

# The Classical Academy

## Mental Game of Golf

From my notes after reading the book *Why Bad Golf Happens to Good People (It's Your Brain, Not Your Game!)* by Glenn R. Kessler, PhD

### 1 AWARENESS

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- Only thing you have control over on the course is **YOURSELF**
- *Slow motion* swing on range...can mimic what you did wrong and correct
- Be *aware* of what caused you to make a bad shot
- Close eyes on putting green, putt, guess how far ball rolled before you open your eyes
- Be *aware* of your tempo and feel of the putt to control distance

### 2 EMOTIONS

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- Keeping your emotions in check is the hard part
- **Positive emotions:** fun, relaxation, calmness, confidence, trust, happiness
- Negative emotions: fear, worry, anxiety, doubt, tension, frustration
- FEAR and ANGER are two primary emotions that cause difficulties
- Sam Snead said "...of all the hazards, fear is the worst"
- Practice tip: put arm on table, tighten the muscles from elbow to finger tips, then tap your fingers; now release the pressure (shake arm) and place arm back on table and tap your fingers (easier, isn't it?)
- "curse of the good drive"...can lead to too high an expectation on the hole

### 3 RELAXATION

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- Don't be overly concerned with the result, enjoy the **PROCESS**, the opportunity to play
- **"The enemy of golf is TENSION"—Bobby Jones**
- **Practice tip to get rid of tension in grip:** take grip on club and squeeze as hard as you can for 5 seconds, then release grip, and within 5-7 seconds, re-grip and make stroke (you will find it hard to grip too tight!)
- "You don't play golf to RELAX, you RELAX to play golf"

## 4 IMAGERY

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- Visualize your target and your ball landing there
- Visualize the flight of the ball to get there
- Visualize the stroke (or putt) that you need to make

## 5 CONFIDENCE

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- “Regardless of how you feel inside, always try to look like a winner”
- “Acting as if you are confident often times will help you play with confidence”

## 6 POSITIVE SELF TALK

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- Do not say “I will try” or “I hope”, but rather say “**I will**”
- Get those negative thoughts out of your head (reboot your brain if you have to)
- Reboot by opening jaw, lift chin up, close eyes, and hold for 10 seconds

## 7 CONCENTRATION AND FOCUS

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- Focus on the **PRESENT**, stay in the **NOW**
- “If you live in the past, you die in the present” (forget those bad shots!)
- The past is HISTORY (do NOT focus on it)
- Don’t focus on the future—you can’t control it
- During practice and play, **focus on only one swing shot at a time**
- Focus on things you can control
- **Be positive**
- Can’t focus for 4 hours, so relax between strokes (go on vacation between shots, what you are having for dinner, hum your favorite song, etc.)
- When you “cross the line” and take your stance, stop thinking, focus and have but one swing thought (e.g., follow through, keep head from raising up, keep body from swaying back, etc.)

## 8 DEALING WITH DISTRACTIONS

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- Can be internal or external distractions
- External: noises, movement around you, talking
- Internal: thinking of that last putt you missed, thinking of the score you are shooting, etc.)
- Steps to help: recognize the distraction, relax, release the tension, and refocus
- **RELAX** to regain focus and begin pre-shot routine again

## 9 PRE-SHOT ROUTINE

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- What is a pre-shot routine? A set of physical and mental behaviors that allows you to prepare and execute a stroke
- **Develop your own** (use on practice range, not just the course)
- Helps with concentration and focus
- Once developed, will become like a best friend, a comfort, a security blanket
- Can watch the pros on TV to see that they all have a pre-shot routine
- I take a practice swing (not near the ball!) to loosen up the muscles, and simulate the stroke I want to make. .then I start my pre-shot routine behind the ball facing the target, I pick something on the ground 5-10 feet in front of ball on desired flight path, and watch it as I take my stance, coming in from the side, and squaring up my legs; release any tension, take a nice breath, have one swing thought, and then execute the stroke
- Allows mind and body to work in harmony without conscious thought

## 10 MOTIVATION

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- Definition: desire and determination to persist at a task
- What motivates you? Everyone is different
- Set goals, good way to increase motivation
- Motivation comes from within

## 11 GOAL SETTING

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- Individual decision
- Long term (outcome goal) and short term (e.g., practice putting 3 times a week, keep three putts to less than 3 during a round, no double pars, etc.
- Goal setting: use **SMART**, **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime bound
- Problems with some goals: too general, too many, no support to achieve them

## 12 MENTAL TOUGHNESS

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- Acquired skill, not inherited gift
- Learn from experience
- Self-directed, self-motivated
- Pay attention to the C words (Confident, Control, Composure, Concentration, Commitment, Competitive, and Consistency) to improve mental toughness (takes years!)
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## 13 CHOKING

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- “...losing the ability to concentrate”—Arnold Palmer
- A result of a perceived threat in a pressure situation (only real threat on a golf course is lightning, getting hit with a club or golf ball!)
- Fight or flight syndrome
- Fear of failure, fear of success, fear of trouble (sand/water)
- To prevent—make practice “real” (especially when practicing putting...pretend the putt is to win a hole, or make a birdie)
- Practice as is you were playing. Pretend you are playing a hole. Hit a driver, then an iron, then pitch shot. Don’t hit same club time after time, alternate clubs

## 14 THE ZONE

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- **FIRST, DEVELOP A REPEATABLE SWING!** (and, therefore, unconscious competence)
- Can take years of hard work and preparation
- Altered state of consciousness
- Performance flows smoothly, effortlessly, almost unconsciously
- Mind and body in perfect harmony
- “A feeling of tranquility and calmness”—Tiger Woods

## 15 PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

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- Enjoy the most demanding game ever developed
- Always keep **SMILING**, especially when completing a round
- Prepare for a lifetime of enjoyment

Coach Gravelle, April 2, 2013