



CLUTCH PLAYER

Secret Strategies on How to Thrive Under Pressure



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Introduction-The Inner Game

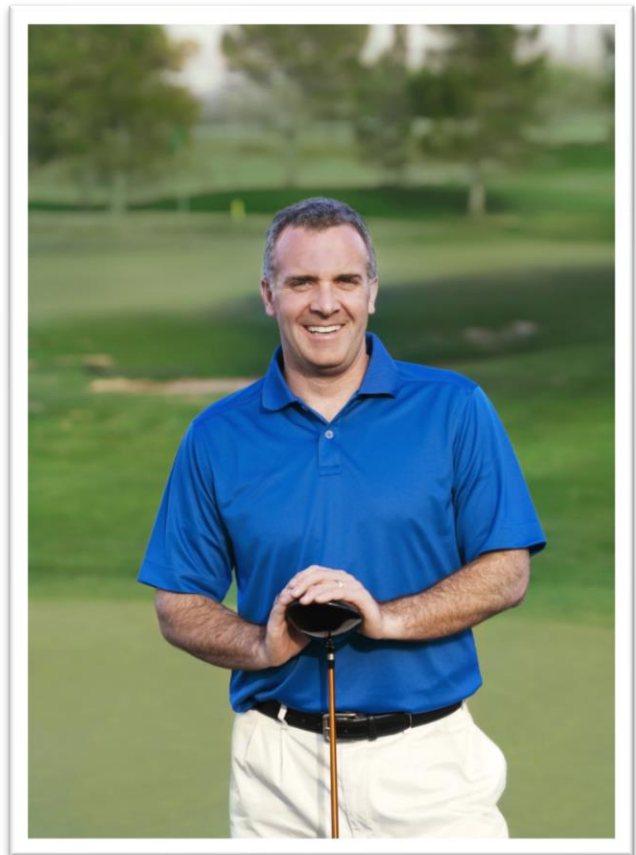
Have you ever heard this **startling statistic** from the USGA?

Did you know the average handicap for men is 16.1 and 28.9 for women, according to the United States Golf Association?

While this information may be somewhat surprising, the most 'startling' fact is that this number hasn't changed for over 20 years.

How can this be true?

In a world where we can watch 'around the clock' coverage of golf and learn from almost every golf expert regarding any facet of the game, how is it possible that we aren't improving?



We have more advanced technology with clubs, more ingenious training tools and gadgets, fabulous new instruction books which have emerged over the years and the internet has exploded with golf instruction videos and tips.

This means the average golfer may never break 80 and his hopes of playing his best in his glory years are all but a dream.

It makes every sane golf lover in the world ask the most important question in golf. *Is there something I am missing? Is it possible there is a concept, a technique or an 'unknown' element that I am overlooking-something so powerful it can transform my game and change the way I look at it forever?*

The short answer is 'yes'.

Get ready as we explore some of the most powerful truths in all of golf and how to make them work for you.

The magic can be distilled down to 4 critical elements that when understood and implemented will change the way you forever think of your game and will most likely alter your performance and your ability to hit the low scores and handicap you've always wanted.

Once you understand these guiding principles, this book will take you through 8 mental exercises and techniques to help you learn and practice these principles for life.

Low scores are now within your reach and you'll be playing like the pros before you know it.

Here's to your golf success....

The Art of Relaxed Concentration

Going into the final round of the 114th U.S. Open at Pinehurst #2, we had an unlikely contender in Erik Compton. Prior to competing in the U.S. Open, he had never experienced a performance better than 5th place in over 99 previous PGA starts.

What most people found so remarkable outside of his great performance throughout the Open was that he had two previous heart transplants, one at the age of 12 and the other at the age of 28.

With a frame of 5'8 and only 150 lbs., he surprised more than a few golf fans when he reached a par 5, 611 yard hole in just two shots.

After a third round score of 67, he was poised for a potential victory or at the very least he would become a popular challenger in the final day.

Can you imagine the nerves he may have been experiencing? Then, add to it all of the media attention and focus on him. Just before the final round was about to begin, the cameras started rolling and the lights were flashing with questions like, 'what is your plan of attack for the day' and 'where will you place your focus'?

Can you say p-r-e-s-s-u-r-e?

Yet, Compton was very relaxed and poised in his response describing his plan to 'follow the fairways as they come' and 'hit the greens'. Sounds simple, right?

Although it may sound pretty simple and straightforward, it is a very different conversation than many amateurs have in their head when playing in similar circumstances. Perhaps you are not playing in the US Open, but it is more typical for amateurs to have thoughts like...

