



*BOOKLET #2:  
IMPROVE THE MENTAL SIDE OF  
YOUR GOLF GAME,  
BEFORE THE ROUND*

*By Ed Feeney*

*ApplyGolfLessons.com*

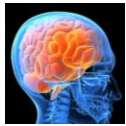
## IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL GAME BEFORE YOU PLAY THE ROUND

### #1: HE EXPERIENCED THE BIGGEST, FASTEST IMPROVEMENT IN CONFIDENCE AND PERFORMANCE EVER FROM A THREE-MINUTE LESSON

Scott Switzer, a member of the Dominion Club in Glen Allen, VA introduced himself to me on the putting green. He said I had helped a friend of his improve his golf game considerably. He was the one now in need of an immediate and effective golf lesson. I asked him what the problem was. He said he had a very respectable eight handicap, but he had just played 18 holes and had three-putted *every* green. Wondering if his frustration caused him to exaggerate the problem, I later asked his wife, who had played with him that day, if he had really three-putted every green. “No, he did not three-putt every green. He three-putted only 16 of them. He did not one-putt any green.” That meant he took 52 putts in 18 holes. Wow!

He said, “There is one other problem. I need help before I tee off again in *three minutes*.”

Sixteen three-putt greens and he wanted a solution in just three minutes. This had to be the test of all tests for my Behavioral Golf Instruction process.



Here is how I analyzed the problem and the actions I had him take within three minutes. If you find your putting is suddenly in the dumpster, perhaps you should take these same actions.

1. I suspected without watching him putt that he had a dual problem. One, he certainly had a faulty putting stroke, which caused him to miss putts. Two, the huge number of putts he missed during the last round had drained his confidence battery drier than one in a 1903 Model A Ford. That added to the performance problem.
2. I needed to see how he putted. However, I felt that asking him to attempt to sink a putt at this stage would be too traumatic. “Let us see you putt over there,” I said, pointing in a general direction away from any cup.
3. When he swung the putter, he looked like he was putting with 25 uncoordinated pieces of car parts picked at random in a junk yard. The putter, wrists, forearms, upper arms and shoulders were all moving independently of one another. The wrists in particular were flapping considerably. It was good news. If I could fix his putting stroke, the improvement in results would quickly cure the mental problems. Or so I hoped.
4. I demonstrated how I wanted him to swing the putter, but I did it at 20% of normal speed, explaining it as I did so. Specifically, I wanted him to swing the arms, wrists and the putter as one unit, without any independent movements. The motor of the swing was to be an up and down rocking of the shoulders. The head was not to

- move. I contrasted the correct and incorrect movements to demonstrate the differences.
5. Next, I had him swing without hitting a ball. The idea here was to have him focus on the *process* of swinging without seeing another failure of the ball to go in the cup or stop close to it.
  6. I first rocked his shoulders as he held onto the putter. Then I held the putter shaft so that he could not bend it back in relation to the line of his arms. I held his head so that he could not move.
  7. There is nothing better for a depressed golfer than knowing he is showing some improvement. If he showed the *slightest* improvement, I praised him enthusiastically and in specific language so that he was more likely to repeat it. As a behavior-change expert, I have trained myself to detect and praise any improvement with the eye of an eagle detecting a worm at 500 yards. (I must check on what eagles eat).
  8. Next, I had him hit some putts, but without aiming at a cup. He stroked them well and exhibited the correct movements.

Off he went to play another nine holes of golf. As I tend to do, I stayed around the green talking to other golfers about their successes and problems and practicing a bit.

When he finished, he walked up to me and said, "You are my savior."

I asked him what happened. He said, "I sank a 45-foot putt on the first hole and a 25-footer on the second. I did not three-putt any green even once (after 16 of 18 three-putts on the first 18).

Here is the point. One could have spent a long time talking to him about relaxation exercises, positive visualization techniques and other mental approaches, but the problem was his faulty putting techniques. If and when you have putting problems, you may want to apply the techniques I used.

I must be honest. I do not know if this was the biggest, fastest improvement ever from a three-minute lesson. Until someone comes up with a better one, I will use that headline to lure viewers to read this example of improving confidence by a sudden improvement in swing technique and results.

## **#2:** *I VISUALIZED IN ADVANCE BEATING ARNOLD PALMER*

In 1971, I had lunch with Arnold Palmer at Westchester Country Club. Five groups of three amateurs each played two holes with him as business guests of United Air Lines. He won the PGA Tour event at that club that year, the 61<sup>st</sup> and next-to-last win he had on the PGA Tour, though he won many times later on what is now the Champions Tour.

One is thrilled to play with such an outstanding player, the "The King," as so many justifiably call him. As to how one reacts to playing with him, he later said they probably fall into two camps.

Those who are fearful they will embarrass themselves and they end up playing worse and those who respond by playing much better.



Here is what I told myself to think and visualize in preparing to play Arnold Palmer:

1. I told myself that I was going to beat Arnold Palmer — without receiving any handicap strokes.
2. I decided I would bet him \$5 on the match.
3. To reduce pressure, I told myself that we were not settling the question of who was the better golfer, which was all too evident. I told myself that we were going to play only two holes, which was an easier task, but was difficult to do against this great and competitive golfer.
4. I visualized intensively and in detail *fifty* different scenarios for beating him, some of them requiring me to hit miracle shots, including knocking in a putt on the second hole to beat him. Why did I visualize fifty scenarios? Because I wanted to be ready mentally for whatever pressure situation I faced with Arnold. For example, one of them was a scenario where I had to sink a putt of some length to win. I imagined saying to myself, “He puts his pants on one leg at a time. Sink the putt and see what happens.”

When I told him on the practice putting green what I proposed, he gave me that Arnold Palmer competitive stare as if to say, “You are challenging me?”

On the first hole we played, the par three 16<sup>th</sup> hole, I hit the green with a five-wood and he missed with an iron shot that stopped short of the green. His chip shot stopped suddenly, well short of the cup.

I was unfamiliar with the Westchester’s tricky greens and received a shock on the first hole that day (before the holes I played with him). I had visualized a four-foot break to the *right* and I got a four-foot break to the *left*. On the first hole of our match, I left my 30-foot-putt three feet short of the cup. While that was a short putt, I was a bit nervous because of the earlier misread. He missed his putt. I barely got my putt to go in the cup, but it stayed there, giving me a one-stroke lead.

