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PULL-OUT GOLF COURSE GUIDE

Are You a Clutch Golfer?

by Louis S Csoka, Apex Performance



Louis S. Csoka, Ph.D.

It's the Army-Navy game, 1992. Fourth-quarter with two minutes and 30 seconds remaining. Imagine yourself as Army's field goal kicker. Army has just delivered a remarkable fourth quarter comeback to within two points from a 14-

point deficit. The crowd is absolutely wild! Army has the ball and is driving down the field but gets stalled on the 27-yard line with 40 seconds remaining. It is fourth down. A field goal is the only chance for winning the game. It is up to you.

You have kicked a 44-yarder only once before during the season. The ball is snapped. It is in the air and it is good! The stadium erupts in wild celebration. Your teammates rush onto the field. You have beaten Navy in the most important

moment of your life as a West Point athlete.

But wait! There is a flag. Delay of game by Army and a five yard penalty. Kick it again. But now it is a 49-yard kick. You have never even attempted that distance before, let alone make it. The ball is snapped. It is in the air and travels dead center through the uprights, with yards to spare. Army wins 25-24! You have delivered an extraordinary performance.

--Patmon Malcolm – Kicked winning 49-yard field goal against Navy in 1992

"My first introduction to "performance enhancement" was at West Point in the early 90s as part of the Army Football Team. Since then my preparation for any type of competition or stressful event has never been the same. As a placekicker, dealing with stress is part of the job and how you prepare for that stress can be the difference between success or failure. Colonel Csoka and his team taught me how to recognize and better control normal human reactions to stress such as increased body temperature, perspiration, and heart-rate. The ability to visualize an event and then become more comfortable with the situation through mental rehearsal has helped me as an athlete, an officer, a Blackhawk Pilot and business professional."

Photo Courtesy - US Army Sports Information



What makes clutch performers like this cadet? It's not what most people think. The general understanding of clutch performance is being able to do extraordinary things in a critical situation. That is not the real description though. Clutch performers actually do what they normally do except they also do it in critical situations. Nothing extraordinary in terms of what they do but extraordinary in the outcome. This means they can be counted on consistently. It's not a one-time shot.

Golf can very quickly become a game in need of a series of clutch performances. We have all been there. The make-or-break moment that can determine any final outcome, like the decisive putt, the 3-par tee shot that has to get within three feet of the cup, the bunker shot that must land on the green. But it all goes wrong. The putt almost sinks in but circles the cup then in and out. The tee shot that goes awry. The bunker

shot that's too deep and stays in the bunker. You failed in the clutch.

So what is going on? Overthinking and overconfidence are typical of chokers. They analyze too long and place too much meaning into a situation thus making it more complex. Laying blame elsewhere instead of taking responsibility for the outcome is also common among chokers.

Interestingly enough, those most suited to solve a problem are likely to fail under the pressure of making a quick decision or relying on their instincts. The attempt to find a solution, i.e., thinking, quickly becomes worrying which consumes the mind in irrelevant activity, leaving it little resources to make that automatic shot that you have been perfecting for so long.

Sian Beilock in her book, *Choke*, writes "the later golfers learn the sport, the more vulnerable they are to choking under pressure. The reason has to do with the fact that

"the later you learn the more dependent you are on your working memory. The younger you learn, the more you develop your skills using sensory and motor-brain areas." So for you older players or should I say experienced, go back to your instincts and stop with the thinking. Chokers also spend far too much time on the effects of a critical moment instead of focusing on what is needed now.

Clutch performers have great confidence in their abilities and remain calm and composed. They are more likely to respond intuitively with little to no thinking. What looks like extraordinary effort and action to an outsider, is really what clutch performers do on a regular basis but are able to bring it to the "big game". I strongly recommend the two books below for anyone interested in learning more about clutch performances.

References:

Choke, Sian Beilock, Free Press, 2010
Clutch, Paul Sullivan, Portfolio, 2011



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