

A Player Interview – Henry Lister

I recently had the pleasure of playing golf with a friend and past student of Creative Golf. It had been some time since we last played. As I enjoyed the day and Henry's company, it became very clear to me that he was playing the game in a very powerful space. I was excited when he shared how much his experience with our mental game workshop back in 2005 had impacted him, both on and off the course. At some point during the round, it occurred to me that others might be interested in hearing his story. He agreed to an interview, and here is some of what we talked about that day.

How many rounds of golf on average do you play each year?

Last year I played 104 rounds on 78 different courses. Between my business of golf marketing, my volunteer work as a course rater, and playing on an amateur golf tour, I have a lot of opportunities to play.

What is your handicap?

I'm 5'8", pear-shaped and can only hit the ball 250 yards. Actually, when I started your Creative Golf program I was a 12 handicap. This month (August) it's a 5. In June it was a 7, and in July it was a 6.

As a golf writer and course rater you play a lot of golf. What is the general feeling out there for the need to work on mental game?

Most of the golfers I play with realize the importance of the mental game, but very few golfers ever do anything about it. I know lots of golfers that actually will practice their swings, chips, putts, etc. but don't even try to manage their minds. Nor have any of them ever taken any training to learn what to do to manage their minds.

Heck, I didn't even consider doing something about it until I read about your program. I always figured I'd have to go to a week long golf school or something to learn about golf psychology. Because you were local, I figured it couldn't hurt me to give it a try. It was the smartest money I ever spent.

Can you share with the readers your overall impression of the Creative Golf approach to personal performance?

The Creative Golf program were the best days I ever had playing golf. Even though we only played three holes, I learned more about myself as a golfer in and out of the classroom than I thought was possible.

This is not to say the program was easy. Actually, it was frustrating. I learned how poor my mental approach was to the game, how totally random my behavior and thoughts were - it was all kind of embarrassing. But the overall experience was non-threatening, supportive, and I felt safe to open up and talk to my classmates about our shared issues.

What was your experience like during the program?

As I said, it was a bit embarrassing the first day to see myself in a mess mentally, although I did learn some really positive things that I could build on. I wasn't totally bereft of mental control, but I was hungry to learn how to control it all. There was a lot of anxiety, that I would learn something about myself, especially in front of the other students, which would damn me to golf purgatory forever. But that never happened.

The night after our first day I was a little depressed, because it seemed like learning to manage my thoughts was going to be hard and that I might not be able to do anything about it. But when we started using the heart monitors and I could see how my thoughts really DID control my heart, and I could create a state of mind that was more conducive to playing golf. That blew my mind. I actually could feel my body and tell before I hit the ball whether the outcome would be what I wanted or not. In some ways it seemed too easy. Here I was, doing it once or twice on the course with some success, that was easy. And then to watch the other students succeed just as easily was stunning. Yet creating the mental environment and habits and using them for an entire round was way more difficult. You as the teacher were great in encouraging us to try harder, and the help and support you gave us to move from our "bad" selves to our "positive" selves was awesome.

What is the biggest difference in your game since taking a Creative Golf workshop?

When my game starts to fall apart, I have tools now that I can call on to get myself back on track. I don't panic and begin an endless spiral into playing worse. I know how to take stock and pull from my "mental tool bag" what I need to fix things. I play with much more confidence and relaxation than I ever have.

If you had to choose one thing to share with fellow golfers that has been the biggest reason for your improvement, what would it be?

It sounds trite, but playing one shot at a time is what it is all about. You call it being in the present, and I think the meaning is similar. I realized that all I can control is what I have in front of me, the club in my hand and where the ball rests. We had a scorecard where we recorded our mental practices/behaviors, and THAT really did the trick to help me ingrain a mental routine. This led to confidence and relaxation, as I said.

What outcome goals did you set for yourself in 2005, have you achieved them, and what are your current goals?

This is a tricky question, because as I have mentally matured in golf, my goals have changed. In 2005 I focused on reducing my handicap as a goal and set as a goal to qualify for the US Senior Amateur in 2008. Now, my goal is to be more fit so I have more stamina. Another goal is to continue to reduce negative and forbidden thoughts. Another goal is to increase my commitment on every shot by trusting my shot choices. I

worry less about handicap and scores, and try to enjoy my “victories” when I achieve my current goals. I think I will achieve my original goal of the US Senior Am if I accomplish my current goals.

You mention how you see those you play with in a different light. Would you like to elaborate?

Yeah, it’s sad to watch guys doom themselves to a poor round of golf because of poor attitudes and negative thinking. I see this time and time again, in pros and amateurs alike. It’s stunning to watch that, knowing that I used to be just like that and changed. I really hurt for my friends especially who don’t seem able to hear and apply to themselves what I tell them about my journey to mental improvement. Nor have any of them, who by all appearances seem to be serious about golf, ever participated in a program like Creative Golf.

As you know Creative Golf shares the belief that by working on improving your mental golf skills you can actually improve performance in all areas of life. Have you noticed changes in other areas?

In some regards, yes. Since I am in sales there are many moments when the conversation gets tense, people get defensive or protective, and I find myself trying too hard to get my point across. The physical signs are similar to getting too excited or tense about a bad situation on the course. Now, I am trying my relaxation techniques, focusing on the moment to discern the issue at hand, and then work with the customer to resolve their issues. After all, it’s not about my making a sale, but making the customer pleased with the product. Oh yeah, it’s made me a safer driver too. I am less aggressive and less rushed while driving.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Yeah. When are you offering the next advanced class?

Henry A. Lister, PhD is a golf writer, photographer and marketer, and an experienced CGA Course Rater. He lives in Chapel Hill, NC when he is not playing golf!

Doug Hodges is a Class A PGA Professional and founder of Creative Golf, an organization specializing in unique corporate teambuilding events that use golf as a vehicle to emphasize creativity in the workplace. Teambuilding events and golf schools are conducted at the Heritage Golf Club. For more information, contact Doug at (919) 453-2020, ext. 11, or visit: www.thinkworkplay.com.