

Seeds of Change

As each golf season comes and goes, some of us find our golf games right where they were the season before. For some, handicaps may even get worse! We take lessons, buy that new driver, watch the Golf Channel, yet our game remains unchanged.

In the immortal words of Albert Einstein, “Insanity is continuing to do the same thing and expecting different results.” Now is the time we should ask ourselves what we can do differently during the winter months to produce different results next season. What can we do to produce consistently good shots, lower our handicap, in short – reach our potential?

There are three issues you can address today that will produce significant changes in your game:

- Mental game
- Physical fitness and flexibility
- Nutrition and hydration

To play your best, examine these areas, as each plays a crucial role in lowering stress and tension on a long-term basis. By reducing stress and tension, you are more likely to play to your potential.

Mental Game:

One of the easiest ways to initiate positive change in any aspect of our lives is to set goals. How many golfers actually write down what their outcome goals are? Studies have shown that by writing down your outcome goals you are 15% more likely to achieve them. When setting goals, begin with the end in mind and set intermediate goals to achieve along the way. You can set mental goals for the golf course and physical goals for your golf swing and your fitness. The important thing is to write them down. Once you’ve done that, make sure they’re SMART - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Tested. If your goals meet these criteria, there is a good chance you will attain them and be able to set the bar even higher next time.

Now that you’ve set some goals, focus on stress and tension and how it impacts your golf game. Reducing stress and playing in a relaxed, mentally “quiet” state is crucial when it comes to playing your best. Dr. Deborah Graham and Jon Stabler, co-founders of GolfPsych, an instruction method that has been taught to over 350 Tour Professionals, have this to say:

“Consistent with great golf is an ability to tap into athleticism through creative and imaginative play. Unfortunately, once we are old enough to understand the game, it quite naturally elicits the opposite response, drawing most players to intellectualize, over-analyze – in short, think too much and try too hard.”

GolfPsych teaches players various techniques to reduce stress on the golf course and thereby play to their potential. At the core of their method is the theory that in order to execute a good golf shot, a player must quiet the analytical left brain and let the creative right brain play the shot. In an effort to make their system accessible to the everyday player, Graham and Stabler train a select group of instructors in their methods, who in turn offer weekend GolfPsych schools as well as individual instruction. After an intensive immersion into the mental game, participants leave with a clear understanding of how to access their potential and a system to follow that will allow them to fulfill their goals.

Fitness and Flexibility:

Golf, as with any sport, requires a balance between mind and body. One of the best ways to achieve this balance is through Pilates.

Pilates is an exercise regimen developed by Joseph Pilates in the early 1900s that focuses on improving flexibility and strengthening the body's core muscles. Pilates for Golf helps you develop focus and awareness of your core muscles while retraining the body to overcome its natural tendencies and compensations. A strong core is essential for a powerful golf swing, primarily because golf requires that you make a solid turn using your body's core muscles to hit a shot. In addition to core strength, other areas that are isolated in relation to golf are balance, rotation, flexibility, and extension. Susan Maravetz, Certified Pilates for Golf Instructor at Body Balance in downtown Raleigh, says the following:

“The results of the regular practice of Pilates for a golfer include a stronger core, improved balance and better rotation. This allows the golfer to move through the golf swing smoothly and with increased strength. A rewarding byproduct of the program is better awareness and focus, which gives the golfer enhanced execution and results on the course.”

Nutrition and Hydration:

Volumes have been written on this topic by doctors, scientists, wellness coaches and the like. Most agree that if we do not pay attention to nutrition and hydration we will not give our bodies what they need to perform at their optimal level. One side effect of poor nutrition and hydration is physical stress. Physical stress over time will lead to a diminished ability to perform in any sport, but particularly in golf, which requires higher levels of focus and concentration.

At the onset of mild dehydration, mental skills begin to decline. Common symptoms of dehydration include difficulty concentrating, indecision, irritability, mental fatigue, confusion and forgetfulness, all of which prevent us from performing at our best.

Many experts recommend consuming half our body weight in fluid ounces of water each day to maintain normal hydration. It might just be that drinking a couple of extra bottles of water each day could change the way you play golf! Taking a look at what we are consuming on a daily basis now may well lead to feeling more focused and better able to concentrate on the links this summer.

So why wait for the spring thaw when you can plant the seeds of change in your game today?

Doug Hodges is an Advanced GolfPsych instructor 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. His teambuilding events and weekend GolfPsych schools are conducted at the Heritage Golf Club in Wake Forest. For more information, contact Doug at (919) 453-2020, ext. 11, or at www.creativegolfonline.com.

For more information about Pilates for Golf, please visit www.bodybalancetherapy.com.