

We have taken the liberty to add friends with whom we wanted to share our newsletter. As with all transmissions these days, this one doesn't have to be in your inbox. If you prefer not to have it sent every two months, just let us know.

Also, we have elected to provide a URL from which our readers may download the current issue so as to deter anything resembling "spam." Thanks, CGM

One Under Par

Volume 10, number 2.

A Newsletter from **KEYGOLF**.....April, 2009

We offer our apologies for the tardiness of this issue. It was forced by a strange, limited crash that removed all of our email address book and programmed list of newsletter subscribers. It has taken this long to restore that as best we could. Hopefully we will not miss too many or include some who did not wish to be on the list. If the latter occurs, please let us know. Thanks for your patience.

How's Your Personal GPS Working?

Those who post on golf forums may have trouble identifying what needs explanation and what does not, but they certainly have no problem making room for a constant flow of comments and questions that reveal similar stumbling points in players' games. After multiple phrases like "I am hooking the ball. Can you tell me what to do about it?" or "I've tried everything and still can't get more distance. Please help," or "What do you think about my swing?" (accompanied by a YouTube flick), and a legion more such postings. Occasionally, one will look like the following:

"I don't think I'm unique in having difficulty applying a practice swing to the ball. I really love the pass I'm making....but when I step up to the ball....I take it back to far....(I believe, I'm lifting my arms at the end). I know I don't need more distance....I know the trouble it is causing....but I can't seem to stop it.....It's becoming a source of heavy frustration. :bigcry: I've tried the "stop the arms when the shoulders stop"...my brain just will not let it happen. Right now, I'm basically trying to keep "very connected" with my right arm to my side. Again this works great in rehearsal.....limited success when it counts.....Has anyone gone through this? Any remedies?"

Such messages make it hard to determine whether these are mechanical, emotional, mental or simply head-scratchers. There is a vast amount of the chicken-egg puzzlement involved. Where to start?

Most comments seem locked into an unspoken assumption and carry an initial sound of something mechanical. The responses to them, therefore, follow suit, and are usually in terms of "fixing" something in the swing or picking on some mechanical fundamentals typically listed for the game. There are times when the issue presented is all manual (or mechanical), there are times when it is all mental, and there are times when it is a mixed bag, with an undetermined beginning - either manual or mental. Unfortunately, more often than not, what we notice is that these concerns are conceived and born in the mind and displaced onto some mechanical issue only because that is more concretely visible and therefore more available for "fixing." Thus players go on, indefinitely, because their "personal GPS" systems are given incorrect setting information. A lot of folks have gotten lost from missing or inaccurate information, faulty perception, or simply a lack of the kind of evaluation skills that makes problem identification possible. It all boils down to acquiring enough knowledge (a mental function) of pertinent quality

to be able to identify what really needs attention and solution whether the problem at hand is mental or mechanical. That approach begins definitively in the "mental" domain since it involves up front thinking.

But that, of itself, is only part of the problem. "Enough" knowledge must be accompanied by "the right kind" - effective, sufficient, validated, researched and applicable. And that kind of information/knowledge is often hidden around and under golf's glossalalia. What *is* available, however, often comes close to reasonable accuracy, without quite getting there, as my Granddad used to say - "If it had been a snake, it would have bitten you." There are many who stumble onto a truth that makes solid impact for a moment, but is soon lost and/or abandoned without the benefit of "the rest of the story."

It's not only in forums, however. If you saw episode 20 of the TV show "The Mentalist," you were exposed to a classic. Patrick Jane (the Mentalist) gains the confidence of mafia boss Santino Battaglia by helping him with his golf game. How? In short he gave him a clear key which instantly brought outstanding results to Santino's game. (Ignore what the rest of the show was about, though). Jane had Battaglia singing "Santa Lucia" while he swung his club, instead of thinking mental swing thoughts -- he was immediately successful, and happy -- it would have needed much work, but the basic idea was there. Jane put him on automatic.

