



Are you a 'victim' or a 'competitor'? Pictures by Getty Images.



“CREATING AN EFFECTIVE ‘TOURNAMENT MENTALITY’ IS ONE OF THE STEPS YOU CAN LEARN TO HELP YOU PLAY YOUR BEST GOLF WHEN IT MATTERS MOST.”

- ▶ Staying in the present – playing one shot at a time
- ▶ Calm and controlled
- ▶ Handles the mental challenges that the game of golf presents
- ▶ Plays to the finishing line irrespective of score – ie. does their best

Traits of a ‘victim’

- ▶ Negative self talk, often sarcastic bemoaning about their bad luck
- ▶ Thinking in the past or the future
- ▶ Poor body language
- ▶ Impatient and irritable
- ▶ ‘Mentally’ gives up when score is bad

KEY POINTS

- (a) Focus on tasks that are within your control during a tournament round
- (b) Play ‘golf’ – a game where you manage different mental challenges
- (c) Make a decision to be a ‘competitor’, not a ‘victim’

To Do: *Become aware of your self-talk. One exercise that we use is to take a scorecard, and make two columns – one with ‘competitor style’ thoughts (eg after a three-putt – ‘even great putters three-putt sometimes’), and then the other column for ‘victim style’ thoughts (eg after a three-putt – ‘the greens are really bad and I have been putting poorly for a long time now’).*

Victim or Competitor?

How often do you hear the phrase: “I just don’t understand it! I play well in practice, but when a tournament comes along everything seems to go wrong!” If that’s your stock answer to a bad round then you need to re-examine your mental approach, says **Jonathan Wallett**, director of the Elite Coaching Golf Academy.

TOURNAMENTS tend to create a different level of stress on a player than a practice round, and being able to control this stress is a skill that needs to be learnt. Creating an effective ‘tournament mentality’ is one of the steps you can learn to help you play your best golf when it matters most. During a tournament round, let’s examine what you can control ... and what you can’t control.

What can you control?

- ▶ Your thoughts on the golf course (between shots and response/reaction to shots)
- ▶ Your pre-shot routine

What can’t you control?

- ▶ Weather/condition of the golf course
- ▶ Bounce/luck
- ▶ Results of other competitors
- ▶ Your results
- ▶ Your swing technique on the golf course

So, why talk, think and focus on things that you can’t control? But I often hear amateurs say: “It frustrates me that I hit good shots on the range but then on the course I go to pieces.” Let’s just ask ourselves this question: ‘What is golf?’

Is it a game like ice skating where judges hold up a technical merit mark afterwards, and where if you make one bad mistake, like a fall, the tournament finishes? Of course not!

Golf is:

- (i) A game played on a golf course, not a driving range
- (ii) A game of mistakes; the best round will only have four or five perfect shots
- (iii) A sport in which luck is an integral part
- (iv) A game which creates mental challenges

Golf is a game where the winner is the player who reacts to these mental challenges the best.

At our Academy we call players who play ‘golf’ for the entire round ‘competitors’ because they are competing and looking to manage the different challenges that a round of golf presents.

Players that succumb to the challenges and just buy into different excuses we label as ‘victims’.

Are you a ‘competitor’ or are you a ‘victim’?

Traits of a ‘competitor’

- ▶ Focused and mentally alert; in the flow; in the zone

Every time you experience a thought, make a tally in each column depending upon what type of thought it is. At our Academy we call this the ‘mental scorecard’. At the end of nine holes you may have a score like 35 ‘victim’ thoughts, five ‘competitor’ thoughts. Work with this exercise over several months and just by becoming more aware of your self talk you will notice that the balance will begin to change.

How this can help the club player

The reason you have a handicap is that you are not a professional and you are going to make mistakes – so don’t chastise yourself for these mistakes. Instead, accept them and move on. Don’t go to the tournament with the mindset of trying to hit perfectly struck, and perfectly straight shots for the whole day. Instead, go to the tournament with the mindset that you are going to ‘drive’ your game, round the ‘track’, the golf course, in the most efficient way possible.

Focus on ‘being your own best coach’, by talking to yourself in a coping way as opposed to a critical, perfectionist way. Understand that tournament golf is about managing your imperfect shots – ie managing your mistakes!

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



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