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## Rest, recover, refocus: Picking up the pieces after defeat

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By Patrick Cohn  
GolfWeb contributor

One of most challenging things to do in sport is coming back mentally after a personal defeat.

Almost every golfer in this year's British Open played with aspirations of winning the tournament. But only one player can win.

And for the big names in the field who had a realistic chance of winning but didn't, such as Tiger Woods, Justin Leonard, and Greg Norman, the agony of defeat is even greater.

But how about if you blew a three-shot lead on the final hole of the Open and lost in a three-way playoff? Now that's a major blow to one's ego and test of mental strength.

"I'm obviously shocked by what's happened to me, devastated even," Jean Van de Velde said. "That choice was not crazy, but it made me live through a nightmare. And, I'll add, a nightmare ... that may continue for a while.

This same scenario happens every week in golf. On average, 150 players tee it up, but only several are in contention Sunday afternoon. And only one comes away the winner.

The rest of the field is left with mental scars and must lick their wounds until the next event. These are the times when players such as Van de Velde must process what has happened and heal the scares.

Embarrassment, loss of confidence, decreased motivation and losing sight of one's goals are just a few of the challenges that the "loser" faces after a hard defeat.

I see the same reactions when a player flunks out of tour school at the end of the year. He or she had high aspirations of playing on tour only to lose in the finals and walk away without a playing card. It's not so much of a feeling of embarrassment, but a loss of one's dream.

It doesn't matter if it a player lost the club championship, flunked out of tour school or blew a three-shot lead in a major, the reaction is the same, which can lead to long-term scars of the psyche.

Here are a few tips to help you get back up after being knocked down:

**No. 1** Take a break from golf.

Some players say you have to get back on the horse immediately after being thrown off. I think this is the time to take a rest and get away from golf for at least a week. Air out and let the past get behind you.

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**No. 2** Look at the bright side.

Greg Norman is familiar with defeat. He's had some close calls when other players have stolen tournaments from him.

Hard to take? Not for Norman. Instead, he pats himself on the back and says job well done for getting himself in contention.

**No. 3** Use it as a learning experience.

As you get older, you get wiser. I wonder why?

Experience is the great equalizer in golf. It helps the older players on tour compete with the talent of their less experienced peers. Great players use setbacks to improve themselves and gain knowledge.

What can Van de Velde learn from his defeat? Probably that he shouldn't let his ego or what others say interfere with making smart choices.

**No. 4** Keep your goals in focus.

Loss of motivation is a big challenge after defeat. This is when you have to remind yourself of your goals in golf and recommit yourself to being a better player everyday.

It's OK to feel like you don't want to practice or play for a few days -- that's normal. But after a grieving period of, say, one or two weeks, it's time to get focused on your goals.

**No. 5** Focus on your best.

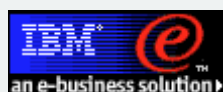
It's easy to look back and beat yourself up for what you did wrong and wonder how things would be different if you only made that one three-footer. But that only serves to hurt confidence.

Instead, you have to recall the good shots and putt you made. Think about the smart decisions you made to get yourself in contention. If it wasn't for some good play and keen thinking, you wouldn't even have had a chance to win the tournament.

So keep your confidence after a defeat by remembering what you accomplished, not what you let get away.

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

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