On the next hole, I drove into the right rough. He thundered a long drive in the center of the fairway. My iron went dead straight over some trees, but the ball stopped short of the green.

Arnold spun a wedge shot into the baked, hard green and, incredibly, backed it up to six feet from the cup. After he hit the shot, he immediately looked at me as if two lightning bolts were shooting out of his eyes toward me. It was as if he was saying, “Take that!” I felt his huge competitive nature, as so many of his opponents felt on the PGA Tour.

I chipped up almost dead on line, but the ball ran 15 feet past the cup. At that distance, I had an 80% chance I would miss the putt and end up with a bogey five. He was six feet away, likely to make a birdie three, which would give him a one-shot victory.

As I had mentally rehearsed many times in the days leading up to the event, I said silently, "He puts his pants on one leg at a time, just like everyone else. Knock the putt in and see what happens." I sank the 15-foot putt.

He said, "You really want to win that five dollars, don't you?" He missed his putt and immediately offered his hand in congratulations.

He reached the clubhouse before I did and, as the great sportsman he is, told the players in the other groups of our bet and my win. Win or lose, Arnold is always gracious, though a ferocious competitor. No wonder he is so beloved by the golfing public, the media, his professional competitors and me.

When he offered me a five-dollar bill, I said I would prefer a check with his name on it. When he graciously wrote the check, a fellow player said to him, "You better write on the check that it was for gambling, or else they will think it was for caddying." That is how I received the five-dollar "gambling" check signed by the legendary Arnold Palmer. As you would expect, I never cashed it.

Sure, it was only for two holes, but for me it was like playing in the U.S. Open and winning. It was one of the best examples I have of me training my mind to perform well against a better opponent and then winning.

### **#3:** *I VISUALIZED BEATING EACH OF FIVE U. S. OPEN CHAMPIONS*

Including Arnold Palmer, I played five winners of at least one U.S. Open. Three of them were legendary male golfers all ranked number one in the world in their day and two female golfers elected to the LPGA Hall of Fame. Three of the matches were for 18 holes and two of them were the two-hole variety. I won three of the matches.

The mental, positive visualization I engaged in prior to the matches and during them was similar to what I did playing Arnold Palmer. Had I played those same golfers repeatedly, they would have made mince meat of me. With intense and vivid mental training, a huge number of practice shots and rounds played, with instruction coming from about 80 lessons over many years, 100 golf books and countless magazine articles, I was able to hold my own.

## **#4:** MY MENTAL TRAINING FOR EXTRA-HOLE MATCHES: 17 WINS, 2 LOSSES

Perhaps the most pressure for a golfer is playing in an extra-hole match. A single stroke on the first extra hole can lead to victory or defeat. One day I went back over the years and was startled to find that I won 17 extra-hole matches and lost only two. They were mostly at the club level, with a few at the large-city or state level. Since I had not previously kept a running record, the high ratio of wins to losses surprised me.

As I suspect of other golfers, I was not born with any mental or physical skills to play well in extra-hole golf matches. Though we can learn more about the effect of genetics, I suspect no one is born to play well in such matches. I *learned* to do this, and I believe you can learn to handle extra-hole matches and any pressure situation in golf better than you do now. The value I have for you is that I am an expert in analyzing behavior, communicating it and helping people to change it.

The earliest competitive pressure I can recall was a non-sporting event. It was a spelling bee in the seventh grade. My biggest competitor was Tom Gallagher, a smart, handsome, athletic boy whom most of the girls had a crush on, especially Bernadine Buckley, a beautiful blond he later married. In the class, I was the third-ranked male student scholastically. Perhaps due to envy, I decided I was going to win that spelling bee. I did. As youngsters, we probably all try to gain some stature and have self-doubt along the way. The win boosted my confidence. The lesson it gave me was to visualize winning, train to win and then produce it.

At the age of 19, I entered the Chicago Public Links Golf Tournament at Jackson Park, one of 256 players, as I recall. I won the first match and in the second faced the gallery favorite, though not the best player, a Police Sergeant named McNamara. Because of the size of the field, there were two man-to-man matches played in each group of four players.

The first hole went away from the clubhouse and the second returned. At the end of two holes, a spectator probably too lazy to walk the two holes asked me if I was two down. I said no, I was two holes up. He looked surprised.

The match seesawed, ending in a tie at the end of 18 holes. Dante Vicini, a quarter-finalist in the U.S. Public Links Tournament was playing a match in our foursome. In those days, I had little money and could not afford new golf balls. My ball at the end of the round had cuts and scuffmarks, conditions that were common with the golf balls in those days. Without saying why he did it, Dante bought a new golf ball at the end of 18 holes and gave it to me. I was touched that such an excellent golfer was so generous to me, a stranger. Though it was our only meeting, I remembered his name for over 60 years.

For whatever reason, perhaps buoyed by the kindness of Dante, I won my first extra-hole match by sinking a putt of about ten feet on the first extra hole.

Two other positive consequences occurred that might have jump-started this extra-hole winning behavior. The Chicago Tribune mentioned my win in a short paragraph.

A few minutes after the match, a man walked up and said, "You look like you have a good swing. If you ever want to get serious about playing, I can put you in touch with some teachers who can help you." He handed me his business card. It said, "Frank Walsh, President of the PGA." At the time, the PGA was not as large or as influential as it is now, but I was impressed at the time and more impressed years later. I have absolutely no illusions I would have made a professional tour player, but it gave a young man needed confidence at the time.



Did all of these positive consequences increase the probability of later winning many extra-hole matches? Knowing what I learned much later about behavior change, I would say yes.

At any rate, I received five positive consequences in my first overtime match and win:

1. I won my first extra-hole match.
2. It was against the gallery favorite.
3. A nationally known player I admired bought me a golf ball to play the extra hole-match.
4. The Chicago Tribune in a short paragraph mentioned my win over the gallery favorite.
5. The President of the PGA told me I had a good swing and offered to introduce me to professional instructors who could help me.

In later years, just before playing the first hole of an extra-hole playoff, I conned myself into a positive frame of mind by always saying to myself, "I am a professional. I am paid to win playoffs." Of course, I am not a professional golfer and I do not receive pay for winning a playoff. Conning yourself with positive talk is effective in winning an extra-hole match as it is in so many challenges in your life.

