



If You Want to Go Low, Learn to Work Your Mental Muscle

By Todd M. Kays, Ph.D.

Sport Psychologist

Many times very good golfers (<5 handicappers) are surprised and/or frustrated when they do not shoot to their potential in tournaments. This happens quite frequently among golfers at all ability levels. When the Nationwide Tour was in my local city recently, it happened for numerous golfers in this tournament as well. It is great to have the players here as most of the time we communicate through email and phone because of their rigorous travel schedule, but I often wonder how many of them are truly working their “mental muscle” during and in between tournaments. When a golfer achieves a single digit handicap and/or plays competitively at a high level, the game becomes more and more mental. When these players can hit the ball *how* and *where* they want, the only thing left is hitting the ball *when it counts*. This is where the mental muscle comes into play. This is where many excellent players fall short.

The mind is a muscle just like any other one in the body. Compare your “mental muscle” to the biceps in your arms. If you want to increase the strength and power of your biceps, you have to exercise them with curls on a consistent basis. When people do not work their biceps, these muscles do not become stronger. If people work their biceps three times a week with multiple sets, repetitions and actually “feels the burn”, however, their biceps become more powerful. In the same way, golfers must realize that their mind is a muscle and must be worked and challenged for growth to take place. “Flexing the mental muscle” only once a month with limited amounts of energy and time is simply not enough, especially when possessing a single-handicap. Answer the following questions and be completely honest with yourself:

- Are you working your “mental muscle” at all?
- Do you know how to “maximize” its strength?
- Have you done anything since your last tournament to improve its strength?

If you answered no to any of these questions, you are not working the mental muscle effectively and must begin to do so if you want to reach your potential. .

Golfers need to learn to work the mental muscle and feel the “burn” when they are out on the course. They need to be working the mind muscle through mental training strategies, reading, visualization, and/or working with a sport psychologist as a way to prepare their

mind before walking onto the course. In addition, when out on the course, they need to “feel the burn” after making a mistake (when the mind wants to give up and continue thinking about the “bad” shot) and say, “Next shot” and let go of the past. It is a very simple, but not necessarily easy process. Golfers, especially the single-handicappers, must work the mental muscle. There is simply no other way. If they do not know how, they need to learn. No more excuses. You must “feel the burn”

Play Hard, Play Smart and Play Well!