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## Playing beyond your comfort zone

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One question players always ask me is, "Why do I shoot 33 on the front, then turn around and shoot 43 on the back? I feel like two different players."

I think a comfort zone is at work.

A comfort zone is an expectation a player has about his or her ability to shoot a certain score.

A comfort zone, or what should more appropriately be called a "discomfort zone," creates a feeling of anxiety when you play better or worse than you typically play.

Thus, our own expectations create limits.

Most of the time, a comfort zone becomes a concern when you are playing better than expected. However, it can work the opposite way as well.

For example, when you shoot 45 on the front side, there is a tendency to say to yourself, "I'm better than that," then shoot 38 on the back.



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Most players put limitations on their performance because they expect to shoot within a certain scoring range on a given day.

John, for example, usually shoots in the mid-70s and has a scoring zone of plus or minus four shots from his average.

He always manages to finish a round within his comfort zone because of his expectations.

If he shoots 33 on the front nine, he then shoots 40 on the back.

Conversely, if he shoots 40 on the front, he plays himself back into his comfort zone and shoots 33 on the back. If you are having trouble beating your comfort zone, here are some suggestions:

- **Don't protect your score. Play aggressively.**

When you realize you are playing great, the focus often shifts to avoiding failure, rather than continuing to play aggressively and aiming for the best round of your life.

The tendency is to "protect" and play defensively.

This causes you to look at hazards and out-of-bounds markers.

The key is to play one hole at a time, maintaining the same style that got you in position to shoot a good score, rather than adopt a cautious style of play maintaining your score.

- **Focus on hitting quality shots and forget about your score.**

As soon as you become score-conscious, the comfort zone is at work.

You notice your score is better than "normal," and begin to project what score you might shoot.

"If I could just par in..." you say to yourself. Then you begin to just try to make par on the last few holes.

Your strategy changes as you try to protect a good score. This strategy usually leads to bogeys rather than pars.

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Sound familiar? Have someone else keep your score.

- **Don't limit yourself with expectations.**

On the golf course, you have to learn to play with no expectations.

Humans place limits on their potential. If you think you are a bogey golfer, then you will most likely play to bogey.

How many holes have you birdied on your home course?

You must believe you have the ability to par or birdie every hole on the course. But don't expect to birdie every hole or shoot a certain score.

If you are playing better than you expect, assume you are only playing near your maximum potential.

- **Don't think ahead.**

A player who projects the score he or she will shoot is not focused on playing one shot at a time.

He or she is thinking ahead about a finishing score and not focusing on the task at hand, which is to get the ball into the hole in the least number of strokes.

This is the time to focus your mind on the process of hitting good shots.

Without a "now-oriented focus," you are doomed to think about your possible score for the round.

And score is irrelevant to what you need to make a three-foot putt.

Add up your score at the end of the round. The goal is to play an entire round without knowing what you shot. When you can accomplish this, you will be closer to conquering the comfort zone phenomenon.

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**Performance Tip:**

The key is to stay mentally focused and forget about your score.

To do this, set two or three goals for yourself before the round. These should be process goals.

For example, you might set two physical goals such as hitting 10 of 14 fairways and 12 of 18 greens. You might also set one mental goal such as focusing only on the present shot for 18 holes.

If you start to project your score, stop and refocus on the present shot.

Ask yourself this question: "What do I need to do to hit a good shot or putt right now?"

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