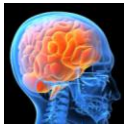
## **#5:** *HOW TO AVOID TENSENESS WAITING FIVE DAYS TO HIT A SUPER-FAST, CURVING DOWNHILL PUTT IN A CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP*

I played in the final match for the club championship at Ridgewood Country Club that that had several unusual pressure situations. Players had to qualify in a medal score over 36 holes the weekend before the final match. On Thursday before the first of two qualifying rounds, I bent over to put water on my face, felt a piercing pain in my lower back and sank to my knees. Though bent over, I managed to half-walk and half-crawl into the office of Dr. Julie Sanna, a chiropractor and close friend in Danbury, CT. He treated me for three days.

First, I had to train myself mentally not to quit due to the painful injury, a tempting option.

On Saturday, the first day of qualifying, I could stand erect, but I had no feeling on my left side. I decided to try making the swing an entirely right-sided-affair. On the first hole, I was surprised to hit the second shot pin high and par the hole. On the second hole, a long par four uphill and against the wind, I was again pin high and made another par. Perhaps this injury was a blessing in disguise. I may have found a secret to a better swing. On the third hole, that thought vanished as I duck-hooked the ball into the left creek.

The rest of the round was a disaster. On Sunday's first nine, I fared no better.



Pain or no pain, I told myself I had to score better on the back nine or face not qualifying. I qualified, but I shot the highest score of the 16 qualifiers.

The Club Championship started the next Thursday. My back improved, but I could not bend down to tee my ball. I won the first match, the second and the third. In Sunday's finals, we were to play 36 holes. My opponent was a player whose handicap ranged from zero to a two. He could hit some great shots I had never hit in my life even once.

I had one great mental advantage. He thought that every shot he hit should be perfect. On one occasion, when he rimmed the cup with a slippery, downhill putt of 45 feet that curved 12 feet, he threw his putter 40 feet up into a tree in anger. I was more realistic and positive.

On the second 18 holes of golf in the championship match that day, I got to the par-five fifteenth hole one up. On a green that was as fast as a pane of glass, I faced a treacherous eight-foot, downhill putt that curved about four feet. Touch the putt and it would roll 15 feet past the cup.

Then the Almighty spoke and lightning struck all around us as we ran for the clubhouse. The rain and storm did not abate. We had to postpone it to the next day, or so I thought. However, my opponent could not play for five days. I had five days to think about that zippy, slippery, confounded putt and the pressure of attempting to win my first club Championship.

Golf Rules prohibited me from practicing that putt from the same place and to the same cup in those five days. I analyzed the situation and decided that after waiting to sink that difficult putt for five days, I could be so tense that I would barely be able to take the putter back.



Therefore, I repeatedly envisioned myself hitting that putt on Friday, five days later, without being the slightest bit nervous or tight. I knew the putt was extremely difficult to read, start it on the right line and avoid having it roll well past the cup. I decided to train myself to be very calm when I stroked that putt.

When the time came to hit the putt, I was as cool as a cucumber. I would like to tell you I made the slick-as-glass putt, but I did not.



He birdied the 18th hole to even the match. We went to the first extra hole, our 37<sup>th</sup> in the match, where I won my first club championship. My training to remain calm under pressure had helped.

My opponent in later years had some adverse marriage and career failures. He never achieved the success that I thought he deserved and was qualified to handle. In later years, his golf handicap soared. A friend told me he suffered some serious emotional problems. Looking back, I now wish I had offered a helping hand. While golf is a game, the lessons one learns about the mental side of the game can sometimes help a golfer conquer not only problems on the links, but also the far more important personal problems in marriage and career.

## **#6:** AFTER A FOUR-MINUTE LESSON ON THE MENTAL GAME, HE CAME FROM SEVEN SHOTS BACK TO WIN THE CHAMPIONSHIP

I was talking to Tony Good, an amateur member of the Dominion Club, on the practice range about my golf web site. He asked me in a nervous tone, "What have you got that will quickly help me reduce mental tension from playing in a tournament?" He was getting in some practice shots before going to play at another course in the Virginia State Open Championship (for pros and amateurs). He shot a 67 the day before in the first round, which he said was "way over my head" and he was nervous about the three rounds to come. My reading of his body movements and voice was that he was more "wired" than nervous.

I told him to use the following three steps:



1. "Think only of the next shot. Do not think of the *consequences* of playing well or badly. Do not think of getting your name in the paper for playing well or looking bad to others if you play badly. If you start to think of consequences, I want you to stick out your arm in front of you and hit the Change Channel Button on an imaginary TV remote control." After simulating such an action by extending my right arm and thumb out away from my body, I asked him to emulate that action.
2. Before every shot, focus only on the two key elements by repeating the following, "Here is the ball. There is the target."
3. Start by relaxing the top of your forehead. From the forehead down, concentrate on relaxing every part of your body before and during the round, especially in the minute before hitting a pressure shot. Make sure you are taking full deep breaths.



When I saw him on the next Saturday, he gave me a big smile and said, "Hey. Those ideas on the mental game of golf really work."

He said he was playing in our three-round Club Championship final the next day. One junior player leading the tournament had

shot 66 and 69, great scores indeed. That put Tony seven shots behind going into the final round.

In the final round, Tony Good shot a pressure-packed 67 to get into an even more pressure-packed, extra-hole playoff. He won the club championship on the second extra hole.

When you need help in controlling your excitement in playing in an important round, use the three steps above.

## **#7:** CONFIDENCE AND A PAYOFF FROM KNOWING THE RULES OF GOLF

Knowing the rules of golf can save you strokes and reduce the chances of inadvertently causing penalty shots, especially during tournaments. If there is a rules dispute, your knowledge of the rules makes you more confident and your poorly informed competitor less so.

For example, if you hit into a lateral water hazard, you have five options. One of those options almost all players are *unaware* of is to draw an arc from the cup that crossed the point where you last crossed the hazard *to the other side of the water hazard, but not nearer the hole*. On the 11<sup>th</sup> hole of Palm Beach Polo's Dunes course, such a ruling allows a player to avoid a downhill lie, an over-the water ball flight, and a wide sand bunker in front of the green.

