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PULL-OUT GOLF COURSE GUIDE

Preparing for Your Club's Championship

By Louis S Csoka, Ph.D. - Apex Performance, Inc



Louis S. Csoka, Ph.D.

So you're finally ready to take on all comers at your annual Club Golf Championship. How ready are you

though? Perhaps physically, yes. But playing in the Club Championship is not like your Saturday foursome. You will not be relaxed or calm. You will be easily distracted – unless, you prepare to play the mental game. Why? Because the stakes are higher. It may not be the PGA Championship, but for you, it might as well be.

This is the moment when you want to bring to bear everything you know and have practiced, physically and mentally. This is the moment, unlike all other golf moments, when your mind will ultimately make the difference in how well you do. So let's take a look at some of the things you need to know and do to bring your mental game to the Club Championship.

What's Your Target?

Of all the performance enhancement techniques and mental skills that elite performers learn and use, the one that has the strongest empirical support for directly impacting how you perform is **goal setting** - having a very clear picture of what you want to accomplish and how you're going to get there. Not *kinda*, but exactly?! Have you set yourself a realistic, yet challenging goal worthy of your very best effort?

The brain has a funny way of

not working for you when your goal or target is unclear. There is an area of the brain known as the pre-frontal cortex responsible for making decisions, judgments, evaluations, as well as analyzing and planning, and it needs a very clear and precise goal to operate at its very best. Without such precision, it becomes "lazy", inefficient, and certainly not your "friend". Think about it. It is the part of your brain that handles your basic *course management*.

At this point you are probably asking, "So, how do I prepare myself?" As a start, you need to be thinking about this well ahead of the week of the tournament. Before you take that first practice swing in getting ready, establish your overall goal, the outcome you desire, in very clear terms. Is it to **win** the Club Championship?

If so, then make sure you can **envision** yourself in that position, in whatever way is comfortable for you.

Next, list in very precise terms those **performance goals** and the enabling **process goals** that are essential for reaching your desired outcome goal. This will take some work, but it will be well worth your time and effort, since these are the steps you need to climb to achieve your desired end state.

This takes care of where you want to go and how to get there overall. But you are not finished with setting targets. Now it's time to think about specific targets during your play. When you are on the tee and you are preparing to hit the drive, what is your target? Is it "out there", or is it a very specific spot on the fairway?

When putting, is it the cup or a spot on the cup? Is it a specific point on the green? The more precise the target, the more effectively your brain will work for you. I cannot



For any pre-shot routine to work for you, practice it regularly on the driving range, on the practice green, or in any practice round.

emphasize this enough. Select a very precise and narrow target and then just let go and swing. Trust your brain to do the rest, let yourself go and hit the ball the way you have been practicing for so many weeks.

How Do You Prepare?

How do you prepare for each shot? A couple of practice swings? Address the ball? Look down range and fire? Not good enough! Every

great athlete has a pre-performance routine, or in the case of golf, a pre-shot routine. You need one as well. It prepares you mentally, emotionally, and physically for what you are about to do. Without that preparation, you will not have the consistency essential for an 18-hole round of golf. A pre-shot routine helps you:

- **Establish calm and coherence**
- **Achieve emotional balance and control**
- **Halt over-thinking**
- **Maintain composure after every shot**

In effect, a solid pre-shot routine raises your awareness and builds a foundation of cues and “rituals” which become automatic through repetitive and deliberate practice. It helps systematize factors such as the amount of time over the ball in seconds, number of waggles,

number of looks back-and-forth between ball and target, total time in your set-up phase. I offer you a pre-shot routine I have developed for the golfers with whom I work. This routine combines both mental and physical elements for maximum preparation before a shot.

- **Synchronize your breathing and heart rate** (*steadies you*)
- **Select your target** (*give that pre-frontal cortex something to shoot at*)
- **See the desired shot & then visualize the ball path** (*see it in your head; don't think*)
- **Swing through and get the feel** (*fires up your muscle memory*)
- **Spot your target and lock in** (*a last look at where you're going to hit*)
- **Set your stance over the ball** (*get that good body position*)

- **Visualize the desired shot** (*the brain doesn't differentiate between real and imagined*)
- **Shoot** (*let go and let 'er rip*)

In order for any pre-shot routine to really work for you, you have to practice it very regularly on the driving range, on the practice green, in any practice round. Whatever it is we want the brain to do must be repeated often enough to become automatic. And you definitely want your routine to be automatic. You do not want to have to think about it each time you prepare to swing.

As complex and marvelous as the brain is, it still learns in the simplest way – repetition! You must execute your pre-shot routine before each and every shot, no matter what just happened on the shot before or on the previous holes. That's why we call it a *routine*. Good luck in the Club Championship!

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