

# Get Positive!



Continuing his exclusive series of articles for *Asian Golf Monthly* about the psychology of the game, Jonathan Wallett, director of the Elite Coaching Golf Academy, explains why negative thinking patterns will prevent you from playing to your potential.

**AROUND OF GOLF** during a stroke play tournament typically takes between four and five hours. During the course of this time many things may happen to alter a player's equilibrium: a putt may lip out, a bad bounce, a nice iron shot on line for the flag that flies over the green, some poorly struck shots, some off line shots ... and so on.

The events that occur during any given round ensure that not only is the player taken on a physical journey of 18 holes, but also a mental journey.

In my experience, people react to these events in a habitual way, and this becomes a 'thinking pattern' for them. Breaking negative and non constructive thinking patterns can be the key to taking your game to the next level.

Let's look at some common thinking patterns, which discourage peak performance golf and may be preventing you from playing to your potential:

**Perfect Swing Game:** This player constantly measures every shot and swing against their perception of 'his or

her perfect swing' or how he perceives he should and can swing. This is a very dangerous game to play as a few 'non perfect' shots early in the round can then lead to the player criticising his swing and game, therefore undermining his own confidence. This player then proceeds to make more and more practice swings in between shots and the round becomes an 'internal fight' with his swing and technique. Invariably, this player ends the round feeling frustrated and disappointed.

**Victim Game:** This player is waiting for some bad luck to happen, so he or she can bemoan their luck, and then externalise the blame. This player often 'talks a good game', but lacks deep level self belief and confidence and then tries to convince those all around that their poor performance is simply bad luck or the fault of their coach, their caddie, spectators or the equipment they use. Players who indulge in this game often talk themselves into a negative attitude ... and a poor round. They then continue with this line of thinking in the clubhouse, letting everyone they come into contact with know that their score 'should have been better'.

**Scorecard Game:** This is a very common game all golfers have played at one time, and definitely interferes with a golfer playing to their potential. They are focused on result-based thinking – always aware of their score, with the mind often wandering off into the future, imagining how a future shot or result could impact on their score. Often they will also dwell on the past and think how earlier mistakes in the round have impacted on their score. For example, they will know that they have had three three-putt greens so far and driven the ball twice in the water. All through the round they will know their score relative to par.

## “BREAKING NEGATIVE AND NON CONSTRUCTIVE THINKING PATTERNS CAN BE THE KEY TO TAKING YOUR GAME TO THE NEXT LEVEL.”

**Trying Game:** This is a very common mode of play for many competitors. They constantly 'try hard', desperately trying to hole a putt, or talking to the ball in mid air to 'get down'. This player has good intentions, but interferes with their ability to get into the 'flow', the state of peak performance golf. They feel their score was not a reflection of the way they played.

So, if these thinking patterns are non-productive, how should you condition yourself to think on the golf course?

**Focus on the process.** What exactly does this mean? Well, it means following **Bob Rotella's** advice in the books he has written:

### KEY POINTS

- ▶ Learn to recognise and understand your habitual thinking patterns;
- ▶ Be aware of the different 'mental traps' on tournament day;
- ▶ 'Focus on the Process': Play one shot at a time and add your score up at the end.

**To Do:** On a piece of paper make five columns, titled: Perfect Swing, Victim, Scorecard, Over Trying and Process. Over the next 10 rounds, after each round estimate how much of each of the round you played with each of these thinking patterns (total 100 per cent). The aim here is that one day you can play 100 per cent of the round in the 'Focus on the Process' way of thinking.

- ▶ Play one shot at a time and then add your score up at the end;
- ▶ Commit to the swing you bring to the golf course on any given day, and understand that no-one (not even **Tiger Woods**) brings a 'perfect' swing to the tournament;
- ▶ Commit to thinking in a way that helps you, not hurts you; be your own best coach;
- ▶ Be immersed in task relevant cues during the process of execution (for example, planning the shot, visualising the shot, routine).

So, next time you play a tournament round, take a little time afterwards to review your round and investigate your 'thinking pattern' that day. Did you think in a way that

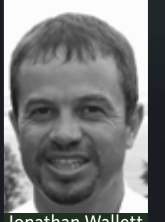
was going to help you or hurt you? See if you recognise any of the negative patterns outlined in this article, and then you have at least taken the first step in any learning process ... awareness of the problem!

### How this can help the club player

Most club players lack confidence in their game, because they are comparing it to the game of a Tour professional instead of comparing it to their own handicap level. This then leads them to spend most of the tournament round in one or more of the four dysfunctional thinking patterns highlighted in this article. Next time you play a tournament, focus on:

- ▶ Forgetting the score
- ▶ Not trying to 'fix' your swing
- ▶ Letting go and not trying too hard
- ▶ Playing one shot at a time

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)



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