

“A Simple Routine builds Confidence!”

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Article Three of Seven Series

Ben Hogan and Jack Nicklaus: Creators of the Golfing Routine

“Stick to your routine.” If you have played junior competitive golf for a while now, you have probably heard this piece of instructional advice until you are sick of the phrase. But it is the golfing truth. Adhering to a pre-rehearsed shot plan is a great way to stay in the moment and dismiss the demons of competitive pressure. To state that every great golfer who has ever played high-level competition has displayed a consistent way of preparing to make contact with the ball and then accepting their result is not overemphasizing the importance of a great routine.

Even the legendary Ben Hogan had a routinized way of setting up to the ball and delivering a powerful blow to the white pellet. But you don’t hear anything about Mr. Hogan’s pre-shot routine or how he prepared himself mentally or emotionally for the upcoming shot. All that you read or hear about is his icy stare and extreme powers of concentration. As was the case for golf in the early modern era of golf, one rarely discussed how a particular shot was to be played, but considerable focus was placed on the outcome or result of that stroke.

Actually, when we discuss golf that was played in the 1940’s or 50’s, no one was really talking about the consistency of set up or having your mind in the right place to hit the ball. Sport psychology was a foreign term and an unheard of scientific endeavor back in those days. The words that people used back then to describe players who exhibited consistency and poise were items such as a player displays an “even temperament” or a “specific style or motion” while addressing the ball. It wasn’t until the dominance of The Golden Bear, Jack Nicklaus, that golf teachers and the golfing public started to look at how one should prepare oneself to make contact with the ball.

Jack's manner of consistently setting up to the ball and going through a very methodical way of preparing himself for the upcoming shot grabbed the attention of every player who wanted to give themselves an edge in golf performance. Mr. Nicklaus later revealed that on every shot he hit, whether in a practice or tournament round, he went through a checklist and had a "Hollywood spectacular" rehearsal of the shot he intended to hit, long before he stepped in and addressed the ball. Jack's record of 18 tournament victories and 19 runner-up finishes in the major events is proof that a great routine sets the stage for winning results!

The notion of creating and utilizing a pre-shot and pre-putt routine is to consistently organize your thoughts and behaviors into a procedure so that your physical movement is performed automatically. This means that you do not have to think about the separate components of the routine and address positions when you are actually going through those motions. Simply, when you are over the ball, you have already created a mental blueprint of what you want to do. By the time you step into the ball to hit it, you are only focusing on making a full and committed swing to that intended target. But in order for this to occur, you must first identify what actual behaviors you will use and to what degree their function helps to create smoothness and focus into your routine.

For the most part, I am not overly concerned with the number of steps that a player uses in establishing their customized pre-shot routine. However, the simpler that you can keep the process (and understand exactly *why you are doing and what you are doing* at any moment during the routine), the easier it is to repeat. The following is a short and simple primer to help you develop a simply great routine!

The Four Steps to a Simply Great Routine

I. The Ready Phase

In order to strike a golf ball effectively and efficiently, motion is involved. But long before the actual physical strike is to occur, many mental and behavioral events have to take place before the club is initiated in the swing-away. First, an action plan for your upcoming shot

needs to be created. You need to ask yourself the following questions so that you can make a prudent and well-thought out plan for your shot decision. This is what I call the “ready” phase.

- *What is my lie?* Because you can only do what your lie allows you to do, you may have to limit your options for the shot. (If you are on the tee box, you can make a clear decision about how high to tee your ball, from what angle or side of the tee box you want to hit from and so forth). But, first, you have to understand your lie. If your ball is sitting up, you have many options. If your ball is down in a divot or poor lie, your options are limited. Your task is to understand what you have to work with at this particular moment and situation.
- *What is the distance to the hole or my target?* Knowing the exact yardage to a specific landing location or obstacle to clear is crucial for your shot planning.
- *What is the environment doing?* Wind, weather conditions and temperature all affect your ball flight, trajectory and overall spin. These are vital elements that constantly need your full focus to process the necessary information.
- *What do I feel like at this particular moment?* Am I strong or am I weak at this moment? Am I feeling excited or am I feeling depressed and lethargic? Monitoring and assessing your bodily feelings gives you an edge into what you feel you can pull off or not.
- *Creating a rehearsal swing that is a real-time motion swing for the upcoming shot.* This is where you create the feel of the shot by making one or two rehearsal swings from behind the ball and before you commit to the shot. By making a real-time swing, it allows the brain to “pre-set” a signal to your muscles for what you want to do when you hit the real shot. Consider this a “before the hit mulligan”. That is, instead of having feedback after the shot.....you have given yourself a feed-forward mechanism. This simple procedure helps to warm up the mind/body connection for a great swing that is about to happen.