The knowledgeable player has the information that offers that drop option. The uninformed competitor usually protests and asks the pro to come out on the course to rule on it. The knowledgeable player wins the ruling, of course. The uninformed competitors are upset at the ruling and their ignorance of the rules.

How do you learn the rules? You can read the small booklet the Rules of Golf and carry it in your golf bag. It is available from the USGA and most pro shops.

You can read and carry the Decisions of Golf, though it may be too heavy if you are carrying your own bag. This is available at most large bookstores, web sites, such as Amazon, and from the USGA. What makes the Decisions of Golf so interesting are the tersely stated case histories, organized around a given rule. I suggest you scan the case histories and study the ones that sound like situations you have or are likely to encounter. Skip the exotic ones that tell you how to take relief from a drunken elephant in heat.

During a Super Senior Championship qualifying round in Virginia, I had a dispute with a former Virginia Amateur and Senior Amateur Champion. He hit a shot pin-high 35 yards to the left of the green that would force him to hit a low shot under a low tree limb, land it in a sand bunker and run it onto the green.

The other three balls in the group were on the green near the cup, which might stop any low running shot hit into the sand bunker that ran up onto the green. As a result, I had a rules obligation and a responsibility to all the competitors in the medal-play qualifying tournament to mark and pick up my ball and ask that the other two balls be marked and lifted.

When I announced my request, he growled that he alone had control over whether we lifted and marked our golf balls on the green. I told him that the rules did permit that in the past, but the rules changed some years earlier. We lifted the three balls.

Later, while we waited for the group ahead to hit their shots, he drifted away. When he returned, he said the Virginia State Golf Assoc. official had agreed with him. I knew any knowledgeable official would not make that ruling without talking to the other disputant.

That night I opened up Tom Watson's book explaining the rules and found the rule clearly explained in the same way as I had said. Next morning I approached the same competitor and said in a friendly voice, "In the future, knowing that rule we discussed yesterday might help you. Here is a copy of what Tom Watson said."

"What does he say?"

"He confirms what I said yesterday."

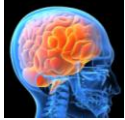
He growled, "I don't want to read it."

A VSGA official told me later that they had their fill of this player. He would sign up for a tournament and pull out if his initial score was high or his back hurt.

At the very least, I had helped him learn a rule of golf. In addition, I felt I gained a small edge when I knew the rules when he did not. Further, I did not back down, even to a player with multiple state championship wins. I suddenly recall as things turned out he was to play me in the match play part of the Super Senior Championship. He canceled due to "pain in his back." The pain, I suspect, may have started during the losing rules dispute.

**#8:** *WHEN YOU PLAY BADLY BEFORE A TOURNAMENT, WATCH YOURSELF PLAY MUCH BETTER IN A DETAILED MENTAL VIDEO DURING THE ROUND TO COME.*

In my golfing career, I experienced very few slumps and when I did, I would recover quickly. However, one year prior to a qualifying round for the club championship, I found myself mired in a deep and protracted slump. If I played in it as I was then scoring, I would not qualify. Trying a number of mechanical swing thoughts did not seem to help.



Instead, I mentally scripted and acted in a vivid and detailed imaginary video of me shooting a par 72 on this difficult scoring course. I imagined a happy ending — I was the low qualifier. And why not, it was my dream.

It was a complete video, starting with driving to the course, practicing before the round, playing each hole, hitting great shots, recovering from all sorts of trouble and remaining calm and confident in difficult situations. At the end of the video, I visualized walking up to the scorer, telling him I shot 72 and watching with pleasure as he wrote the score next to my name. In the video, I saw that I was the low scorer and heard competitors and observers congratulate me. I liked the outcome so much that I re-ran the video a number of times on my mental screen.

How did it turn out when I played? I shot 72 and led all qualifiers. I made a point of walking up to the scoreboard and lingering there watching higher scores posted, just as I repeatedly did in my mental video.

Intently visualizing success in vivid detail does not produce success every time or even most times, but it will help you reach more of your goals than if you do not use this tool.

## **#9: SET MEASURABLE GOALS FOR LONG-TERM PERFORMANCE, LESSONS, PRACTICE SESSIONS AND ROUNDS**

Successful business people know the value of setting *measurable and specific* goals in their organizations. They set goals for increasing sales and production, for cutting costs, reducing accidents and improving customer service. They set goals both for the year(s) ahead and for shorter periods: quarters, months, weeks, days and even hours. The very process of setting goals will stimulate your imagination, motivate you and establish goal posts for you to monitor progress. The managers commit the goals to writing.

Smart coaches in sports do the same. When I addressed the Northwest Region of the Young Presidents Organization one year, one of the other speakers was the Don James, the Head Coach of the University of Washington's football team. When we played golf, he told me he was using a number of my ideas in setting measurable goals for his football team that year. He listed as goals being the number one football team in Pac 10, winning the Rose Bowl and being rated the number one team in the country. He also showed me the specific goals the individual components of the team were to meet to reach those larger goals, such as for the punter.

Months later, Washington played Iowa in the Rose Bowl. I took my father who graduated from Iowa to the game. Before the game, when Don wandered over to the sidelines, I was able to talk to him. I said, "Well, you reached several of your goals. You won your conference championship and got to play in the Rose Bowl."

Unfortunately, after watching Washington's strong line in the first two plays, I said to my dad, "Iowa is going to get creamed." They did, 28 to 0.

Yet, when it comes to golf lessons, there is little evidence of students setting measurable goals. I have listened and evaluated what hundreds of students answer when golf instructors ask them what their goals are. Over 90% of such student-stated “goals” are *neither measurable, observable nor objective* (meaning that different observers could not agree on whether or not or to what degree the student met the goal).

In addition, the instructors almost always accept the “goals” that describe performance that is not specific, observable or stated in objective terms. They do not prompt the student to be more specific.

Word-for-word, here are typical vague “goal” statements that students made to instructors before lessons I observed.

- “I have lost confidence in my three-wood.”
- “Just give me a couple of things to work on.”
- “I would like to putt better.”