*I really want to break 80 today
I hope I don't blow this hole
I always struggle with these putts*

And, these thoughts and emotions become the quick demise of players every day, limiting their true potential and keeping them from ever really playing the game they know they have physically prepared for and believed would happen.

The Golf Swing has Two Masters

One of the most revealing lessons the pros have mastered is how to limit the chatter that goes on when playing golf. The chatter I'm referring to is the constant talk all golfers hear from one shot to the other and before and after a round. The chatter seems endless. There have been many names given to these voices like ego and alter ego, the conscious and sub conscious or the two masters.

Think of it like having both a *coach* and a *player* in your head.

The coach, of course, wants to remind you of all the lessons you've learned so far.

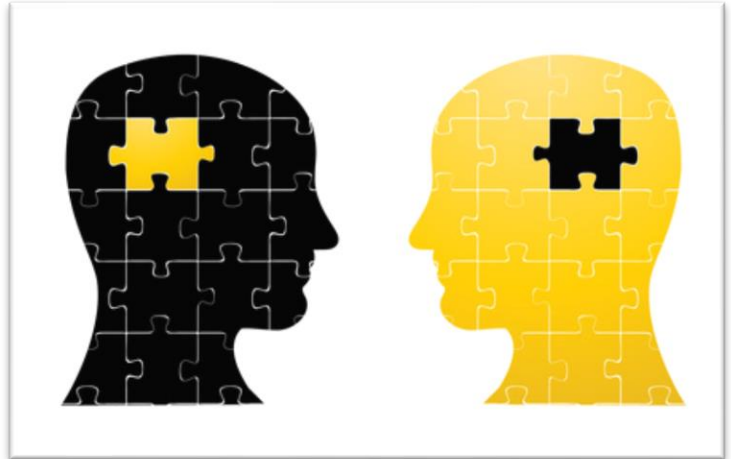
'get your club on plane in your backswing'
'don't forget to move your hips out of the way'
'make sure you keep your head down'
'don't forget to bend your knees'

The distracting thoughts can be overwhelming at times.

The other voice you may hear is that of a *player*. In this case, the golfer just wants to play golf and enjoy the game. This voice was far more relaxing and upbeat while the *coach* was far more demanding and technical.

The truth is all golfers have these two voices in their head along with the endless chatter. And, who takes over in the conversation going on in your head is usually the one who leads the round.

The *coach* voice is relentless in pursuit of you to pay attention to everything. If it's not one thing, it's another. Your mechanics are all wrong or you made a bad decision-again. Every time the coach is present, there is a reminder of your failures, your fears and your inadequacies.



Yet, when the *player* was in charge, there was an ability just to trust that you have properly prepared yourself up to now and it's time to let go and play the game that you've practiced and the one you've come to know.

With this simple adjustment in attitude, golfers have shown remarkable progress in performance by eliminating the interference from the *coach* and letting natural swing take over.

What is now being taught by all the mental game gurus who work with tour players is that it is important to recognize the two masters within you who want different things for your game. The *coach* doesn't trust you and will remind you at every opportunity. The coach places fear, doubt, and judgment on you.

The *player*, however, believes you can do it and trusts you immensely.

The dynamic that goes on between these two masters is very real and pros spend a great deal of their time learning how to manage the masters and

pay attention only to the voice of the *player* which keeps them present and in the moment.

This is also something amateurs have heard very little of and, as a result, haven't yet learned how to effectively quiet the mind.

So, how exactly do the pros do it? They start by learning the difference between process and outcome and where to place their focus.

Process vs. Outcome

One of the biggest challenges faced by golfers is in training the mind to separate the difference between the 'process' and the 'outcome' of what happens on the golf course.

When Compton said the main focus of one of the most important and stressful days of golf in his career was to 'follow the fairways' and 'hit the greens', he was really saying his plan was to focus on the process of hitting one shot at a time, reaching one fairway at a time and rolling one solid putt after another.

What exactly is the difference between process and outcome and why does it hinder so many amateur players?

The process simply refers to placing all of your focus on the task at hand. Forget about the results of the hole, the consequences if you hit it poorly or the outcome if it doesn't go where you intended it.

The process allows you to play only the shot in front of you without any consideration of any other variables, other than what you are facing in that very moment.

If you find yourself becoming distracted with thoughts of winning or losing, then this can inhibit your performance and limit your ability to play better golf.

Let's take a look at two different thought processes as you approach a green.