Essentially, being ready means that you can make a clear decision on the type of shot that you want to hit and where you want it to go. This crucial decision is the single, greatest element of playing high-level tournament golf. When you know exactly what you want to do will help you to stay committed to the plan and eliminate doubt from your mind. Most golfers when they step in and hit a shot have not fully thought out their shot and they step in with doubt and worry.

The result is less than effective. Be ready when you take your first step into the ball. Being sure about what you want to do is a big first step into a successful shot!

II. The Aim and Alignment Phase

This step of a simple routine is when you step into the ball to aim your clubface and align your body lines (feet, hips, shoulders, and hands) and you are setting the human body into a position to hit the ball squarely on the intended target line to your specific ending destination. As with the first step of being ready, you need to commit to taking the time to be in the proper strike position from the outset of this shot. By making sure that you have aimed the clubface to your intermediate target (if you use one) or that you know that your clubface is at a 90 degree angle to your intended target line, helps to insure that the following procedure of aligning your body is correct as well. Having a simple, yet efficient and consistent manner of walking into the address position and aligning yourself with the appropriate target lines is the second step to a great routine.

III. The Swing Phase

What many golfers fail to realize is that the swing or hit phase of a golf shot is the easiest part of the process. At this point, when you have aimed and addressed the ball, the single aspect that you want to focus on is: Where do I want my ball to go? This question can be answered by simply looking at your specific target and bringing your attention back to the ball and swinging to that visual memory that you just processed.

Many times we speak of “look and react” to your target. What this means is that you have already processed the swing via your rehearsal and it is still imbedded in your short term memory. Without too much delay, bring your eyes back to the ball and simply make a full swing and follow through. Even though this aspect is where most junior golfers spend 90% of their time trying to develop this overlearned process of building trust in their golf swing, what you need to know is that this is where the swing should be on automatic pilot and very little if any conscious thought needs to be used in this element of the routine. That is why we talk about making your shots “automatic”. This is where you simply look at your target, come back to the

ball with your eyes and swing. The beauty of this aspect is that if you have done steps one and two correctly, step three will seem effortless and a lot more fun!

IV. The Accepting Phase

The final element of a simple routine is perhaps the hardest and that is accepting your results. Acceptance is the emotional aspect of a golf shot and for many young golfers, being able to handle a shot that goes out of bounds or takes an unfortunate bounce into the water is almost too much for their delicate psyche to handle. Albeit that golf is a game of non-discrimination, (the golf ball does not care who you are or how much or how little talent you may possess) the ball will only do what the law of physics and gravity allow it to do.

You must understand that being able to accept a shot as something that has happened and move on to the next shot unscathed and willing to focus 100% on the next shot (and only that shot) is what separates the winners from the less than fortunate at every junior tournament. Let me repeat this in another way: Your result is what it is....you may not like it....but you cannot or will not change the past. The shot that you have just hit is over....done.....finished.....it is history.....kaput, etc. What you need to be able to do is accept it for what it is, calmly evaluate the result and let it go and move into the next shot with renewed vigor and positive anticipation. I realize that this is much easier to talk about than do, but every great junior golfer who goes on to the college ranks has learned this simple and vital step to a golf shot.

Whether you make a conscious effort to walk away from the shot and use a five step walk away process (after you put the club in the bag and take five steps...that shot is finished and you are looking forward to the next....totally letting go and releasing the past shot); or use a swing away technique (swinging the anger and frustration away with two swings and then putting the club in the bag) or simply keeping your head up high, the result is what it is and you need to be moving on to the next fully committed to giving your best effort into the next shot and not let the baggage of what just happened affect you for the next hole or shots to be completed.