Instead, the student should set a goal, which contains elements such as these:

1. What the average score or handicap index is now and what the student would like it to be after taking lessons and practicing the new swing frequently
2. Before-and-after data describing the ball-stopping location of the shots to the target by shot condition(s) (distance, type of lie, slope, target condition and intervening hazards)
3. Before-and-after improvement in the percentage of putts sunk by distance or (less useful) the average number of putts per green
4. Before-and-after improvement data on the median distance of the shot by type of club
5. A date for meeting or beating the goal

Here is an example of a specific goal that would motivate a student:

“I want to lower my average score (or handicap index) from 92 to 85 in four months. I plan to do that by reducing my average putts per round from 38 to 33. I also want to stop my average chip, short pitch and greenside bunker shot 30% closer to the cup than I am doing now (as shown on the attached chart). I aim to hit six greens in regulation per round versus the present three.

## #10: A BIOFEEDBACK MACHINE'S IMMEDIATE AND ACCURATE FEEDBACK RESULTS IN MUCH DEEPER RELAXATION

Do you think you can fully relax before and during an important golf round? That is a valuable state to be in to play your best. Based on what I learned from the device I am going to describe, you are not even remotely close to knowing how to induce a state of relaxation or even realize what it means to relax fully. The reason is you do not receive *accurate and immediate* feedback on your degree of relaxation at any given moment, nor do other golfers.

How do you obtain such accurate and immediate feedback on your degree of relaxation? Find someone, usually a psychologist, who can attach you to a biofeedback device. Biofeedback simply means obtaining accurate and immediate feedback on your degree of relaxation as indicated by your body and, at times, from a device.

The concept is simple. When you become tense, your muscles contract and give off extra electrical energy. To pick up that slight additional electrical energy, the person operating the biofeedback device attaches sensors to your body, usually to your head. The sensors send the signal to the device, which converts the electrical impulse into an audible sound that rises when you become tense and falls when you begin to relax. The immediate feedback provided by the change in sound level teaches you when you are relaxed or tense and all the gradations in between.

What you soon learn, is that *your thoughts and visualizations control immediately your degree of relaxation in your body.*

For example, if you think about how many times you have driven the ball into the lateral water hazard on the 13<sup>th</sup> hole, the pitch of the sound rises immediately. When you think about taking a hot shower after the round or swinging in a hammock at the beach, you relax and the sound drops to a lower key immediately.

I thought I knew how to relax, but that was an opinion based on inaccurate feedback provided by my senses. When I received that immediate and accurate audio feedback, I soon learned that I control my degree of relaxation by controlling my mental conversations and visualizations.

Major university studies demonstrate that people receiving biofeedback can, to name just a few applications, reduce back pain, correct digestive problems and, raise the temperature by four degrees in a hand suffering from arthritic pain.



The psychologist can then teach you a process of *progressive relaxation*, starting with the forehead and working down. In this process, you learn to progressively monitor one part of your body and relax it and then go to the next body part. The expert will probably suggest that you repeat audibly some simple mantra, such as, "My right arm is heavy. My right arm is warm. My right arm is heavy and warm." You do this

while imagining blood flowing to your fingertips. Learning to take slow, deep breaths, helps induce relaxation. You then can apply it on the course when you need to relax and play better.

I apply it on the course. It helps and I never stop learning how to improve the amount of relaxation.

Certainly, every professional player on a tour should experience this at least once. If I were on a professional golf tour, I would own one and have it in my hotel room. You should use it periodically to monitor your relaxation response.

Look in the yellow pages for psychologists who advertise "biofeedback" procedures. *Make sure they use a biofeedback device*, and do not just apply general training in how to relax. You can buy such a device from a web source by entering "Biofeedback device" in a search engine, such as Goggle. One such source presently selling a "starter kit" is Bio-Medical Instruments, Inc., 1-800-521-4640, bio-medical.com. You will still need to have someone teach you progressive relaxation procedures.

## **#11: EXPECT SOME BAD SHOTS AND MENTALLY PREPARE FOR A RECOVERY**

Walter Hagen was one of golf's all time greatest match-game players. He knew from experience that he would likely hit multiple bad shots each round, as almost all players do. However, instead of losing his temper or becoming fearful when those shots occurred, he *welcomed* the challenge. He strode to the ball with a jaunty and confident air, or he would look intentionally worried about the shot. He knew that after hitting the initial bad shot, his opponent was most likely counting on winning the hole or the match. Therefore, when Walter recovered from the bad shot, as he often did, he would turn a bad situation into a psychological dagger.



In your mental rehearsal, imagine some bad shots, your strong positive reaction to them and a great recovery. Give your opponent a smile as you pick the ball out of the cup and a helping hand if he or she suddenly staggers.

## **#12: PREPARE AND RE-READ A LIST OF YOUR BEST SCORES, HOLES AND SHOTS**

This is a two-step procedure:

### **LIST YOUR POSITIVE GOLF MEMORIES AND READ THEM BEFORE AN IMPORTANT ROUND**



When you are going to play an important match or tournament, you want to flood your mind with detailed images of how well you have played in the past.

You should add to that list every day or week you play golf. Write the list or type it into your computer. It should contain some or all of the following:

- Best 18-hole scores, preferably at the same course you are to play.
- The best score at each hole.
- The best shot for a given distance or club.
- The best recovery shots, by distance, type of lie, slope, weather condition (wind, cold, soggy ground).
- The best recovery shots from a difficult lie, from intervening obstacles or following some bad holes.
- The best putts you have sunk by distance.
- The best pressure putts.

In the week or days before the tournament, sit in some quiet place and review the “video” in your mind of these great shots, holes, rounds and hopefully wins or high finishes. Some golfers spend most of their time recalling only their *bad* shots and how to avoid them. That is not nearly as useful as imagining great shots you hit in the past.

## #13: TAKE A HOT BATH AND WATCH A POSITIVE MENTAL VIDEO

When I was a young boy, the only information I received about golf instruction was from a book Bobby Jones wrote, which I reread many times. In those days, there was no commercial TV or Cable, web sites or video. Since I did not take any golf lessons in my early years, I relied strongly on Bobby’s teaching.

I was impressed that this golfer, the equal of baseball’s Babe Ruth as a sports idol, stated that the mental pressure to perform at his level was intense. He became so nervous that he was unable to knot his necktie, an item golfers wore while playing in those days. To relieve the pressure before a tournament or after playing a key round, he lingered in a hot bath for an hour or more.



If a hot bath helped Bobby Jones, well, by God, I would take one before I played in tournaments or an important round. I found it relaxed my muscles and allowed me to focus on positive images of my game. It has worked well for me and allowed me to play better during tournaments than my game would predict.

