

Using “Target Focus” In Pre-Shot Routines

MENTAL TIPS

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When talking about mental skills

and golf, the importance of pre-shot routines often comes up. Pre-shot routines are useful for many reasons, such as: controlling emotions, focusing attention, alignment and shot selection. There is no one pre-shot routine that is best for all golfers, however, all pre-shot routines need to incorporate a “target focus.”

So what does a “target focus” mean? Grab a friend and try the following exercise: Stand a few yards apart facing your partner. Toss a golf ball back and forth, observing where your focus is when you are throwing the golf ball. Most people notice they are focused on the other person’s hands or mid-section. They focus on where they are sending the ball, not the ball itself.

Interestingly, your motion follows your focus. Your arm extends forward toward the other person without thinking about it. If your friend moves a little to the left or right, you simply adjust your motion to connect with your target’s new location. You react to the target, rather than thinking about the subtle adjustments made by your body.

TWO-TEE DRILL



1. Place two tees three inches apart in line with your target.



2. Place a ball on the forward tee ... swing through both tees.

This principle applies in golf, too. Unfortunately, most of us have been misled to believe that we need to focus on the golf ball. After all, isn’t it important to “keep your head down, eye on the ball?” This produces a motion where you swing at the ball, rather than through the ball, which can result in thin or fat shots. Sound familiar?

Solid contact is the result of extending through the golf ball toward the actual target (i.e., “finishing” your swing). Consistent solid contact will always elude you if you focus on the golf ball. So, am I suggesting you not look at the golf ball when you swing? No. You look at the golf ball rather than the target because, anatomically, it allows you to take a bigger shoulder turn to produce greater power. The key is to look at the ball, but to keep your mind’s eye on the target.

Let’s return to our original ball-toss exercise. Once you determine where your partner is standing, close your eyes and toss the ball. Again, observe your focus when throwing with your eyes closed. Most people will report that they still focus on the direction of their partner despite not being able to directly see her.

How can we relate this to our pre-shot routines? Once you have addressed the golf ball, look out toward your



3. Set up to a golf ball with a tee placed a few inches in front.

at the back tee, but swing through both tees. Once you can consistently clip both tees, place a ball on the forward tee (*photo 2*). Again, address and look at the empty back tee, while swinging through both tees. Finally, set up to a golf ball with a tee placed a few inches in front (*photo 3*). Swing through the ball and the tee. In all three steps of this drill, the forward tee serves to pull your attention (and consequently your motion) toward the target.

The next time you head to the golf course, ask yourself to what extent is your focus on the target versus the ball? Your best rounds of golf will come from swinging through the ball toward the target. Thoughts of how to swing will only serve as a distraction from the target.

target. Most people spend too much time visually connected to the golf ball. Get a sense of where your target is so that when your eyes return to the golf ball, you don't lose sight of which target you are swinging toward.

To reinforce this principle on the practice tee, try the following "two-tee drill." Place two tees three inches apart in line with your target (*photo 1*). Address the back tee, look

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