

Why is the pre-shot routine so important?



In less than 20 seconds we need to convey as clearly as possible our thoughts and actions in a way that is going to encourage the brain and body to perform a good golf swing. Karen Francis explains a simple process that will help in coaching programme to achieve this

We all know how mentally challenging golf can be, mainly because it is a lot harder to instinctively hit a stationary ball and also the in-between time where over-thinking the game is such an easy thing to do.

In my experience, working with all levels of golfers, there are some common themes that mentally sabotage any chance of hitting a decent shot.

- Think about what they don't want, e.g. 'I don't want to go in the bunker'. The brain cannot deal with an abstract comment so it becomes 'I want to go in the bunker'
- Negative self-talk, for instance 'I'm rubbish at chipping'. Builds a self-image that the brain will only be too happy to comply with

- Negative emotions, e.g. 'I get so angry when I can't putt'. Events are stored in the brain by emotional content so the higher it is the more it will remind you next time 'Don't forget... you can't putt'

- Negative body language, such as slumped, looking down and gesticulating. This is all relayed back to the brain which will encourage more negative feelings as it thinks it is helping.

These key themes are wrapped around individual levels of emotional control, focus and concentration and personality styles.

Prior to developing a pre-shot routine, it is important to understand whether your student is a Thinker (need the detail) or a Doer (just wants to

get on with it).

Rushing a thinker to hit a shot will only lead to feeling flustered, while slowing down a doer means they will start to over-think.

Building a mentally solid pre-shot routine

Once we have a better understanding of the golfer, then a pre-shot routine can be built around ensuring the right kind of focus, techniques to manage negative emotions and a thought process which is positive and encouraging and most importantly giving the right information to the brain.

Focus

Encourage your student to be clear about what shot they intend to play. The brain needs clear, specific, concise information so 'left side of the fairway' is ok, however 'that patch of darker green fairway on the left' is far better.

The brain does not know the difference between a real or imagined event so the more sensory information we collect the more the brain believes this will happen.

Being able to visualise the shot is very powerful, however if this is difficult for an individual then talking through what they intend to do will then create an image in their minds as well.

Emotions

When we experience negative emotions we generally breathe

from our chest which sends a signal to the brain that we are unsafe. This creates a chain reaction of cutting blood supply, tensing muscles and flooding the body with adrenaline hormones - none of which is conducive to hitting a good shot. By taking a deep breathe down to the abdomen confirms being in a safe place so this is very important for the pre-shot routine or indeed anytime when anxiety is high.

This is called the 5/2/7 technique; breathe in through the nose down to the stomach to a count of five, hold for two and exhale to a count of seven.

Thinking

Negative thoughts will produce negative actions so it is important that your student develops affirmations that are encouraging rather than destructive.

An example could be 'When I keep my head down my swing is loose and free' and is a way of not allowing other intrusive thoughts in.

A consistent pre-shot routine will not only keep your student focussed, it also gives clear and concise information to the brain which just wants to please and also stops any distractions or rushing without any thoughts at all.

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