It does happen often that the truth gets told, just not all of it, because the rest of it just isn't available. The following post on a golf forum struck us with that same kind of force - a truth recognized and told, but coming just short of turning it into a habit. (And do not conclude that it is a sign of any personal lack whatsoever. It's the sign of an historic and continuing failure in our general education system). With the permission of Noel T., the author, it is printed here, since it is an important piece of work. Everything he says is true, not only for him, but all golfers at some point or another. We saw this as an opportunity to show that many, if not most, are genuinely seeking ways through the maze and regularly only finding one more barrier where the "runway" should be.

Our thanks to Noel, who says:

"When I go to Florida to visit (used to live there) I play golf with my best buddy and the head pro at a really great Fred Couples designed course.

The pro is a good player and has been in the game for years.

He had seen me come down there only to fall apart and get upset time after time. My friends had told him that I was a good player back in the day, but he saw a not so good player.

We had our usual heated matches and I was playing golf for the first time in years (meaning not taking a bunch of time before each shot to get the right thoughts, etc...)

After remaining even for many holes, and looking at peace, he looked at me and said, "you learned the secret- that your swing doesn't matter".

That may sound crazy to many of you, but there is a lot of wisdom in that. I was getting the ball in the hole, even when the pressure of the situation was getting to me a little, and I didn't have my "A" swing, like I do often at home.

I had spent so much time obsessing about finding the right swing, that I forgot how to play golf.

The irony is that when you stop worrying so much about hitting great, solid shots, you often are free to play your best golf.

It used to really get me down that I would bring my "C" swing down there after making so much progress up here at home. I felt like my partners thought I was lying about my scores at home, etc...

Some of the old Scottish wisdom from Stewart Maiden came to mind when the pro said this to me.

"Hit the hell out of it"

"Don't worry laddie, the ball will come down somewhere".

I don't stress out about hitting a tennis ball when I play. Within minutes, I am in game mode.

That's where taking dead aim comes into play in golf. You really should abandon swing thoughts and play golf.

Now, I know sometimes we need a thought to cue our swing into action. And I certainly enjoy working on my swing, but I put in SO much time and effort and wasn't reaping the benefits when I played. This leads me to think my expectations and approach were not as good as they could be.

When your pro, who you play golf with tells you, you have nothing wrong with your swing, you should listen. They are not saying "you swing perfectly", or "there is nothing you could improve" they are saying "you can play really good golf with that swing. and have fun".

Playing competitively growing up I used to think you should never miss a shot when it counts.

Well, the pros do!

What is a swing anyway? It really doesn't weigh nearly as much as the short game. If you can reasonably hit the ball somewhere in play, and you can chip and putt, you can play some golf.

Certainly, working on your fundamentals is worthwhile. I am saying though that your swing is really just the runway for you to get to the green, it's not the end all be all of your golf game. It's just the runway to your scoring game."

Joining Noel are other notable examples.

The very same issue came out of the mouths of the commentators (not sure which ones) at the recent Player's Championship, as two of them discussed Pádraig Harrington's recently being "off his game," because, as they said, he had become too concerned about his "mechanics," and consequently sidetracked "playing the game and scoring." Plenty of problem recognition, but no solution.

And it's not too much of a backtrack to note what happened in the last three or four holes of the Master's either. That situation certainly raises the epic question, "What were those tournament leaders thinking." How can players of that caliber, having conducted themselves almost flawlessly

for 69 or 70 holes, suddenly be unable to make a decent shot? The commentators recognized the problem, but had no solution to offer. Maybe they should watch "The Mentalist," or listen to Noel.

It's Noel's last paragraph that players need to ponder. But we need to do that in the light of his words coupled with Patrick Jane's advice to the Mafioso. The runway is inherently present, but since we don't quite understand what to do there, we encounter potholes, so we need to know how to negotiate what the runway has to offer. Jane indicates the *how*, informed or not, but that's nonetheless what clears the path as we have presented it for 30 years. You get to the finish line with the 32 ball drill to address the development of your mechanical and mental game tasks simultaneously, and you negotiate the runway with your clear key, which keeps you in "the swing doesn't matter" mode. Then wrap all that in new or revised, now accurate, input (your mental self-image, or the way you think about yourself and your game) that you can program into your GPS. That's how we reach the point at which "the swing does not matter." Why can we do that? Because we can lock it into our habit repository, which does not require "thinking while the action is being exercised." And there is a bonus benefit. When Santino was singing, he was, even without knowing it, also preventing any pressure (anxiety) from firing up tension levels that prevent smooth, harmonious, synchronic motion needed in golf. That's the rest of the story that either continues to be mysteriously unknown or rarely accepted and will remain so till the validating research is found, made visible and accepted.