Outcome thinking: 'If I make this birdie, I go to 5 over'.

Process thinking: 'Focus on rolling this putt to the right edge'.

Do you see how different these two statements are and how they may affect your thinking and performance on the course? The first one creates a level of stress and is not present at all in process thinking.

By keeping positive, action oriented thoughts in your mind, it allows you to stay in the present and cut out needless chatter which leads to distractions.

What are other positive vs. negative responses that play out in a golfer's mind?

Destructive thoughts

- Whatever you do, don't hit it left.
- You're swinging too fast.
- Don't blow this hole with a 3 putt.
- Don't hit it in the water.

Constructive thoughts

- I'm going to hit a draw that drops just beyond that tree along this line.

- I'm going to roll this ball slightly to the right so it can drop into the hole.

Mental Exercise #1

Most tour players have learned to quiet their mind by incorporating deep breathing exercises into a pre shot routine. Try this technique before your next shot to see what difference it makes for you.

Here is one of Tom Watson's favorite breathing techniques.

Step 1: Take a deep breath and slowly let it out.

Step 2: Take another deep breath and let half of it out.

Step 3: Start your golf swing

When you breathe, make sure you are inhaling through your nose and diaphragm. This will activate your parasympathetic nervous system which slows your heart rate and induces a state of relaxation.

Mental Exercise #2

Another great mental exercise which forces your mind to be more focused was revealed in the book, *The Inner Game of Golf*, by Timothy Gallwey. The exercise is called Back-Hit-Stop.

Draw your attention on the feel of the clubhead as you move through your backswing to its furthest position. Now, say the word 'back'. You should be able to sense the position without worrying about its exact position.

Next, say the word, 'hit' at the moment of impact when the clubface meets the ball. Again, notice the feel.

Last, say the word 'stop' as your body completes the follow through and is in its final resting place.

The Unthinkable Swing

It is not enough to simply make a tee time, play 18 holes and hope some lessons are learned along the way. Nor is it enough to show up at the driving range for the purpose of banging on balls for an hour or more.

It has no specific mission and serves no real purpose as it relates to truly getting better at golf. The person who came up with the often repeated 'practice makes perfect' underestimated the power of purposeful practice.

But, well beyond the boundaries of technical swing instruction, endless hours of practice and repetitive play is something few amateurs explore and every professional uses.

What is it? The power of 'unthinking'.

How to Experience Non-Thinking

One of the biggest misconceptions in golf is what you should be thinking about when you swing. An average golfer might respond, I was thinking about...

-not going to the trees on the left

-not screwing up this hole completely like I did the last round

-how bad I want to break 80!

However, the truth is that the best golfers perform their most impressive rounds when *they are not thinking*.

Don't they care about the outcome like you do and want to achieve their goals while out on the course? Yes, of course, they do. It's not that they care less about the outcome, but you greatly increase your probability of success to achieve the outcome you desire by not thinking about it.

Players of the game today understand the need to develop their mental game to fully reach their potential. Unfortunately, the golf world is full of examples of players who are incredibly talented physically and technically, but consistently fall short of their potential because of deficient mental skills.

When we start to improve our thought process it creates feelings and emotions which then controls our actions. This is why it's important to develop and control our thought process. Just like developing a swing, most great players devote time and energy to learning the mental game.

The ability to clear your mind of all thoughts takes time and mental training to accomplish. It doesn't mean you will go on to make every shot and roll in every putt. However, it does mean you will learn to play closer to your abilities and without common distractions that affect other players.

To 'unthink' is also to disassociate with the outcome of your golf shots. Just like we discussed with the differences between the process and the outcome, it is a clever way of not attaching to emotions and feelings that have a potential negative effect on your game.

Pros who use this technique have shown dramatic improvements in their games. It is a perfect way to help amateurs improve quickly and easily. Just as you have likely experienced, emotions can have a snowball effect and take you quickly from making one bad decision to ruining an entire round when you don't recover.

Here are two great exercises to help you disassociate from the results of your shots – for better and for worse.

Mental Exercise #1

Practice this dissociation technique on the course.

After hitting a bad shot, take a deep cleansing breath and imagine you just watched a television shot of someone else hitting that shot. Keep your comments objective as to the input you would offer. This will take 'you' out of the shot and keep the objective information at the forefront.

Mental Exercise #2

Play a practice round of 'nonjudgmental golf'. Think of it like a game where after every single shot you **MUST** remain neutral or happy. If you mishit the shot, then you must immediately say something kind to yourself or remain neutral. However, in no circumstance can you pass judgment on the shot or yourself. Give yourself a rating of 1 to 5 so you can measure how successful you were at achieving this goal.

