

# RIGHT HERE - RIGHT NOW



## **Golf Has A Habit of Exposing What is Really Going on Inside.**

I often hear players ask why, when they get themselves into a good position, they cannot seem to close out the round. They usually look first at technique: a poor strike, a missed putt, a loose swing at the wrong time. Sometimes they are right. But sometimes the issue is not technical, or not only technical.

The skill is there. The problem is that, under pressure, the player can no longer access it clearly.

The swing and stroke may have already shown, over the previous few hours, that they are good enough. After all, the player may be a few under par with only a couple of holes to play. Their preparation was probably adequate, although I do sometimes see players run out of energy and cognitive clarity towards the end of a round. They have all, or at least enough, of the tools needed to score well.

But under pressure, often self-imposed, those tools become harder to reach.

I was reminded of this by a player who was an experienced PGA professional. She had once aspired to be a Tour professional, but life did not quite deal her the cards she needed. A medical condition stopped her in her tracks and, for much of her working life, she spent her time coaching.

Then, quite unexpectedly, she had a second chance to compete on another tour. She worked hard at her game. She enjoyed travelling. She liked the competition. She also had some success. At times, she was near the top of the tour she was playing on, performing well and occasionally winning.

But success can bring its own weight.

To keep playing, she needed sponsorship. She had found that support, mainly from businesses and from people who genuinely wanted to see her do well. The financial help allowed her to pursue the opportunity in front of her with vigour. It gave her the chance to play, compete and test herself.

She loved it.

Over time, though, the sponsorship started to weigh heavy. In her mind, every round became linked to the ranking. Every shot appeared to carry the weight of whether she would move up or down the order. She wanted to stay high enough to get into bigger events. She wanted to show her sponsors that she was worth continuing to support.

She was not just playing golf. She was playing for her future, or at least that is how it seemed to her.

Most golfers do not play with sponsors in mind, but many carry their own version of the same weight. It might be a handicap, team selection, reputation, pride, money games, parental expectation, or simply the private story they want to tell themselves about the kind of player they are.

The details change. The pattern is often the same, when we add a large dose of consequence to every shot.

I watched her one day when her round appeared to be going well. She was a couple under par with only a few holes to play. I then moved away to watch another group.

When she came off the 18th green, she looked disappointed. More than disappointed, really. She looked disconsolate. A round that might have become three, four, or perhaps even more under par had ended at level par after a poor finish.

After giving her a little time, I asked how she felt.

She could not understand what had happened. She had been in good positions before. She was not scared of being under par. Yet once again, she had managed to turn a good round into something that felt, to her at least, like a bad one.

So I asked her what she had been thinking about over the last few holes.

Her answer was revealing.

She had been thinking about how high in the ranking she had once been. She had been thinking about the fact that she had not won for some time. She had been thinking about her sponsors. She was worried that, unless she kept performing, they might not continue to support her.

Perhaps that was where the real problem lay.

In my view, this was not mainly a technical issue. It was not even mainly a decision-making issue. It was the emotional weight she had attached to the round. She was trying to squeeze every possible shot out of it, not because the shot in front of her demanded it, but because she had filled that shot with consequences.

I suggested that she should speak to her sponsors. Not guess what they were thinking. Not create a story in her own mind. Just ask them. Have a conversation. Understand why they were supporting her.

From what I could see, her sponsorship was not purely transactional. It seemed to be given, at least in part, because the sponsors liked her, believed in her, and were happy for her to represent them. Perhaps they enjoyed playing the occasional round with her. Perhaps they valued the connection.

Perhaps they simply wanted to help.

Sponsorship can exist for many reasons.

But the more important conversation was not really about sponsorship. It was about attention.

On the course, she had been living in two places at once, neither of which was useful.

She was in the past, thinking about previous wins, previous rankings and what she had once achieved. She was also in the future, imagining what might happen if her ranking dropped, if her sponsors withdrew, or if the opportunity disappeared.

She was everywhere, but in the present.

And golf can only be played in the present.

That sounds simple, but it is not easy. The mind is very good at travelling. It goes back to the missed putt on the previous hole. It jumps forward to the possibility of a good score. It tells stories about what others might think. It creates pressure from things that have already happened and things that may never happen.

So I asked her to do something very simple.

I asked her to take off her hat, hold it in her hands, close her eyes, and tell me what she could feel.

At first, she said, "I can feel a hat."

So I asked her to go a little deeper.

What part of the hat could she feel? What was the texture? What was under her fingers?

She began to notice more. The smooth material. The stitching. The logo. The peak. The inner band that sits against the forehead. As she moved the hat around in her hands, she started to feel details she had not noticed at first.

After about 90 seconds, I asked her whether she had been thinking about the past.

No.

Was she thinking about the future?

No.

What had she been thinking about?

The hat. The feel of it. The detail of what was in his hands.

In that moment, she was present.

That was the point.

When we are lost in the past or anxious about the future, we can come back to the present through the senses. It might be the texture of the club grip. The sound of the wind. The sight of the trees. The pressure of the feet on the ground. The breath before stepping into the pre-shot routine.

The object itself does not matter very much. The act of noticing does.

People sometimes say, "smell the roses", and perhaps that phrase has become a little overused. But the idea behind it is sound. The senses bring us back to where we are.

For a golfer, that matters.

The shot in front of us is the only shot we can play. Not the one we have just hit. Not the one we hope to hit on the next hole. This one. The shot now.

A simple reset

To give yourself the best chance on each shot, I advise going through a simple checklist.

What is the shot you are trying to play?

Will the lie of the ball support this shot?

Can you fully commit to this decision?

These questions are not magic. They will not remove any pressure. They will not guarantee the ball goes where you want it to go. But they can interrupt the spiral. They can stop the mind turning one shot into a career, one hole into a judgement, or one poor finish into a story about who we are.

That interruption matters.

Then you can simply take your grip. Pick the target. Set up to the ball. Take one last look. Then let it go.

That does not guarantee a good shot. Nothing does. But it gives you a better chance of accessing the skill you already have.

A few months later

I saw the same player again. I did not know she was behind me until a buggy pulled up beside me and I felt a tap on my shoulder.

She looked at me and said, "Thank you for putting the smile back on my face. I'm enjoying my golf again." It seems that only a week or so after our conversation she had taken my advice, met with her sponsors, and heard that they were happy to extend her contract. She had been worrying about something that existed only in her mind. It was not the reality.

That stayed with me.

Because sometimes helping a player is not about adding something new. It is about removing some of the weight they are carrying. It is about helping them see that the past has gone, the future has not arrived, and the only place golf can really be played is here.

Right here, right now.

(note: The player's identity purposefully anonymised)

Tony Bennett

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