A Final Word from Dr. Bob

So there you have it, four simple steps to a great routine. If you can commit to the steps that I have outlined for you here and practice them to a point of being overlearned (meaning that you don't have to consciously think about each separate step...they all seem to go together in a seamless transition and you feel comfortable with the process) you will be well on your way to playing your best golf ever! My next segment (Part 4 of this 7 part series) will focus on having a single, yet dominant thought that helps to create confidence during your competitive round.

If you need any help or personal direction with building your routine or you want to learn more about becoming the golfer you have always wanted to be, please contact me at my world- wide internet link, www.drBobWinters.com or contact me personally at **407-340-7785** or reach me at my email address of: drBob@drBobWinters.com

I look forward to speaking with you and helping you reach all of your goals! Good luck in creating a great routine!

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If you find it hard to concentrate on the present shot, you may be allowing your focus to drift from the shot you are currently playing, and project your awareness into the future (future shots and holes to play). An example of this future thinking may be while you are putting on the 12th green and are getting ready to attempt a putt for a birdie. As you are getting ready to address the ball, your mind projects forward in time to thinking about playing the 14th hole (which is a short par five) and you might be saying to yourself, “If I can make a birdie there (as well as here), then I’ll be 2-under for the tournament!” This type of thinking takes you out of the present moment and distracts your ability to properly focus your attention into what needs to be done to make your current birdie putt on hole number 12.

A second way that your mind may work against you is when you reflect back into the past and dredge up old memories, and this also takes you out of the present moment. I am not saying that reflecting back in the past is always a bad idea, because in some instances it might be a good strategy to think about a great shot from the past and to provide you with confidence for

the present moment. However, many golfers only focus on bad-shot memories and this type of thinking brings anger, worry, and frustration into the present moment. Thus, this becomes by and large, a fairly ineffective way to think. Many golfers sustain the present-moment shot philosophy for a little while and then jump back into their old way of thinking about their round. They return to the unproductive habit of starting to keep a running score of the day's proceedings and ruin their rounds by getting ahead of themselves.

The issue comes down to this: How do you learn to stay in the present moment and create a one-shot mindset? Well, here are some ideas that will keep you in the present moment and help you stay focused on the shot at hand.

Basic Steps for Creating a “One – Shot” Mind

First, recognize that **golf is a process, not just a result**. This means that a golf shot is much more than just hitting the ball with your physical golf swing. Rather, it is a culmination of a series of events that leads to the hitting phase of the golf swing and also encompasses the acceptance of the result as well. In totality, the phases of any single golf shot are this:

1. Assessing the shot (determining the lie, wind, distance to the target, and other organizational data)
2. Analyzing all of your options for hitting the correct shot and processing those components with your talent and skill level
3. Making a clear and purposeful decision about what type of shot you will hit
4. Hitting the golf ball (the physical execution of the swing)
5. Accepting the result (whether it was productive or unproductive)

As you can see, there are really five (5) separate components of any one golf shot.

Most golfers feel that the physical portion of hitting the ball (the fourth component) is the shot, but that is only one small portion of the entire process! In fact, I feel that the most important part of the entire playing portion of hitting great golf shots is the ability to assess correctly, analyze all of your options, and then, make a clear decision about what you are going to do, and then just go do it! This means that for any one shot, there is a time to think and a time to act. Therefore, don't confuse your thinking with your acting!

Explaining the Steps to Stay in the Present

To explain it further, when you stand over a shot and are determining what you can and cannot do, you must take a look at what the present situation gives you. You first have to check out the lie and other environmental factors such as wind, climate and distance conditions. This is the assessment phase of the shot. You also have to assess your own physical and psychological climate (your personal feelings of confidence and momentum) and to factor those elements into your equation. You then analyze all of the different shots or options that will bring you the best chance of executing the shot effectively. This is the analyzation phase of a shot. By using your mind to objectively and logically assess and analyze the situation, you have given yourself a chance to think the shot through. This process helps you to make a clear and purposeful decision about what type of shot you can hit. Making a clear and purposeful decision is the third and perhaps the most important component of the shot making process. By making a clear decision based on your assessment and analyzation of the situation, helps to enhance the hitting phase of the shot. This is because you when you take the time to think a shot through (given a situation specific thought process), you stay in the present moment and think about that one particular shot, to the exclusion of any others.