Mental Exercise #3

Many professional golfers have been highly successful with awareness drills. These techniques awaken the mind to what is happening in the present moment and take away any attention to the mindless chatter of the brain.

- a. Close your eyes and move your club from an open position to closed to square. See if you can feel the difference with the club in your hand without making any contact.
- b. Next, swing the club with your eyes closed to see if you can feel the angle of the clubface at impact.

Playing Within Yourself

As Ricky Fowler walked off the 18th green of the 2014 U.S. Open, the cameras were rolling and the interviewer asked how he felt about his game after finishing a strong second to Martin Kaymer. He commented that he was happy with his performance and his success was the result of 'staying within himself'.

Have you ever heard a professional golfer say this before?

It is probably one of the most common statements you will see in professional golf today as it taught by every mental guru in the game of golf. But, what exactly does it mean to 'stay within yourself' or 'play within yourself'?

It is an important reminder that performing your best and playing your best is more about knowing your game and your limitations. As golfers, we are also dreamers. We dream of flying every shot off the tee, landing every green and rolling every ball into the hole. Occasionally, it actually happens just like we remembered it in our dreams. The problem is with the word 'occasionally'.

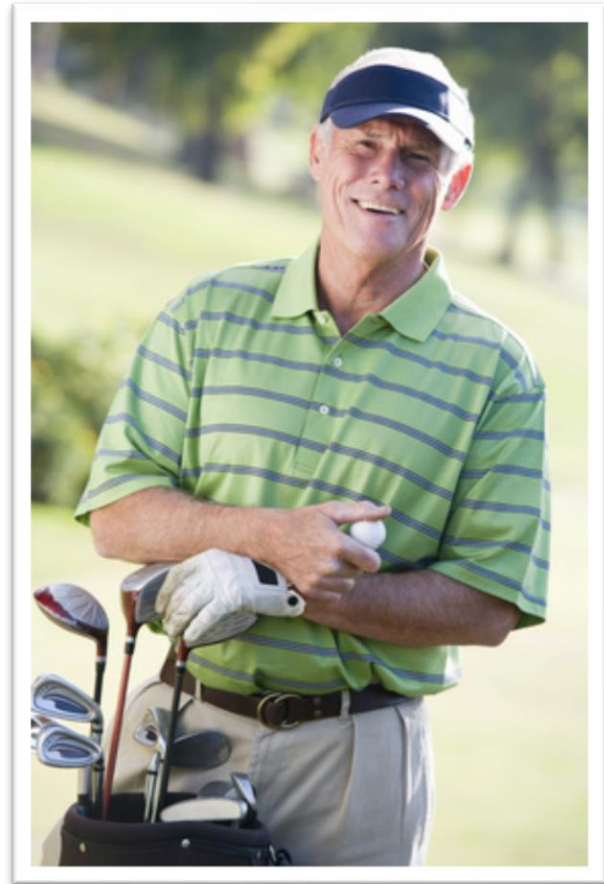
The truth is we can't always replicate the perfect shot, even when we try our very best and even for the pros who play far more golf than the average player.

So, when we play within ourselves, we are playing the shots that we have a high probability of making based on our experience. They are shots we have practiced over and over and shots we typically make. It does not refer to the one time you made a crazy shot that you were never able to duplicate.

Playing within yourself doesn't have to mean laying up, playing safe or being weak. In fact, it is quite the opposite. It means you are confident with your game and the shots you know you can make (or your probability is strong) and you engage the mental strength within to play just within that boundary.

It creates an air of invincibility that has been demonstrated over and over by Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus. They were both famous for playing within themselves as a guiding principle to keep making smart decisions, shot after shot, only focusing on the task at hand.

Watch and observe the best players on tour and you will see them selecting a precise target within the boundaries of their comfort zone and capabilities, then aggressively executing the shot. By playing this way, they can play with more comfort and ease instead of trying to force shots that can push their limits too far.



The contrast is quite drastic as to how an average golfer or mid handicapper might approach a hole. Oftentimes, you will see an average golfer approach a long par 4 with confidence or maybe even sheer desire to reach the green in two. Not because this is a 'go to' shot, but because they did it once or always wanted to do it. The only way to make it happen is to hit the 2 best shots of your life.

Naturally, the situation becomes one of stress and playing outside your abilities. The next thing you know, you've hit it into a trouble zone and it takes you a few extra shots just to get back on track.

