

# The Mental Game of Golf

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**G**olf is a sport where players can get consumed by emotions, distractions and negative thoughts. These factors can make a golfer feel “out of control”

resulting in two reactions: giving up (going through the motions to just finish the round) or forced play (trying harder by adjusting mechanics or over-analyzing their play).

The most optimal mindset for peak performance requires that you avoid engaging in over-thinking and over-analyzing while playing. In the heat of the moment, pressure and mistakes can seem overwhelming but if you can commit to adopting the right mindset and spend the time to train your mind, your golf game will soar. Always remember, your emotional reaction, your thoughts and your focus are 100% within your control – you just need to learn how to do it. Here are four tips on how to adopt the right mindset.

## TIP #1: Competitive Routine

Your pre-shot routine is the key to calm your mind and body. The last part of your routine should signal your mind and body that you are fully ready and committed to THIS shot. Try including the word “Ready!” at the end of your routine for emphasis.

## TIP #2: Focus on Task

Always focus on the process of performing a task... not the outcome. Ask yourself, “What exactly do I need to do in this moment?” Choose your strategy for the shot, align your shot, perform

your pre-shot routine, trust and swing. Anything more than that is useless noise.

## TIP #3: Thought Control

You will have thousands of positive, negative and neutral thoughts throughout a round of golf. You may not be able to control which thoughts come into your mind, but you can control what thoughts you grab on to and buy in to.

I like this analogy. Imagine your mind is like a fish tank. Different fish swim into your awareness like thoughts. It is up to you to decide which ones you want to focus on. The cute small blue and yellow spotted one or the ugly gray and black fish. Tell yourself that just because a thought comes through your mind, it is your choice whether you stay with this thought or not. Let go of self-defeating thoughts and choose self-enhancing thoughts. Try to do this in your next practice round.

## TIP #4: Anxiety Management

Begin to recognize your troublesome thoughts that lead to worrying before and during your performances. Train yourself in relaxation techniques (ie: deep breathing, imagery) to reduce your stress levels. It is important for you to equip yourself with diverse strategies to regain the calm, clear mind and automatic execution required for peak performance, especially in critical moments during a tournament. You wouldn't just bring one golf club to a tournament because you know you will face many different shot situations; you bring a variety of clubs to best attack each shot. The same should be true for your mental game. Having a selection of optimal mindset tools and strategies at your disposal prepares and arms you to face the various challenges that you will come across during a round of golf.

► PGA Professional Dean Sklar is a member of the Quarter Century Club of the PGA of America, an elite group of members who have served the PGA with honor and pride for 25 years. If you would like to talk to Dean about your golf game, contact him at [Dean@SklarTeam.com](mailto:Dean@SklarTeam.com) or visit Rose and Dean Sklar at Coldwell Banker online at [www.SklarTeam.com](http://www.SklarTeam.com).