



Purposeful Practice

In the latest instalment in an exclusive series of articles for *Asian Golf Monthly* in 2010, **Jonathan Wallett**, director of the **Elite Coaching Golf Academy**, argues that **purposeful practice is the key to building a tournament tough game.**

WHY DO YOU PRACTISE? Why does anyone practise? In my opinion, there are two basic objectives from practice:

- ▶ Develop your skills (swing, short game, putting)
- ▶ Develop your confidence in these skills

I often see some elite players very confident in practice, but then this confidence dissipates during tournaments. Why? I talk to our students about the concept of competitive confidence. This means confidence during competition.

This is the type of confidence every player requires to play peak performance golf. So how do you develop 'competitive confidence'?

There are many strategies we employ, but let's look at two of them in particular to help build your competitive confidence.

- (1) Practise at least one-third of your time in the trusting mentality – this means practising one-third of your time without being focused on technical thoughts. During this period, visualise each shot to a specific target in the tiniest detail, using your pre-shot routine and trusting your technique.

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- (2) Practise under pressure (stress). Make part of your practice simulating competition. Extensive testing by university researchers in the field of sports psychology has emphatically shown that practicing in pressurised situations is by far the most effective way to inoculate yourself against the negative effects of pressure.

Slapping away on the range is like practicing for a football World Cup shootout with your five-year-old son in goal! There are different ways you can do this, but one way if practicing on your own is to design and develop 'skill tests' in each area of the game, such as driving, long irons, short irons, short game, putting etc, and to keep track of your scores and look to develop your 'practice scores'.

And just like a Formula One racing team, if your practice 'times' improve, so will your race 'times'.

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Practise to develop your skills and your confidence
- ▶ Develop competitive confidence by:
 - (i) Using one-third of your practice time without technical thoughts, as using your routine aiming at specific targets, which you change regularly;
 - (ii) Practising under pressure or stress – design practise games that simulate a tournament environment.

To Do: Next time you go to your practice facility, design a simple 'skills test' for three areas of your game – 'Long game', 'Short game' and 'Putting'. Do not make the test too complicated, about 30 minutes in length is ample, and create a scoring system and then do each test one time per week, and keep a record of your scores.

How this can help the club player

Probably 90 per cent of club players who go to the range do no benefit at all, because of negative practice habits. If you practise the wrong way you just get good at doing it wrong!

- ▶ Change target regularly
- ▶ Design mini games to put yourself under pressure
- ▶ Try to simulate course play with range play. For example, pick two targets to represent the left and right side of the fairway, and then tee up 10 balls and count how many you hit on the fairway
- ▶ Practise one-third of your time 'trusting' your technique – without technical thoughts.



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