A more experienced golfer would make a nice easy swing and keep themselves in play. They continue hitting shot after shot within their comfort zone and stay relaxed and ready for the next shot, then the next hole.

Playing within yourself requires trust, commitment and honesty about where your game is and where your capabilities lie at any given time.

Here are two mental exercises to help you learn to play within yourself.

Mental Exercise #1

Remember 'playing within yourself' has to do with knowing and playing your usual shots, not your best shots. Of course, you won't know this until you try this drill.

Mark off a practice area that represents an average fairway. With the average fairway being 40 yards wide, get a visual to work with.

- Hit 10 balls with your driver.
- Hit 10 balls with your fairway woods.
- Hit 10 balls with your hybrids.
- Record your results in a notebook.

Now, repeat with an area you mark as the green. The average green is about 20 yards at its widest.

- Hit 10 balls from 100 yards
- Hit 10 balls from 125 yards
- Hit 10 balls from 150 yards
- Record your results in a notebook.

Mental Exercise #2

Play a practice round of 18 holes. For the first 9 holes, only go for the back of the greens on every hole. For the second nine, only go for the front of the greens. This drill will begin to give you a better feel for where your strengths and competencies lie. It will also help you build more creativity in your shots and build confidence as you improve, yet continue to stay within yourself.

Dream Big. Execute Small.

It's important to have dreams when you play golf. In fact, your belief system becomes an integral part of your level of achievement and can either hold you back or propel you forward. You may dream of breaking 80 for the first time, out driving the buddies in your foursome on a consistent basis or, even, winning the club championship. Dreams can be as small or large as you choose based on your belief system.

In the first chapter we talked about the difference in 'process' and 'outcome' thinking. Your dream is the outcome you desire, but it is not how you get to it. It is the process that you follow that allows you to achieve great results. This process of thinking big, but executing small has been described by a popular methodology called 'One Shot at a Time'.

Executing Small

It is very difficult to communicate to a golfer the value and importance of changing their world view from outcome to process thinking because they have been conditioned by society to judge their success from their outcome results. As a result, it takes a leap of faith to trust that the secret is in improving the process while only briefly referring to the outcome in the recesses of your mind.

For golfers who want to eliminate fear, grief, frustration and anxiety on the course, they need to make a critical shift in their thinking which allows them to stay present in the moment and concentrate only on what is in front of them.

Playing in the present is exactly what it is -- the present. You are in the present when you are without any thoughts or concerns about the past or future. Nothing else exists except the present and the truth of your circumstances. Your past brought you into the present and how well

you do in the present will create your future. Any thoughts about the past or future take you out of the present and affect your ability to perform to your full potential in the moment, which is all you have.

Golfers with a strong mental game realize that the present is all that they can control. They have learned to play in the present without concern about the past or future outcomes. They realize the power of just being in the moment with the full intention and expectation to accomplish their desires without attachment to the results. When they are at their best, they play on instinct and trust their subconscious or "it" to make it happen for them.

Learning to play in the present on instinct requires time and effort. That is why experience is such a priceless commodity. Because when all else fails, the truth emerges from one's experiences if you are honest with



yourself. By training your mind to play in the present, you can shorten the time required to experience the power of being free to play on instinct and in the zone. Unfortunately, many golfers never learn to stop dwelling on their past and future outcomes.

So, how do successful players 'execute small' and keep their mind in the present?

One of the best ways to do this is to create a pre shot routine and post shot routine. This is something *every* player on the PGA tour has and almost *no* average players have. The most obvious reason is tour players have access to some of the best mental gurus in the game and, of course, there stakes

are much higher. However, the concept is very easily applied to any golfer's game with remarkable results.

The Pre Shot Routine

Not every pre shot routine is identical, but they all have similar commonalities in their goal to relieve stress and anxiety and create a singular focus on the present moment. The present moment always applies to the shot on hand, hence, the one shot at a time method.

A pre shot routine typically looks like this.

A golfer approaches his or her next shot from the standpoint of collectively relevant information of the factors that may affect the shot. These are things like:

- Yardage to the target (measuring to lay-up area/front edge of green/pin position, etc.)
- Wind (downwind/headwind/crosswind)
- Lie (ball on sitting down in rough/perched up on tuft of grass/sitting on short grass)
- Slope (ball above/below feet, upslope/downslope)
- Course conditions (wet/hard/soft)
- Elevation change in shot (uphill or downhill to target)

Then, the golfer sets up a quick plan of attack regarding the club they will use, the intended location of the shot and the type of shot they will play. Here's what it looks like in motion.

