



#### ABOUT JONATHAN WALLETT

Jonathan Wallett is an Elite Performance Coach with Academies at the Evian Masters Resort, France and Lakelands Golf Club, Australia. His Tour clients include players such as two-time European Ryder Cup player David Howell and, since recently, young Singaporean professional Lam Zhiqun. For further information on Academy programmes please visit [www.elitecoaching.com](http://www.elitecoaching.com)

As golfers we are all looking for tips and concepts to improve our game. It's widely accepted that the more belief and confidence you have in your game, the better you'll play. Conversely, the less belief and confidence, the worse you'll play.

So what strategies can you employ to improve your confidence that will then, in turn, lower your scores and reduce your handicap? In the first article in an exclusive three-part *Asian Golf Monthly* series, Elite Performance Coach **Jonathan Wallett** discusses how you can improve this skill which is at the epicentre of how all golfers perform.

**Watching Rory McIlroy** flush driver after driver down the Kiawah Island fairways as the cornerstone to his eight-shot victory at August's US PGA Championship was a great demonstration of a fully confident player in action.

Yet just a month or two previous, McIlroy had been missing cuts. 'What's wrong' with McIlroy's game was the hot topic of conversation at tournament media centres around the world.

So, what happened that brought such a dramatic turnaround? Within a month, did McIlroy's swing or putting stroke completely change? Certainly not. But what did change was the Northern Irishman's belief and confidence in them.

It begs the question as to how important is it to have your putter and driving club in your bag during a tournament round? Most players would say it's pretty critical that these two clubs are in your bag. Not having them there would seriously affect their ability to play their best.

Well it's very difficult to play good golf if you don't have two 'mental clubs' in your bag – *belief* and *confidence*. In fact it's just the same as if you do not have your putter or driving club.

Of course, we all know we should 'believe in ourselves'. It's a phrase that has been quoted to each and every one of us on many, many occasions. But saying it and doing it are two different things.

But how can we believe in ourselves or our golf swing when it produces shots that go in the water? Surely you must first perfect your swing before you can trust and believe in it? And how can we believe in our putting when we miss putt after putt?

Many players leave their self belief and confidence purely to chance, and they let it ebb and flow in reac-



Rory McIlroy prepares to unleash another pinpoint drive at the PGA Championship. Picture by Getty Images.

# Building Belief and Confidence

Unlike adults, children do not undermine their ability to learn. Picture by Getty Images.



tion to their performances. However, elite performers take responsibility for their belief and confidence, and are *proactive* in preparing it before they perform.

They know it's a deal-breaker in the pursuit of success. How have you actively managed the development of your own self-belief and confidence in your game? Can it be learned, or is it a God-given talent?

Just like a player can grow and develop their golf swing, so can they learn to improve and build their confidence and belief.

Confidence is a skill, and like all skills can be learned and developed. Actually, we all possess an inherent ability to build confidence, but as adults we then learn the ability to undermine it.

As a child, did you ever doubt your ability to be able to speak a language successfully, without grammatical errors or pronunciation mistakes? But then as adults, learning another language fluently without grammatical or pronunciation mistakes is akin to climbing Everest!

It's the same with putting. Do you see many junior players with the yips? Almost never. Juniors constantly refine and develop their ability to putt. But then as adults they learn to internalise their failures and suddenly something that seemed so simple starts to be so difficult. **Lee Westwood** was once quoted as saying: "I'm just trying to learn to putt again like when I was 16 years old."

Often, players with low self-belief envy counterparts who appear to be totally self-confident. They feel as though for them it is always going to be a struggle and have the mistaken, limiting belief that successful players possess an inherent ability to believe in themselves.

I am very fortunate in that I have had the privilege to work with many elite players of many different nationalities over the last decade. These players range from elite juniors through to successful Tour players with wins on the main men's and ladies professional circuits, as well as Ryder Cup performers.

# Holistic Approach

## There are many young players

around the world with ambitions of becoming the next **Rory McIlroy** or **Tseng Ya-ni**. This dream fuels and motivates them to spend countless hours on the driving range in pursuit of this goal.

So, will the player who spends more time than their fellow competitors on the range become the best? How can a player make the transition from being a talented junior player to a Tour professional?

When it comes to practice, quality time focusing on important areas is the key to success. So says **Jonathan Wallett**, Director of Elite Coaching Golf Academy, which is recruiting for its 2012-2013 Elite Programme at the **Jack Nicklaus**-designed Lakelands Golf Club on Australia's Gold Coast.

