



Practicing your Mental Game

Train your mind to break 100, 90, 80, Par, 70...

By Val D'Souza, General Manager/Director of Golf

Over the years I have helped many students at a variety of skill levels break through a new scoring barrier in golf. Most of these students reside in the category of breaking through 90 or 80, however I have used the same strategies to help students break 100 or Par. The two major focuses to achieve these goals are directed towards the short game and the mental game. While each is equally important, there seems to be a greater emphasis in golf media on the short game. The mental side of achieving these goals is equally important and requires practice to break through a scoring barrier, and then consistently keep your scores there. In a later article I will address the short game and highlight a proven system that lowers scores on a consistent basis. Since there is little help for golfers on the mental approach to achieving their next scoring breakthrough, this article will focus on a method to practice and develop your mental skills in golf.

The question I get from most amateurs is: "Why do I keep blowing it when I am on track to easily break 100/90/80/etc?" I usually answer them with a question that starts them on the path to success: "Well, when was the last time you practiced breaking 100/90/80/etc?" Although a simple question, many golfers rarely have an answer other than "Never". The fact is, we are inundated with mechanical tips from golf media outlets focusing only in technique and very little about how to develop your internal mental/course management skills. Even some of the best books on the psychology of golf never really get to the nuts and bolts of how to practice the mental side of the game and develop that particular skill. Here are some methods and practice drills that I give my students to break through scoring barriers:

Tee it Forward: Too many times we let our egos get in the way of developing our mental game. At least one out of every three rounds, play from a forward tee. At a facility like Butterfield Trail, our five different sets of tees provide you multiple choices to accomplish this. If you normally play from the Silver Tees, move up to the Copper, and yes, EVEN THE BRONZE tees. Even if you are a 10 digit or less handicapper (trying to break 80, Par or 70) who normally plays the Gold or Iron tees, I want you to experience playing the course from shorter distances. This practice forces you to make decisions that are far different than the routine you fall into when playing the same holes at the same distances all the time. Additionally, this practice prepares you for what it "feels" like to be under par or under your next scoring barrier. Most of the time amateurs fail to break through scoring barriers is because they have never practiced getting mentally "uncomfortable" playing above their expectations. Getting under par, being in position to break a barrier with only a few holes to go or after a great start to a round puts most golfers in an uncomfortable state of mind. If they haven't practiced being in this position, it usually starts a chain of poor decisions which results in poor swings and a catastrophic end to a good round.



“Teeing it forward” will help you sharpen your mental skills as well as exposing you to the funniest experiences of golf. Some of these include: going for Par 5’s or 4’s, making more birdies/eagles and learning how to assess the rhythm of your swing on a given day then applying it to aggressive and conservative course management decisions.

If you really want to put some pressure on yourself and achieve your goals fastest, challenge yourself to start at the most forward tee on your regular course and play there until you break your next barrier. Once you do, move back to the next set of tees until you break the same scoring barrier and so on until you reach the normal set of tees you play. After finally breaking your scoring barrier from your normal tees you can return to the forward tees with a new scoring goal and repeat the same process until you reach your normal tees again, and so on. As I have seen in many students, I am confident you will not only improve your scores, but increase your enjoyment of the game! Quite simply, if you aren’t experiencing the thrill of making pars, birdies and eagles then you are missing out on a great part of the game and probably playing from the wrong tees.

Two Ball Scrambles: Whether you like to play alone or not, this is a great way to enjoy the game. If you can’t find someone to play with, or only have time for nine holes after work, playing a Two Ball Scramble in two different ways can really help you score better. For all of you I strongly recommend this drill as a way to unlock and realize your true golfing potential. So many times the second time you try a shot, with nothing to lose, you pull it off flawlessly. Play an entire round this way and teach yourself to make the right decision the first time while building the confidence needed to execute shots right the first time. By the end of a round you will experienced a “vision” of your golfing potential while developing your golf IQ.

For better players, switch the philosophy of this drill to the opposite. Play a Two Ball Scramble selecting your WORST shot as the one you score. This is a great way to really develop decision making, confidence and a consistent routine that prepares you to execute on the course. It also represents a great method to introduce pressure into your game and practice handling it better. If you can shoot within 10 shots (or 5 shots for 9 holes) of your handicap/average score then you are doing very well with this drill. Please also consider that these scramble drills take more time to play so I recommend doing this at off peak times for the golf course and check with the staff to ensure there are no restrictions from using them.

The reality is, there exists an infinite number of strategies to navigate a golf course for everyone. The goal of these drills is to teach you how to learn those strategies right for you and your game. Additionally these drills will also teach you how and when to implement varying approaches to achieve consistently lower scores regardless of ball striking. As we continue to develop clinics and programs dedicated to helping you play better and enjoy your game more, watch for specific programs in the future from Butterfield Trail Golf Club. Until then, please contact our Golf Shop to if we can help you with any part of your game.