

## Mental keys to consistent golf

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It doesn't matter if you are trying to win the U.S. Open or break 90 for the first time, the goal is the same --to play consistent golf every day.

The more consistent your approach to golf, from shot to shot and day to day, the better your results.

As professionals get ready for major championships, they have a specific system for practice and preparation to play their best.

Your practice, pre-round warm-up routine and pre-shot preparation are three important areas to play more consistently. If scores vary from one day to the next or if you play golf on the "emotional roller coaster," you'll want to take notes.

### Focus the mind, ready the body

The warm-up routine is a great time to get loose, feel confident and get your mind and body ready to play. It's a great way to develop consistency in your pre-game preparation, which leads to consistent golf.

The warm-up is not the time to work on your golf swing, try new equipment or call your broker on the cell phone.

A warm up should: **(1)** get you loose and physically ready, **(2)** focus the mind, **(3)** instill confidence and **(4)** give you a feel for your swing and touch around the greens.

First, loosen up and feel your swing that day. Find a swing cue that's working. Get focused for the opening holes by hitting the clubs you will use on those holes. Lastly, hone your touch on the greens so you can putt your best right out of the gate.

### Have a game plan

A game plan is a strategy you use to attack the golf course. What should a game plan involve?

Given the layout and distance of each hole, a player should plan how to play each hole. Decide ahead of time what club to hit off the each tee -- driver, 3-wood or an iron.

Know the fat part of the fairway and what's the best angle to the pin. Pick your targets ahead of time in the practice round given the usual wind direction.

Decide what pins you can shoot for and when to play to the center of the green. Once you have a game plan, stick to it.

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## **Control your reactions**

I often see players become rattled when they hit a couple bad shots. No one likes to hit bad shots, but sometimes it's part of golf.

The fact that you hit a bad shot or had a bad hole is not the problem. The problem starts with how you react to the bad shot or hole. Even the best players in world such as don't expect to hit every shot well.

But they are able to let go of bad shots and play on with composure.

If you get easily upset and carry that with you, be prepared for an emotional roller coaster. To get off the bogey train, you must first learn to react to bad shots or errors with coolness and composure.

## **Utilize a simple pre-shot routine**

A consistent pre-shot routine can be a player's greatest asset to focus the mind, instill confidence and deflect distractions.

It has three objectives: **(1)** instill confidence, **(2)** focus on the task and **(3)** set the conditions to trust your skills during execution.

A pre-shot routine locks your focus into performance cues so you can be task-focused for every shot you hit.

The following are six ingredients of a good pre-shot routine:

- Create a specific plan for each shot. Decide on a target and type of shot before you address ball.
- Program your mind with a clear mental image -- a picture, sensation or thought of how the shot looks and how you will make it become a reality.
- Rehearse the shot physically and mentally, which should mirror the swing of the actual shot you plan to hit.
- Align and aim consistently. Find a consistent system for addressing the ball so you can feel confident in your alignment.
- Use the same thought or image to trigger the swing. For example, see the target in your mind or feel a smooth swing. But do the same thing on every shot.

## **Have patience after mistakes**

The nature of the game tests our patience. Players shouldn't let one shot or one hole ruin their confidence for the rest of the day.

If this happens, self-doubt and indecision take control, and that will certainly cause inconsistent play. It doesn't make sense to give in to doubt because of one or two bad shots.


If you have real confidence and patience, you won't let that missed three-footer ruin your game.

## **Practice tips for consistency**

- On the range, play the all the holes on the course. Hit driver, 7-iron on the first hole. Frame the hole with landmarks on the range. Hit the clubs you think you will need on the course.

- Hit three shots on the range and three putts on the practice green with your full pre-shot routine before you play. This way you will be ready to put your game face on.
- During your practice round, select the clubs you will hit off the tees and the targets you will aim to in the actual round. Stick to your decisions when you play, but be flexible with changes in weather or course set up.

**Editor's note:** Patrick Cohn is a regular contributor to GolfWeb.

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