Wallett, an Elite Performance Coach, said the academy's aim is to provide an opportunity whereby aspiring golfers can fulfil their talent. In its ninth year, the programme, which runs from the end of November through to the end of March, is based on holistic training, encompassing technical, mental, management and physiological areas.

Wallett said: "A common problem I see in my work with elite players is that they are under the misconception that in order to get better they need to practice 10 hours a day, hitting ball after ball. But that's not a success formula. In order to get better they need to work on developing their skills in each area of the game – technical, mental, management and physiological."

The academy's programmes are devised

for good junior players, elite amateurs and young professionals who are assisted in developing their skills and reaching their targets with the academy's use of experts.

Wallett emphasises the importance of a sound mental approach. He said: "Many players don't have a success mentality. They find it difficult to believe in themselves to be really successful. And if this is the case it doesn't matter how perfect you make your swing or putting stroke. You'll find it difficult to progress your golfing career.

"We look to create a mental foundation, architecture for success within our student's minds, on which we can then attach the different technical, thinking and management skills.

"When this foundation is established, then skill development becomes much easier. Our belief is that it's not about the technical game or the mental game, but it's about a fusion of the technical, mental and management game.

"Often in my work with Tour players, development Tour players and elite amateurs I see that they become lost in the detail by

But one conundrum that constantly puzzled me in my earlier days was what separated the elite junior player that struggled to the player that would sometimes clean sweep all the titles. What differentiated the struggling satellite Tour player to the established successful Tour player?

I quickly learned that the ability to hit the ball, and the quality of the swing was a random factor in this equation. I had seen some great swings and great strikers on satellite Tours who would win a driving range contest every time over some Tour players. But also I had seen some great short games on the lower Tours and some mediocre ones at the higher level. So what is the golfing Holy Grail that separates the winners from the losers?

The 'strugglers', albeit on the junior Tour, satellite pro Tour or the main Tour, often convinced themselves that the champions in their field possessed a supernatural belief that they were born with ... and this is what made the difference.

But when I started working with these so-called champions, I soon realised that often they had the same doubts, insecurities and anxieties that the other players had. But the critical difference is that they had learnt strategies, often sub-consciously, to manage and overcome these challenges which then allowed them to perform at this higher level.

**Oliver Wilson**, a 2008 Ryder Cup

player, recited once in an interview: "I just never believed I was good enough. After several years of college golf I'd decided that I was just not good enough and mentally I had decided to jack it in and look for an alternative career.

"But something strange happened – the more I let go, the better I started to play, and then ultimately after college I decided to turn pro. Even then, all I was hoping for was some sort of Tour at any level that I would be able to compete on. But one thing led to another and the small successes build momentum and with it confidence."

Confidence and belief is not a God-given talent. It is something that can be learned, developed and acquired.

**\*In the second article in this three-part Asian Golf Monthly series, Jonathan Wallett will reveal the five Golden Rules to build your confidence and belief in your golf game.**

## KEY POINTS

- (1) Confidence is a skill, and like all skills can be improved and developed;
- (2) Elite performers take responsibility for their belief and confidence, and are *proactive* not *reactive* in developing it;
- (3) Strive to improve your self-belief and confidence, just like you would strive to improve your swing or putting stroke.

## CONFIDENCE TIP TO TAKE TO THE COURSE

Make a list of your best-ever shots from (a) Drive; (b) Iron shot; (c) Chip shot; (d) Sand shot; (e) Putt. Then write down your recollections of each of those five shots. For instance, for '(a) Drive' you may write: '12th hole at Laguna in club tournament. Hit it perfectly down the middle – swing felt smooth and easy'. Jot all five descriptions onto a small card and the next time you play, quickly read the card before each corresponding shot. Give it a try!

over focusing or becoming obsessed in one area, which then derails progress in their scores and results."

The bio-mechanics training is directed by **Ryan Lumsden**, who works with the students periodically both in Australia and Evian. Lumsden, who is engaged by players such as **Henrik Stenson** and **Michael Sim**, works closely with Wallett and physiotherapist **Josh Meyer** to create an integrated solution that encompasses both technical and physical elements of the game.

Wallett currently coaches a number of players on the European Tour, including two-time Ryder Cup player **David Howell** with whom he started working following last year's Barclays Singapore Open where the Englishman missed the cut for the 12th time in four months.

In 2012, he's enjoyed his best season for four years, narrowly missing out on winning June's French Open. Howell says: "I can strongly recommend Jon as a coach who can help you reach your true potential."