Later, I became a friend of Charles Price, one of the top three golf columnists, who wrote a book with Bobby Jones. I would pump Charles to tell me stories of Bobby, especially why he quit playing tournament golf in 1930 after winning the four tournaments that made up the “Grand Slam” in those days.



In 1942, there was no U.S. Open because of World War II. However, Bobby Jones played several “exhibition” rounds within the Chicago Victory Open at Ridgemoor Country Club. As a young boy, I boarded an electric streetcar, which was on the longest such track in the world, to see him play. Ben Hogan won it receiving a medal that he claimed later was the same as his four U.S. Open wins was and his fifth U.S. Open title, a claim the U.S.G.A rejected. In that same tournament, I had the pleasure of watching Ben Hogan play the day that he shot 62, which was then the PGA scoring record.

## **#14:** TELL YOURSELF, “I AM THE WORLD’S GREATEST...” AND PRACTICE A LOT

My friend Buzz Carota and the PGA Tour star V. J. Singh engaged in two similar behaviors. Buzz could hit a drive a mile, but when I first started playing with him, his putting was suspect. He would hit a par five in two and then three-putt for a par. V. J. Singh has had an outstanding professional record, winning ten tournaments in one year. More recently, however, his putting deteriorated, resulting in too many missed short putts and a sharp reduction in the number of wins.

They both spent long hours practicing their putting. Buzz spent an hour practicing his putting before every round. V. J. Singh practices as long as any professional does on the PGA Tour.

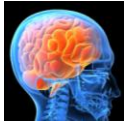
Buzz showed great improvement in his putting. On the super-slick Cog Hill greens in those days, Buzz could knock in pressure putt after pressure putt from twelve feet and under. His handicap dropped to a two.

V. J. Singh had improved his putting in spectacular fashion. He won the first two tournaments in the FedEx Cup in 2008, which gave him enough points to win the first prize of \$10 million dollars for the four tournaments, even if he finished last in the final tournament. In one of those two wins, he sank two putts of approximately 30 feet back-to-back on the first two extra holes against Sergio Garcia. On the first extra hole, V. J. sank the 30-foot putt *after* Sergio sank his of equal length.

What linked Buzz and V.J. was their tremendous amount of practice putting, the resulting major improvement in putting and one mental change — *they both told themselves they were the greatest putters in the world.* They did this even when at the start of their program they were below standard.

## **#15:** PLAY OR SCOUT THE TOURNAMENT COURSE WHERE YOU HAVE NOT PLAYED BEFORE

When you are to play a tournament at a course you have not played previously, it will build your confidence and probably lower your score to play a practice round there. If you cannot do that, seek permission to walk the course.



Take a sturdy notepad to record your observations of each hole. Record information on the best landing spots on the fairway, distances to the middle of the green, slope directions on each green, the shape of each green, hidden hazards, locations of washrooms and water coolers, practice facilities and if they lack a practice area, the name and location of nearby driving ranges or courses that do have practice areas.

If you cannot play the course, ask a good player or a professional at that course for advice. Ask them to tell you how to play each hole, or at least the tricky holes with unseen hazards and those with greens that have speeds and breaks that fool the eye.

## **#16:** HOW IMPORTANT ATTITUDE IS TO LONG-TERM PERFORMANCE

The Kelly Girl's Service asked me to address their management at multiple meetings at a large conference in Camelback AZ in 1983. In between two of the talks, I went to the practice range to hit shots. On the range was a 17-year-old boy who had a good swing, but not a great one. As I so often do, I struck up a conversation about golf with him for a half hour. I was so impressed with his thinking and attitudes, as expressed verbally, that I told the Springer family, my next-door neighbors in Wellington, FL, who were the Golfing Family of the Year, to remember his name. I told them, "I think he's got it."

Three years later in 1986, he won the U.S. Public Links Championship. In 1987, just one year later, he won the U.S. Amateur championship at Jupiter Hills. One year he was third on the PGA Tour money list.

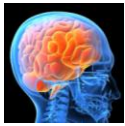
Tiger Woods also has a strong mental attitude. As one proof of that, he has built an extraordinary career up to the end of 2008 in winning extra-hole matches as a professional — 11 wins, only 1 loss.

*The only professional to beat him in an extra-hole match was that 17-year boy I met back at the practice range in 1983, Billy Mayfair, the one with the great attitude.*

## **#17:** TO IMPROVE WHAT YOUR MIND RECALLS, WRITE NOTES ON LESSONS, PRACTICE AND PLAY AND REVIEW THEM OFTEN

The following procedures produce four key benefits. One, versus other players, they increase by at least tenfold what you recall of instruction months and years later. Two, they cause you to review the notes far more often than other players. Three, it improves your scoring performance. Four, it gives you confidence that you have a system to recall instruction content that is superior to virtually any golfer you compete against.

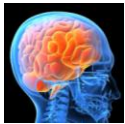
Here is what to do:



1. Write immediate notes on all instruction content you receive that works or that you want to try. That is the content you receive during a lesson, from golf books, magazines, web sites (such as my ApplyGolfLessons.com), TV and Cable, from practice sessions and rounds played, from observations of professionals and top amateurs and from tips friends and relatives give you (which, in general, are not too useful).
2. Store the recent notes in your golf bag to be readily available when you practice and play.
3. Re-read the notes before and during your practice and play

On my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com, click on Written Solutions and then on Student Note Taking for a Summary, Flow Chart, Checklist, and Protocol.

## **#18:** WHEN UNABLE TO PLAY, VISUALIZE A GOLF ROUND IN YOUR MIND



When you are in a location where you cannot play golf, you can still “practice” by vividly envisioning how you are to swing and the action of the ball. You can visualize playing a course you know well in great detail. There is some data showing that athletes show almost as much improvement rehearsing in their mind what they are to do as they do actually practicing.

## **#19:** TEACHER PRAISE INCREASES CONFIDENCE AND THE TARGET BEHAVIOR

The verdict was in long ago. A behavior will tend to reoccur again when a positive consequence follows it immediately or quickly and it links clearly to a specific and positive response you just executed. Hundreds of thousands of experiments document this around the globe and in every type of human behavior.

