

LETTING GO

Vijay Singh reported that Phil Mickelson's spikes were causing spike marks on the greens. The media saw it as an opportunity to make a big news event. Golf is a game where the players are the officials. We can all learn from the way professionals handle a potentially charged issue like calling a rule on someone. Vijay and Phil talked it over privately, resolved the issue, and then dismissed it. It was then over for them. The press kept bringing it up. Phil laughed and said it was over and wouldn't discuss it any further.

MOMENTUM

In this, the season's first major professional tournament, there were shots of brilliance hit over and over despite the unscheduled delays and mental and emotional pressure. The lead changed hands several times on the last day of 27 holes of regulation play. At different times, Chris and Tiger had the momentum. When you don't have it, it is important not to lose your composure or confidence. You never know what can happen on the next hole, or next nine holes. You need to maintain a positive attitude, stay composed, and wait for it to happen.

GAME PLAN

A game plan is the strategy you decide on before your round. Your strategy might include hitting a 3-wood off a tee for more accuracy, hitting shots to take the trouble out of play, or laying up when you can't reach a par-4 green over water.

When you are playing well, there is a tendency to abandon your game plan and play more aggressively. It is important not to change your game plan in the middle of the round, no matter what the score is. It's important to hit high percentage shots within the limits of your ability. Don't try to do too much. Make good decisions and keep yourself in the game.

On the 14th hole, DiMarco's second shot was on a downhill lie 236 yards from the hole. The TV announcers commented that he was playing too conservatively. Describing his lay up shot he said, "I didn't feel like it was a smart play and my wedge play was great all week." He hit his wedge shot two feet from the hole to birdie.

PRESHOT ROUTINE

Chris DiMarco has a rapid, decisive routine. Tiger has a slower, deliberate routine. Using a preshot routine provides you with a consistent method of programming your mind and body. It gives you a way to automatically execute your shots, especially under pressure. The routine gives you tunnel vision that shields you from all distractions so you can swing on auto pilot. Every winning golfer has the same, consistent routine for consistent results.

DISTRACTIONS

On the par 5 15th hole, Tiger was on in two. Chris DiMarco had played short and was about to hit his third shot on to the green. Just as he was about to hit, a tremendous roar erupted from the 16th hole. Trevor Immelman had hit a 6-iron on the par 3 that backed down the slope on the green and fell into the cup for a hole-in-one. DiMarco backed off his shot twice until the noise subsided, performed his quick, consistent routine, and then hit approach shot two feet from the cup. They both birdied the hole.

AROUSAL LEVEL

Tiger missed the par 3 16th hole. His next shot will be replayed many times on TV because of the excitement it generated. His ball was up against the fringe of the green. He chipped it to run up the bank of the green. Tiger watched as it curved slowly downhill toward the cup. The ball seemed to stop at the cup, resting on the lip for two seconds, and then decided to drop in. Tiger pumped his fist and yelled with excitement at the chip-in birdie.

Tiger has said in the past he stopped doing his fist pump because it got him out of his arousal level (see newsletter March 2000) and he found it difficult to regain his composure. That was obvious as he stepped to the 17th tee. He drove the ball way right offline into the trees next to the 15th fairway where he didn't have a shot at the green. He made bogey. On the 18th hole he hit his second shot into the right bunker and made another bogey.

At the end of 27 holes, Tiger had shot 71 and Chris 68 and were tied at 276, 12 under par. By the time he got to the playoff hole at 18, Tiger had settled down, regained his composure, and sunk a sensational 15-foot putt to win his fourth green jacket.

In the 1996 Masters, Greg Norman was also out of his arousal level. He shot a closing 78 to lose a six-shot lead to Nick Faldo who closed with 67. Norman said that he had expected to win at least one Masters but part of his problem was that he got "too excited" at the prospect of playing in The Masters.

RECOVERY

Golf is a game of recovery. Hitting spectacular shots is wonderful, but you need to accept your miss-hit shots and concentrate completely on the next shot. Acceptance is one of the keys to a sound routine.

Both times he played the 18th hole, DiMarco hit on the green only to watch the ball roll back down the slope onto the fairway. The first time he almost holed out his chip shot. He thought he had made it. In the playoff he lipped the cup with almost the same shot.

At the end of 27 holes, Tiger and Chris were tied. By the time he got to 18, the playoff hole, Tiger had settled down, regained his composure, hit his second shot within 15 feet of the hole. He made the 15-foot downhill birdie putt to win his 9th major tournament and his 4th green jacket.

Entrain Your Heart & Brain for Peak Performance

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