

Trusting and Training

Without absolute trust in your swing, it's impossible to achieve the 'peak performance zone' that all top golfers aspire to. So says Jonathan Wallett, director of the Elite Coaching Golf Academy.

IF YOU ASPIRE to have a great tournament career you need to make a distinct definition between when you are 'training' and when you are 'competing'. So, what do we exactly mean by training and trusting mind-sets?

Trusting Mind-set

'You have to first give up control to gain control' -Dr Bob Rotella

'Trust your swing' is often a phrase one hears. But what exactly does it mean? What does it entail?

The definition I adopt is: *Letting go of conscious controlling tendencies and playing from motor memory (the sub-conscious mind), instead of conscious directives from the mind.*

Trust is the feeling of an effortless and unconscious performance. It's the feeling we get when we are playing 'in the zone'. In fact, it's actually the key to the door of getting in the zone. Without trust, it's impossible to achieve the peak performance zone.

We must all realise how incredible we are as human beings. The biomechanical movements of walking, or throwing and catching a ball, or learning how to speak and picking up a complete language when we are young, are incredibly complex things.

But we do it, because the sub-conscious mind of any person is thousands



Next time you head for the practice range, divide your balls into three groups. Hit one-third concentrating on technique, one-third focusing on rhythm or motion and the final third simulating competitive conditions. Pictures by Getty Images.

of times more powerful than any computer that has been designed to date. Doesn't it feel good to know that you are in possession of something that strong!

Every tournament round you should aspire to compete with a 'trusting' mentality – for example, that you are in a state of concentration whereby you trust the swing that you have got on that par-

ticular day, not trying to change or correct it whilst you play.

Deciding to 'trust' your swing is an incredibly powerful thing to do. For a lot of people it's very scary. But if you want to play your best golf that is what you have to learn to do.

"So, what happens if I hit a bad shot in a tournament? Shouldn't I try to work out

what went wrong and then try to correct it?"

Absolutely not! The training ground is the place to work on your swing, not the golf course. If you hit a poor shot, the best reaction is to accept that it's a poor shot and put the club straight back in the bag, realising that even **Tiger Woods** hits poor shots sometimes ... even during his best rounds.

In his excellent book *The Inner Game of Golf*, Timothy Gallwey says that there are three mental causes of bad shots:

1. Self Criticism
2. Self Analysis
3. Self Judgement

By trying to correct your swing after the shot, you are making not one, but all three of these mental errors.

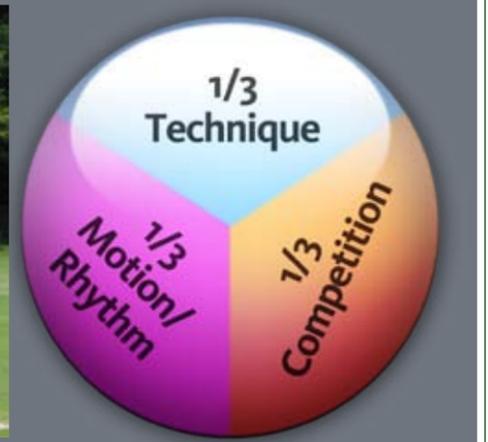
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"So, what happens if I hook my first three drives to the left?"

Well, you should then think about taking a three-wood on hole number four. Alternatively, aim a little further right and accept that on this given day you are playing with a little more right-to-left flight than normal. That is the essence of functional golf, accepting your game as it is that day, and using a mind-set that enables you to play golf and get the ball into the hole in as few strokes as possible.

Training Mind-set

If you haven't practiced trust on the range, you'll find it practically impossible to trust your swing when you get to the first tee of a tournament with out of bounds on the left and water on the right ... and lots of spectators watching you.



Every player needs to develop trust in practise and take it with them to the tournament. So, how do you balance developing your technique with developing trust?

One notable Major championship winner from the past decade once said that when he practices he divides his balls into three groups. He hits one-third of the balls concentrating on his technique; one-third concentrating on rhythm or motion and one-third simulating competitive conditions with a 'trusting mentality' – as if he was playing in a tournament.

This is a fantastic rule because it means that his practise is always in balance, albeit

if he's practising his swing, short game or putting stroke.

For example, on a 60-minute range session, this player would spend 20 minutes working on his technique, 20 minutes hitting balls focused on developing good motion and then 20 minutes simulating competition utilising both his pre-shot routine and post-shot routine.

If he is spending 60 minutes on the putting green, he'd devote 20 minutes to working on his technique, perhaps using a training aid for his stroke path, and then 20 minutes focused on developing consistent rhythm. In the final 20 minutes he'd try to hole 20 putts in a row from two metres.

A common mistake many players make (especially Satellite Tour players, in my experience), is that they over-emphasise the technical side of their practise, and lose this balance. The one-third rule keeps your practise in balance.

▶ TO DO:

Next time you practice, divide your balls into three piles. With one pile, focus on improving your technique. With the next pile hit balls not thinking about your technique, but instead focus on your rhythm – listening to the heart beat of your swing.

In the last pile, imagine you are playing in a tournament and use your pre-shot routine, frequently changing targets and changing clubs.

▶ KEY POINTS

- ▶ Have a different mind-set when training and playing in tournaments
- ▶ Train on the range, trust on the course.

Everyone has a unique look, but there are common denominators – ie. two eyes, one nose, one mouth. It's the same with the golf swing.

And regarding devoting one-third of your practise time to motion or rhythm, every top player and coach will testify

that great motion is a critical skill in all aspects of the game: in putting, pitching or driving.

Top coach **Mitchell Spearman** states: "The swing is a symphony. Mechanics and technique are vital, but they should, and must, play second fiddle to the dynamism and flow of the swing itself." Imagine building a powerful engine but then using no engine oil. The engine would be unable to function.

How this can help the club player

Most club players never trust their swing. They take the view that they will trust it only when it's 'perfect'. Well, this day will never come! The more you can accept and trust your swing, the better golfer you will become. So look to develop your trust in practise. It will be difficult at first but with some practice you will start to be able to play free of conscious control.

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We have a saying at our Academy: 'If you don't learn to trust your training, your training is for nothing'. What we mean is that if you do not take your new technical move through to the trusting stage it will never become automatic and hence will never help you in competition.

Another common mistake is that players disregard totally the technical side of the game, saying that they want to 'find their own swing or develop their own technique'.

This is equally destructive. One of the reasons for the higher level of play on all Tours over the last 30 years is that through research, technology and coaching, teaching of the game has evolved so that the critical success factors, the common denominators that are present in all great players are more understood.

Denis Pugh, one of the best coaches in the world of the modern era, uses the term 'swing identity'. Every player has his or her own signature moves, but there are some critical factors in building a solid and repeating swing, and these factors are what aspiring Tour players should ignore at their peril.

To use the analogy of someone's face:



Denis Pugh (left) helps Italian Francesco Molinari discover his 'swing identity'. Picture by Getty Images.

Jonathan Wallett is a certified and qualified Sport Psychology expert and a member of the British and Swiss PGA. He is the Director of the Elite Coaching Golf Academy, based at Evian Masters Training Centre, France and Royal Pines Resort, Australia. Jon has been the author of teaching articles, DVDs, elite performance workbooks and mental training CDs. For further details about the Elite Coaching Golf Academy, visit www.elitecoaching.com



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