The experimental model used in these applied experiments is quite similar. First, the experimenter collects data on how often a targeted behavior occurs prior to the introduction of a change, such as receiving a positive consequence for improved performance. Next, the experimenter delivers a positive consequence immediately or quickly after the targeted behavior occurs, or any small portion of it. The experimenter then records when and how often the behavior occurs after the reinforcement. Repeated often with that golfer or with others, the difference in how often the desired behavior occurs is due to the introduction of that positive consequence.

How can you apply this scientific and proven behavior-change principle to improving the mental side of your golf game and, ultimately, your golf performance?

First, if you plan to take lessons, select an instructor who praises the student for the slightest improvement, does it often and in specific terms (the latter is a rarity). You probably are going to have to change the instructor's behavior in being specific. When golf instructors praise a student, they do not describe what the student did well in specific terms over 90% of the time. They limit their comment to "That's better" or "Good shot."

In such cases, tell the instructor you would like to know in specific detail what you did well so that you are more likely to repeat exactly what the instructor wants.

If the instructor only comments when you do something *wrong*, say, "In specific terms, what did I do well, in whole or in part, on the last swing that you want me to repeat?"

If you are evaluating your own performance during a lesson, practice session or round, use the same positive talk with your internal conversations ("What did I do well or better on the last shot?").

I played golf with David, a lawyer, and his wife at the Homestead, in Virginia. He was a Rand McNally Golfer – he needed a road map to find his ball. Because of a high score, he picked up the ball on at least six holes without holing out. I asked him if he had ever considered taking lessons. He said he had taken about 100 lessons.

I told him that he if wanted to drive four hours a day round trip from Maryland to Richmond, I and Paul Sargent, the Director of Instruction at the Dominion Club, who I was coaching to apply Behavioral Golf Instruction, would give him lessons. I guaranteed him he would lower his average score.



One of the by-products of playing badly was that he spoke despairingly of his game, usually after every shot and sometimes before it. As one of the procedures, we had him *state aloud after every shot what he did well or better*, no matter how slight it was. We told him that if he hit a shank, but told us what the cause was, it was a good behavior. This is opposed to doing it and *not* knowing the reason. We in turn commented favorably when he stated the post-shot analysis without prompting, was positive and accurate.

Progress occurred, though it was not rapid. To learn how to swing the club so that he did not shank, we had him hit nothing but short chip shots to start with and advance only 10 yards further if he met a measurable standard on five consecutive shots.

One day he was practicing his short shots at another course when a golf professional with six students in tow walked past. When the pro watched his swing and saw the ball fly high and stop within a foot of the pin several times in a row, he asked, "Are you a professional?" The question made David's day.

What had a profound effect on him was this new behavior of looking at his performance in a positive way and commenting only on what he did well or slightly better. Not only did he apply this principle to his golf game, but also he said he was applying it to every aspect of his life. While mentoring bright young people around Washington, DC and doing it without charge, he began to teach them the positive-outlook process.

## **#20:** *READ AND USE THIS TOURNAMENT CHECKLIST*

You perform better in tournaments on average when you are fully prepared. Use our tournament checklist to plan and prepare to play at your best. Add to this list as you gain experience.

Here is the checklist:

### ***GOLF TOURNAMENT CHECKLIST***

#### ***MENTAL PREPARATION***

TO IMPROVE YOUR GAME, IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL PREPARATION:

1. BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT STARTS, READ A PREPARED LIST OF YOUR LOWEST SCORES AND HOLES ON THAT COURSE, BEST SHOTS BY DISTANCE ON ANY COURSE TO HOLE, BEST TROUBLE SHOTS, LONGEST, TOUGHEST, PRESSURE-PACKED PUTTS SUNK.
2. IMAGINE WATCHING AN 18-HOLE VIDEO OF YOU PLAYING THAT COURSE WELL.
3. HIT AN IMAGINARY DELETE BUTTON IF A NEGATIVE MENTAL VIDEO APPEARS.
4. DO NOT THINK OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF SHOT, SUCH AS WINNING OR LOSING.
5. FOCUS ON ONLY THE SHOT AT HAND, NOT PAST SHOTS OR FUTURE ONES.
6. JUST BEFORE HITTING THE ACTUAL SHOT, TELL YOURSELF TO VISUALIZE IN DETAIL THE DESIRED HEIGHT AND DIRECTION OF BALL FLIGHT, LANDING SPOT, AMOUNT AND DIRECTION OF ROLL AND STOPPING LOCATION OF EACH SHOT.

## *EQUIPMENT*

CONSIDER BRINGING THE FOLLOWING:

1. IF LEGAL TO USE, A YARDAGE DEVICE TO ESTIMATE DISTANCE.
2. RAIN GEAR.
3. SWEATER.
4. HAT.
5. DRY CLOTHING.
6. UMBRELLA.
7. EXTRA GOLF GLOVES AND AN ALL-WEATHER GLOVE.
8. BUY GOLF BALLS IN ADVANCE AND MARK THEM.
9. ASK IF YOU HAVE TO USE ONLY ONE TYPE OF BALL.
10. BRING THE SAME GOLF BALL BRAND.
11. SUN TAN LOTION.
12. BRING A RULES BOOK AND A GOLF DECISIONS BOOK.
13. PRACTICE AIDS.

## *INFORMATION*

OBTAIN THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT STARTS:

1. DRIVING INSTRUCTIONS.
2. LOCATIONS FOR DRINKING WATER ON COURSE.
3. LOCATION OF TOILETS ON THE COURSE.
4. DETERMINE WHICH TEES THEY WILL USE (ASK A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LOCAL, STATE OR NATIONAL GOLF COMMITTEE, PGA TOUR OR THE LPGA.
5. OBTAIN WRITTEN LOCAL RULES FOR THE TOURNAMENT.
6. ASK WHAT THE PREVAILING WIND DIRECTION IS.
7. HOURS OF AVAILABILITY FOR THE BAG ROOM.
8. ASK HOW THEY WILL DECIDE TIES.
9. THE HOURS THE PRO SHOP WILL BE OPEN.
10. ASK IF YOU CAN LEAVE CLUBS THERE OVERNIGHT.
11. FOR RULES DISPUTES, WHO IS THE "COMMITTEE?"

