



ANXIETY WILL MANIFEST PHYSICALLY

It is always important to assess problems accurately in order that they can be addressed and eliminated. Quite often, people tell me that they could have scored much better in a tournament if their ball striking had been better. When asked if they had let tension or anxiety creep in (sometimes referred to as “choking”), they might be quick to say, “No, it was just bad ball striking.”

Without a doubt, there are times when we are staying calm and in the present...yet, not hitting the ball well. That happens to everybody at times. If we are the competitive type though...we won't usually blame undesirable results in tournaments on nerves unless it is painfully obvious to us and maybe our playing partners. When it is obvious that we are succumbing to pressure, it becomes something that we are unable to deny...at least to ourselves! You see anxiety will eventually manifest itself physically.

Have you ever played golf in a pressure packed situation and noticed that after you had passed the point of being in contention, let's say...you were so much over par that you figured you had already blown any chance of placing amongst the leaders, that you started hitting the ball better? You might tell someone later that you finally fixed what was going wrong with your swing earlier in the round. You even started lamenting on hole number 16 let's say...that had you hit the ball like this on the first few holes, you could have finished in contention.

Janice Joplin sang a famous song that was titled “Me and Bobby McGee.” In that song, she said; “freedom's just another word for...nothing left to lose.” Let me suggest to you that more often than not, the reason why you started hitting the ball better was because you stopped feeling the pressure of needing to score well and the accompanying distractions that go along with that mindset. Tension in the arms would start to decrease and rhythm would improve. This is very difficult for the average person to accept at times. On the other hand, it is important for us to recognize if we are to address the problem and take the necessary steps to fix it.



ACCEPTANCE! That is one of the keys to dealing with this problem. If we accept that our nerves are shaky, we allow ourselves to get past that moment and deal with the effect of shaky nerves. If we don't accept that we are experiencing problems because of nerves, we will get stuck at that point and can then expect to face the same problem over and over again in subsequent pressure situations until we can learn to get past it.

You aren't thinking negatively just because you have acknowledged a weakness that is present. On the contrary, you will have simplified the situation enough so that you can start to focus more clearly and not be distracted by wondering what the problem may be.

Everybody chokes! Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson...they all choke and have admitted it on numerous occasions. I have to officiate at many competitive rounds of golf. Too often, I see people rejecting any notion that nerves played a part in their faulty play. I can tell you this; I expect that kind of person to fold, virtually every time they get under pressure. I hate it...really! I hate to see people have to deal with such a tough situation and then deny the obvious and consequently not learn what they had the opportunity to learn.

You see...it can be quite a blow to our ego to admit that we don't have what it takes mentally, to deal with a certain situation. Let me suggest that we all have to pay our dues. We must learn through experience how to play our best golf. When we have less than desirable results, it behooves us to recall the round and make at least a mental note of what caused us to perform poorly.

This is one of the reasons why so many touring pros have played all over the world and on so many different tours. It can take a long time to finally figure out what it takes for you to perform your best. Wait a minute though...shouldn't we just be able to think positively and then go out and perform just as we expected ourselves to do? If you answer that with a yes...I suggest you get a little more experience under your belt.



Too often, talking positively about things that are out of our control, only serves to put more pressure on a person and not prepare them for the periods of crisis that virtually everybody faces in every round of golf they play. I'm not saying that negative thinking is what we should be doing though. I'm just suggesting that positive thinking taken to an extreme only sets us up for disaster.

It isn't so uncommon to hear someone say, "I'm going to win this tournament that I am playing in this weekend." Kind of like...it's a given! That usually sounds to me like they're just trying to convince themselves that they are going to win. Very honestly...that's not confidence! It is oftentimes misinterpreted as confidence though...and why not?

Haven't we all been told that we should think positively? We should visualize success! Prepare to win! Don't give way to negative thoughts! I agree with all of those thoughts but those thoughts simply must be kept in balance with reality.

I would much rather hear a person say something like; "I don't know if I will win or lose the tournament but...I am there to do my best because I can do no better than my best. Therefore...I am confident that I will focus clearly and do MY best." That kind of thinking serves to take pressure off of the person and help them focus on the things that are reasonable for them to control and clear their mind of things that are out of their control.

When we focus on what is in our control, we will be able to keep distractions to a minimum and thereby relieve anxiety about things that are out of our control. That scenario sets us up to play our best!

Remember this; anxiety permeates the mind when we are facing something that is out of our control...or when we at least perceive that things are out of our control. By keeping your mind upon the things that are in your control, you will reduce anxiety and free up your body to produce better results.

Good golfing!

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