Plan Assessment and Decision→Shot Commitment→Shot Execution→Recover

You will notice this is all a very structured and practiced way to stay focused on the task at hand and eliminating needless distractions. If you were to ask an average golfer how their thoughts differed, you would find them placing too much emphasis on other things that have little to no relevance like

their score at that moment, what is happening with player group ahead of them and behind them, how the playing partners in their group are playing, and, even, who is or is not watching them play.

By staying with a pre shot routine, all of the distractions are eliminated and focus is given to only this moment in time. So, what does the pre shot routine of a pro look like in practice?

1. Take a full-tempo rehearsal swing standing next to the ball
2. Get four to five steps behind the ball and look down the line of the shot
 - Pick a very specific target to which you are hitting the ball
 - Visualize the shape of the shot flying through the air
 - Take a big, deep, cleansing breath
 - Pick an intermediate target (12-24 inches in front of the ball) to which you will square your clubface
3. Walk into the shot with your eyes fixed on the intermediate target until the clubface is square to the target and your body is appropriately set-up to the club
4. While wagging the club, stare at the target and glance at the ball
5. GO!

Another important note needs to be made at the point of 'recovery'. Once a golfer has assessed all of the relevant information and executed the shot with full intention and commitment, the outcome will immediately be evident. It was either as you intended or not. Pretty obvious, right?

But, this is one of the most differentiating points between amateurs and professionals. Most every single golfer will become frustrated and even

angry if the shot doesn't go off according to plan. But, how is this recovery moment handled?

For amateurs, it typically begins with self deprecating comments like 'that shot was horrible' and 'you always miss that shot to the left'. For professionals, they are trained to give themselves just a few seconds to feel the emotions of the poorly hit shot or even the excitement of a great shot, but then quickly move on.

If you watch professional golf on T.V., then you will notice that many players have a trademark reaction like Tiger Woods' fist pump. Through training, they have learned to express their emotions in any way they chose as long as it is only temporary so they can regroup and focus on the next shot. Because the next shot has nothing to do with the shot they just made, right? It may bring them closer to their goals for the round, but they remain in the process.

Their secret is to monitor their self talk and to limit their recovery-regardless of the outcome of the shot.

Mental Exercise #1

Develop your own pre shot routine similar to the example above. Make sure to use either a single deep breath or relaxation technique like squeezing the grip tight, then letting go to release tension. There is not a right way or wrong way to set up your routine as long as it has all of the elements of a plan>commit>execute>recover.

Next, practice your recovery shots on every hole. Whether you hit a poor shot or amazing shot, feel the emotions, but try counting to 5 slowly as you experience them. At the end of a slow and deliberate count to 5, practice letting go of the emotion completely, then place all of your attention on the next shot.

Mental Exercise #2

Another great exercise is to break down a 9 hole round into 3 mini rounds or an 18 hole course into 6 mini rounds. By breaking each set of 3 holes into smaller segments, it allows you to retrain your brain for smaller defeats and victories without focusing on the larger outcome of the 9 or 18 holes. When each 3 hole segment is complete, then you put it behind you and prepare for the next 3 hole stage. You can set individual goals for each 3 hole segment and keep focused on the process of achieving them, but only within the context of the 3 holes. It allows you to bring closure along with new beginnings with the start and end of each segment.

Summary

One thing the pros know is that really great golf is dependent on getting out of your own way and playing the game that is within you-*naturally*. You can practice hitting balls as often as you like and read every technical book you can get your hands on.

However, when the moment of truth arrives and you are standing on the tee with your foursome, in a tournament or all alone-that is the moment you put everything you know about golf aside and begin playing the shots based on what you are feeling, not thinking.

The only thing in front of you is the objective information you can see, feel, hear and touch as it relates to the conditions of the course, information about your lie, your yardage and knowing your own capabilities. The rest becomes intuitive.

Intuitive golf is free of thinking, free of judgments, and completely self aware of where you are in the process of play. In this moment of truth, you are not thinking of winners and losers, right and wrong; nor punishments and rewards. It is a state of enjoyment and relaxed concentration that allows the outcome of every stroke to be 'what it is'. Your enjoyment of the game does not depend on your performance and it does not define who you are.

When you are free to swing in this way, expect to play more confidently and with greater accuracy. It allows you to stay and play in the present moment and within your abilities. You are no longer seduced by the results, but rather consumed in the process which is only measured from one shot to the next.

When you embrace the concepts in this book, it will change the way you play golf – *forever*.