## *FOOD AND LIQUIDS*

1. BRING OR FIND A SUPPLY AT THE COURSE OF DRINKING WATER, CUPS AND GATORADE OR AN EQUIVALENT SPORTS DRINK.
2. BRING FRUIT, NUTS, ENERGY BARS OR SANDWICHES.
3. ASK WHAT DAYS AND HOURS EATING FACILITIES ARE OPEN, ASK FOR A MENU.

## *PRACTICE*

### DURING PRACTICE:

1. OBSERVE IF SPRINKLER HEADS SHOW DISTANCE. IS IT TO MIDDLE OF GREEN OR FRONT OF GREEN? LOCATION OF SPRINKLER HEADS ON EACH HOLE, ARE THEY CIRCLED FOR FASTER LOCATION?
2. BUY OR BRING A MAP OF THE COURSE OR YOUR NOTES SHOWING COURSE YARDAGE AND ROUTING.
3. WHAT IS YARDAGE TO THE FRONT, BACK AND MIDDLE OF THE GREEN.
4. POSSIBLE MULTIPLE TEE LOCATIONS
5. OUT OF BOUNDS LOCATIONS, LATERAL HAZARDS, WATER HAZARDS.
6. MAP THE HIGH AND LOW SPOTS OF EACH GREEN.
7. PERSONAL COURSE NOTEBOOK: DISTANCES, SLOPES, OUT OF BOUNDS, LATERAL OR WATER HAZARDS.
8. ASK ABOUT PRACTICE RANGE LOCATION AND AVAILABILITY OF PRACTICE SAND BUNKERS, PITCHING GREEN, PUTTING GREEN. ARE YOU ALLOWED TO HIT A DRIVER? WHERE WILL PRACTICE BALLS BE? TOKENS REQUIRED? IF SO, PURCHASE THE TOKENS IN ADVANCE.
9. LOOK FOR COMMITTEE'S MARKINGS FOR TEE AND PIN POSITIONS.

### *TO ADD OR DELETE INFORMATION ON THIS CHECKLIST*

Send your ideas for additions or deletions or to give me your experiences using it, email me at [edfeenyva@aol.com](mailto:edfeenyva@aol.com)

## **#21:** *HOLE OUT ALL PUTTS, EVEN IF CONCEDED*

To train yourself to handle short pressure putts, attempt to sink all of them in casual rounds. If an opponent in a match concedes the putt, say, "Thank you." Then putt it anyway. Even if you miss the putt, the concession stands. By doing so, you will have more confidence and experience. If you start missing them, it will give you early-warning feedback that may cause you to start taking lessons or otherwise finding a solution.



If you play in a group who concedes putts, your handicap will be lower than it otherwise would be. That makes it difficult to compete in handicap tournaments against golfers who attempt to sink and count all putts. If you attempt to sink all of the putts, you will be better able to handle the pressure.

## #22: USE SMALL SHAPING STEPS TO CORRECT A BALL-FLIGHT PROBLEM

Here is a powerful solution to use that will analyze and correct a ball-flight problem on the practice range or during a round. It will also build your confidence that you are your own mobile Golf Squad repair technician.

Buzz Carota, my good friend and a two-handicapper, made a comment one day on the course that made me do some self-analysis. He was playing badly that day and could not make a correction during the round. He said that when I started to hit the ball badly, I usually was able to self-correct in a hole or two, but he could not.

I began to analyze what I was doing to self-correct and what he was doing or not doing that prevented it. There were two reasons for this difference. One, it turned out that I knew what caused a golf ball to fly in the directions it did. Two, I had an improved process for making a swing change that caused the ball to go where I wanted it. To do this, I focused on moving the club path straight at impact on the path I wanted the ball to start on and having the clubface looking in the direction I wanted the ball to later curve. The emphasis was on the *club* movement, not the *body* movement and the movement of the clubhead at the moment of impact.

I will not go into all the details here of analyzing ball flight and correcting it. I will give you a few highlights in how to analyze it and correct it, and urge you to visit my web site [ApplyGolfLessons.com](http://ApplyGolfLessons.com).

Two factors affect the direction in which the ball *starts*, as contrasted with where it later *curves*.

- The first is the direction the club head is moving at impact.
- The second factor is the direction the club face is looking at impact, which exerts about twice as much directional influence as the first factor, the direction of the club head at impact.

For example, suppose the club head at impact was moving four degrees to the left at impact. The club face was moving two degrees in the opposite direction, to the right. Where would the ball start? The ball would start on a straight line. The reason is that the effect of the clubface's five degrees of error must be doubled, making it the equivalent of a 10 degree error.

The ball will curve later in the direction the club face is looking at impact, which is to the right.



Please note that these rules come from the Head Engineer at Ping and Alastair Cochran who co-wrote *Search for a Perfect Swing*, though the example is mine. Also, note that these rules differ from the explanation used by the PGA of America and other organizations of professional instructors. Those organizations say that the ball starts in the direction the clubhead is moving at impact, rather than being double-weighted by the direction the clubface is looking at impact.

## SUMMARY

This booklet contains many practical ways to improve the mental side of your golf game *before* the round. Remember, you are not born with these behaviors. In spite of the charm and success of fictional golf books, a wise and ancient Scottish caddy will *not* suddenly appear out of the fog and inject his ancient golf wisdom into you concerning golf's mental game.

Instead, either you must learn them through trial and error or you must learn them from some experienced person. Reading alone will not be enough to apply the procedures. You also need to practice our suggested procedures, just as you regularly practice your golf swing. That may mean recording data on whether or not you used any given successful procedure I describe.

You first must remember *what* to practice in your mental game. You will remember some of these ideas and, if you are like the rest of us, you will forget others. To prompt your memory, I suggest you put this booklet in a location that will cause you to reread it. You might place a reminder on a calendar several weeks before an important match or tournament. You could also carry a copy of this article in a zip-lock bag, store it in your golf bag and re-read parts of it prior to practicing and playing.

The first step in having mental behaviors become habits is to recall accurately and often what to think and feel before a round and during it. A written list of these ideas helps. The second step is to have positive consequences follow your application of them. One example would come from analyzing data showing that you perform better when you use them and you perform worse when you do not. Watching an excellent shot you hit under pressure of an important match is another. The difference in using the procedures may be slight in some cases and dramatic in others. Because golf performance varies so much from day to day (golfer's scores from high to low can vary by 15 to as much as 20 shots), you will need to keep a lot of data to prove what works and what does not.