All that is left to do now is to initiate your pre-shot routine and to “hit your decision.” The hitting phase of the golf shot is essentially the phase where you execute your decision with a swing or putt of the ball. Essentially then, you are merely hitting your decision. The fifth and final step of the one-shot mindset is to accept your result. For most golfers, the outcome is the hardest part because they base whether they are playing well (or not playing well) on the shot's outcome. But when you view the shot as a process versus a result, you realize that by taking the time to think the shot through and execute your decision, the result is much easier to accept.

This is because you have executed a plan for hitting that one particular shot (at a specific point in time) and have committed to hitting the shot based on your decision.

“Baby Steps” To One-Shot Success

Perhaps another way to think about the one-shot mentality is to liken it to the ancient saying, “that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” The same is true for a round of golf. Each step (or shot) along the way of an 18 hole round can be viewed as a golfer making a single shot (a swing or a step). Viewed in this way, the entire round of golf is nothing more than a series of “baby steps” that you create and perform one at a time, one after another, with equal focus and intention. It is vital to your scoring success that you do not try to “leap backward” or “jump forward” in your mind during this “baby step” process. The virtue of staying patient and playing within yourself will help to facilitate the power of staying in the present moment.

Men and women professionals on the PGA and LPGA tours endorse this one-shot mentality every week when you hear them state, “all I wanted to do was to stay focused and patient, and play one shot at a time.” Many times during their rounds, players who are committed to the one-shot mentality often find that they become so absorbed in the process that they forget how many holes that they have played and often forget how well they are doing! Many low rounds have been recorded by players becoming so focused on playing one shot at a time, that they forget the score and create a “flow performance state” which allows them to score lower than they ever thought possible. Perhaps the greatest value the one-shot mindset provides is that it can be applied anywhere on the golf course and that it can be applied by golfers of all skill abilities and talent levels!

Therefore, if you can adhere to the principles set forth by assessing and analyzing each shot, make a clear decision about what you are going to do, and then to swing away with trust and accept your result, you are well on your way to creating a mind that plays one shot at a time!

May you always play in the present moment and give each shot your best effort!

Developing a Simple Anchor for Consistent Focus

For every shot we execute during a round of golf, it is imperative that we commit ourselves fully to the moment. Long before you step into address your ball, I think having a “mental trigger” or “mental anchor” is a good strategy because it reminds you of what you need to be doing before it is your turn to hit. Recently, Louis Oosthuizen of South Africa had a red dot marked on his glove so that every time he looked down to grip the club, he would see the red dot and this visual signal would remind him to “stay in the moment and do his routine”. This is a great intervention strategy that led Louis on to win the British Open. You can do the same thing with your game when you go to the course. When you step onto the tee or into your shot it is a good strategy to have something that gets your attention into “this shot” and nothing but this shot! You can do this by adjusting your glove or tugging onto your hat, almost anything that signals your brain that now is the time to get into this moment and focus as well as you possibly can.

You can do any of a number of variations of the Louis Oosthuizen theme, but the important thing to remember is to have something that mentally prepares you for this moment and to let nothing else interfere with your focus. Having a mental anchor will provide you with a consistent ritual that will reinforce that today is about you and your golf game and not about anyone or anything else!

It is psychologically and physiologically imperative that you commit yourself to each shot with full intention and purposefulness. Do not allow yourself to hit any shot until you have completely thought the situation and the shot through. Become clear about what you want to do. Committing to your decision about how to play a shot before you step into the ball will help create feelings of confidence and control. Nothing is more crucial to a “play” mindset than knowing that you have thought the situation through and that you are ready

to execute your plan with decisiveness and clarity. By having a consistent game plan and an appropriate strategy and routine for executing it will help to produce more consistent results.