There's a postscript that is much too extensive for this account. It centers in the influences that affect us without our permission over a lifetime. There is no doubt that expectations, wants, wishes, and desires comprise the prelude to performance anxiety that accompanies the pressure of uncertainty about how well prepared we are. Thus a whole other dimension about which we are less well informed, threatens to slam shut the door on whatever runway we approach. So how can we assure ourselves that we are finally looking at a genuinely open "runway to our scoring game?"

We do that by orderly, active preparation, beginning with knowledge, amplified by research (some that has recently surfaced, some as old as five years and some current), concerning brain function, along with programs and procedures to validate what is/has been found. If we allow it, it will greatly facilitate the value and permanence of what we learn and organize in order to expand the habit dimension that supports our games, leaving us nothing more to do but "play the game."

At UC San Diego Medical Center, a study reported in 2005, showed that we humans have a track for conscious thinking that is separate from the track that holds and manages our motor habits. They further found that the reason it is difficult to "teach an old dog new tricks" is that we did not notice there were two tracks or how they performed their "duties," and so we disrupted the motor learning with the conscious mind by thinking too much thus depriving ourselves, in effect, from playing the game. Instead many, if not most, simply become stuck in thinking about the swing and just don't get to the playing of it. That's the common thread in all our illustrations here.

So at the risk of repeating ourselves - learn to apply the automatic process, which is the form confirmed for implementation that incorporates the two paths - conscious and non-conscious - in a way that will not allow the conscious to derail the non-conscious and render it sterile.

The San Diego Medical Center research confirmed that one for us too, since they performed an experimental study as follows:

"We have speculated that humans might have the same capacity to acquire habit memory, but that this capability is ordinarily obscured by our excellent capacity to learn by conscious memorization," said Squire.

In the study reported in Nature, two human volunteers with amnesia, called EP and GP, participated in a series of simple object discrimination tasks. Both individuals have severe memory impairment, due to temporal lobe damage caused by herpes simplex encephalitis.

The volunteers were presented with the same series of 8 pairs of miscellaneous objects and asked to select the correct one of each pair, in several sessions conducted over several weeks. The word "correct" was on the bottom of the correct object, and could be read after the object was picked up and turned over.

At the beginning of each session, the volunteers had no recollection of having performed the task previously, and even after several sessions they could not explain what they were being asked to do or why. But, after several sessions of repeating the exercise with the same pairs of objects, the volunteers unconsciously selected the correct item in each pair with increasing accuracy.

The ability to select the correct object appeared to be automatic. In fact, during the course of the study as they were able to select the correct object, the subjects wondered aloud, "How am I doing this?". When asked how he knew which object to select, one of the subjects pointed to his head and replied "It's here, and somehow or another the hand goes for it." By the end of the study they were scoring 95% and 100% in their selection of the correct item.

"These findings help explain how patients with profound memory loss can still do what they do, for example, why the amnesia patient EP can take a walk around his neighborhood without getting lost," said Squire. "Humans clearly can acquire and retain knowledge through repetition. This also reminds us that we have this habit learning system that's working all the time behind the scenes, independently shaping who we are and how we behave, in addition to our conscious learning system."

Co-authors of the study are Peter J. Bayley, Ph.D., and Jennifer C. Frascino, M.A., of the UCSD Department of Psychiatry. The study was supported by the Medical Research Service of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Institute of Mental Health and the Metropolitan Life Foundation.

We don't need to amplify that except to reprise the "bottom line" of the way we have framed and described the "automatic principle and process," which clearly embraces every illustration mentioned here. In that light, the runway is clear and the GPS is properly set. Take it with you and go play a comfortable, relaxed, enjoyably well-scored game.

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We have placed past issues in our [Archives](#).
Let us know if you have questions or comments.
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