

MENTAL FOCUS: CLUB-FITTING YOUR BRAIN PROCESS

by Coach Lee Tajonera

The #1 question I always get from golfers whom I work with, whether amateur or professional, is this: how do I focus? More specifically, they ask, how do I just stay in the moment and play freely?

We all hear this on the fairways - people telling us to “focus” without actually telling us how to do so. We also hear people say, just clear your head and don’t think of anything.

Now let me get this straight: focus is not about absence of thought. It is about presence of (right) thoughts.

It’s impossible for us to not have any thoughts because our neurons continue to fire away even when we sleep. So if your objective is to merely clear your head of all thought, then you are in a world of disappointment and a lot of triple bogeys.

The key to focus is having the right thoughts. And for you to “have the right thoughts,” the right mindset is necessary.

“Process over results.” This is the mindset that allows you to have the right thoughts and paves the way toward attaining true focus.

The challenge is in adopting this mindset because our world is quite obsessed with results - from the grades we had to meet to pass to the next level in school, to the targets we had to hit to get that big promotion at work. In golf, we’re obsessed with what we shot in our front 9, or what our UNHS index will be next month.

The problem with focusing on results is that if you really think about it, you can’t control nor predict them. You may want to land your approach shot within a foot of the cup every time you pull out your wedges, but there’s no way you can actually guarantee that. You may hit that perfect monster drive down the middle of the fairway, but you can’t control the ball when it bounces off a sprinkler either into a ravine or miraculously onto the green. Such is the nature of golf (and all sports for that matter).

Don’t get me wrong: results are important, but, the “secret” is not to go after them. Rather, pursue the little steps - the processes - which if done correctly, consistently, and with full effort, lead to a strong chance of getting the results that you want.

Let me give a concrete example of a common “results-focused” thought: “I should not 3-putt.”

Like other thoughts focused on results, 3-putting is not something you can guarantee to avoid (even PGA pros experience this!). So how do you convert this to a “process-focused” thought such that you’re instead focusing on steps/processes that increase the chances of avoiding the dreaded 3-putt?

Here are a couple of examples:

“I will follow through on my putting stroke.”

“I will follow my pre-putting routine.”

“I will check the slope of the green from both sides of the cup.”

You can even work on chipping or pitching “processes” that increase your chances of getting the ball into tap-in or “dikit” distance on the green.

“I will hinge my right wrist on the backswing and hit down with a descending strike.” (for a right-handed golfer)

“In long rough around the green, I will open my club face and make a bigger swing than my usual chip/pitch.”

Getting used to a “process over results” mindset is a process in itself, and it can get confusing at the start. A good way of knowing if your thinking is “process-focused” and not “results-focused” is to ask yourself these 2 questions when you have a specific thought:

Do you have full control over this process (meaning, the process does not depend on factors beyond you)?

Will you be able to perform this process 10 out of 10 times (meaning, it’s something you can do correctly, consistently, and with effort)?

If you can answer “yes” to both questions, then you can be assured that you’re being process-focused.

This is what it means to be focused and just stay in the moment - fill your mind with the little steps and processes (the right things), and follow through with each so that the results you want actually happen.

If you spend endless hours on the range working on your swing, then your mind deserves the same (if not more) type of attention. Put in the work by practicing this way of thinking until it becomes a habit. Pretty soon, “focusing” becomes second-nature and those putts will start rolling in.