

# A Thinking Game

At some stage or another, all of us have experienced that sinking feeling when our game goes awry during a tournament or even in a game among friends you're trying to impress. **Jonathan Wallett**, director of the Elite Coaching Golf Academy, suggests that the cause for this blowout is more likely to be a breakdown of thinking than a breakdown of your swing.



Lee Trevino's style may not have come from a golfing textbook, but the trust and total confidence that he's always had in his swing served him well in a glittering career. Picture by Getty Images.

**OFTEN**, we hear players say that their swing has broken down under tournament pressure and that they need to work more intensively on their technique to build a 'pressure-proof' swing.

So, let's take a look at the issues involved in this a little more closely. Let's begin by taking a fictitious example.

During practice rounds you feel comfortable and confident with your swing, and you're hitting the ball pretty well. Come the tournament, you hit a few indifferent shots during the pre-round warm-up and that carries over to the first few holes. Suddenly your confidence in your swing is rapidly evaporating.

You start to make a practice swing or two after the indifferent shots and almost before you know it, you are beginning to question your technique and swing. As this process is happening, your game, and consequently your score, gradually slips away from you. Post-round you come to the conclusion that your technique has let you down under the pressure of competition.

Does this sound familiar?

Well, let's look at this chain reaction from the mental game perspective.

*You hit a few indifferent shots, then...*

↓  
Poor post-shot response (Self-talk: 'My swing is not working')

↓  
Lots of practice swinging after the shot

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Creating self-doubt and undermining confidence in swing technique

↓  
Reduction of trust in technique

↓  
Continuation of this thinking pattern after subsequent future 'non perfect swings' leading to self-fulfilling prophecy

↓  
Complete trust breakdown in technique



So really the question that needs to be answered is: "Is it a swing breakdown or a thinking breakdown?"

Being a PGA professional, I understand the importance of solid fundamen-

## KEY POINTS

- ▶ Thinking breakdowns precipitates swing breakdowns;
- ▶ A good swing is a swing that you trust and have confidence in under pressure;
- ▶ Build a thinking pattern that enhances your 'relationship' with your swing, not a thinking pattern that undermines your confidence in your swing.

**To Do:** Before playing, on a second scorecard, write out two or three specific tasks/objectives for your round. For instance one may be to hit 12 greens in regulation (GIR); the other to do could be 'no practice swings after a shot or a missed putt', in order to stop undermining your confidence in your technique. After each hole, mark your 'scorecard' with a tick for the GIR, and then a tick if you succeeded in not practicing swinging after the shot.

**"TO BE ABLE TO PLAY UNDER THE INCREASED STRESS OF COMPETITION, THE KEY IS TO DEVELOP THE COGNITION TO HANDLE THE STRESS."**



tals and a good technical backbone to a tournament player's game. But rarely is this the root of the problem at this level. In most cases, I feel it is a 'thinking breakdown that then leads to a swing breakdown'.

This player is often the player with a 'perfectionist mindset' and often has the misled belief that playing under pressure is about having a bullet-proof technique. This player will work hours, weeks, months and years on searching for this elusive, unbreakable technique.

But really to be able to play under the increased stress of competition, the key is to develop the cognition to handle the stress. In other words, you must have the ability to think in a way to manage the situation.

Look at the example of **Lee Trevino** who, to the layman, has always possessed a highly individual swing. But to the trained coach, it's a swing that is repeatable, returning the club on a consistent

plane with a neutral clubface and path. And above all, it's a swing that the player trusts and has total confidence in.

The moral of this story is that every player needs a swing that they can trust and have confidence in. But, more importantly, you have to build a thinking pattern that enhances your 'relationship' with your swing, not a thinking pattern that undermines your confidence in your swing.

## How this can help the club player

Most club players go to a tournament round with the expectation, or at least the ambition, of hitting great shots and making great swings. This is highly unrealistic. Concentrate more on thinking your way round. Develop a 'good relationship' with your swing. Don't constantly analyse what went wrong and what you need to do in order to correct it.



Jonathan Wallett

*Jonathan Wallett is a certified and qualified Sport Psychology expert and a member of the British and Swiss PGA. He is the Director of the Elite Coaching Golf Academy, based at Evian Masters Training Centre, France and Royal Pines Resort, Australia. Jon has been the author of teaching articles, DVDs, elite performance workbooks and mental training CDs. For further details about the Elite Coaching Golf Academy, visit [www.elitecoaching.com](http://www.elitecoaching.com)*