

The Path To Golfing Mastery

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“Cameron ... tell me more about your golf concepts and how you can help me?”

Let's start here...

I was on the 11th green, playing a match for my golf team. I was 6 down. Fair to say things weren't going to plan. Worse, I was the hot favourite, playing at my home club. I was frustrated, not because I wasn't playing that well (I was only 1 over for the day. The guy I was playing was 5 under) but because I just couldn't get anything going.

I had just lost the 10th hole - a perfect drive, nice looking approach that faded at the last second, it only just caught the bunker. From here the bunker shot was ok but the putt for par slipped by. The opponent, doing what he had done all day, made a par from the trees.

Things were looking better on 11. He had a long putt for par. I was almost certainly in for mine and I watched this hot player line up his 25 footer.

“Surely he can't make it”, I thought. He had made every putt he had looked at and was due to miss one. He stroked the putt and it rolled smoothly over the green. No spikes marks or imperfections, these greens were perfect. It went in. Again.

Something was different. I was calm and focussed. Normally I'd be feeling edgy but surprisingly my mind was still. I calmly placed my ball and rolled it into the back of the cup.

On the way to the 12th my caddy gave me a new ball. This signified something, what, I'm not sure. I was 6 down with seven holes to play, but there was still hope.

We were both on the 12th green in regulation. I was below the hole, sitting pretty on this exceptionally fast green. The opponent, I think his name was Adam, was coming downhill with a hint of right to left break. Adam was away, and I watched in amazement as it looked like he made yet another long putt. At the last instant the putt dove sharply left to just miss the hole. It was a great putt from a guy that was certainly on his game.

I was still alive, but only just.

My putt for birdie was boring. It was never going in but it finished close enough to the hole to be conceded. Adam's first putt had slipped that uncomfortable distance past the hole - I was going to concede, but thought I had nothing to lose.

It was almost a moment of desperation. Defiance if you will. "If you're going to come to my course and give me a thrashing, then I'm going to make you putt this little one. Go for it Champ!".

He missed. I couldn't believe it. The putt was less than 3 feet and he didn't hit the hole. Was this a chink in the armour?

The 13th was a new par 3. It was a controversial hole because the original hole was a classic on the Sandbelt. Encroaching houses had seen liability issues so the line of play had been amended. Not sure why a net couldn't have been installed, not only saving tens of thousands of dollars, but also protecting a classic golf hole. Golf Clubs work in mysterious ways sometimes.

The new hole was tough (I say "was" because this beast has since been replaced, again, due to too many complaints). The green was raised and also sat at a strange angle. There was a deep bunker to the front right and another at the rear left. Directly in front of the playing line was a large swale.

The approach had to be perfect. Too far left or right and you were in a bunker. Too short and you'd hit the swale and be stuck there. And most demanding of all, if you were even slightly long, the ball would run way down the embankment and you'd have the most difficult of difficult recoveries. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention the green was rock hard.

Most at my club hated this hole. It was just too difficult for the average punter but I had a special way of playing it.

I could hit my favourite shot, a low draw which was perfectly suited. My left-handed spin could see the ball avoid the bunkers (and swale), bounce short of the green and then roll on. And over the years I got good at playing this shot, could almost certainly rely on it to get the ball onto the green - any green.

At times it got pretty extreme - it would start way to the left and then hook back to the right. I didn't care. This shot was my "go to" shot and it got me out of a lot of trouble. Now was another time.

When I first started playing golf there was no special talent. My first score was 156 for 18 holes. It was a debacle and I didn't really enjoy the game.

My Grandmother made me count each shot, including all the penalties, so it was a long day. I scored 17 on the first hole, hitting three shots over the fence and copping the added shots on the chin.

It wasn't until I got away from my Grandparents that my game took off. At home, with a bag of unloved balls and a horse paddock I went to work. I was free and nobody getting in my ear and telling me what to do.

I could experiment. Hit all sorts of shots and play a variety of games. I even set up my own mini course, with obstacles and my own par. I loved it and to this day is probably the best practice I've ever done.

Golf was becoming an addiction. I was still playing soccer but my heart wasn't in it, I relished the challenge and individuality of golf. Golf was now my sport.

My scores were coming down. I broke 100 quickly and then 90 and not long after 80. My golfing mate and his dad thought I was a freak - they couldn't believe a short-term golfer could improve so quickly. But I knew there was no secret....

.... my mate loved his computer and TV. After school he'd race home to play games and watch TV. I had none of this. My playground was the horse paddock and I couldn't think of anywhere else I wanted to be.

Within 12 months I had broken par. Golf was easy. And I'm not saying this to be a smart arse - it's just I played in such an uncomplicated way.

I'd look at the hole, chose a club and then walk up to the ball and hit it. Can it get any easier than this?

It helped that I'd be able to hit most of the shots I could conjure up in my mind (If I couldn't hit them I'd find a way over at the horse paddock). So golf really was easy and I used to laugh at all the older golfers who made it so hard. I was good at taking their money too.

At the height of my powers (I was 16 years old) I applied and was accepted for a golf scholarship. Acceptance meant regular coaching and a year's supply of range balls and green fees. This was better than Christmas.

I put everything into getting that scholarship. I took multiple application forms and made sure my handwriting was legible (it's terrible normally) and every question was answered fully. I must have rewritten that form 15 times - but it was worth it. When I opened the letter from the sponsoring business I saw the word "Congratulations" and that was that. I let out a

cry and a fist pump - it looked like my dream of becoming a professional golfer was coming true.

My success also led to my biggest disappointment. I wasn't to know it at the time, but my approach so far to golf was close to ideal. I was playing/learning in a natural way, just like we're supposed to. It was the reason I had improved so quickly and could beat almost all at my club.

Things were to change.

The golf lessons were full on and definitely not all they were cracked up to be.

For starters, it was hard. It wasn't like you could work on one thing and then start hitting the ball better. It wasn't so simple. The pro would give me some swing change ideas and I'd try and implement.

“Not like that”

“It's not right yet”

“Keep practising”

“Rotate your hips”

“Your swing is off plane”

“Let's put your swing on video and see what you're doing wrong”

I thought changing my swing would be easy. It wasn't.

Then, my game and scores started falling apart.

I started hitting the ball all over the place. I stopped focusing on playing the game - I was becoming obsessed with my swing. I started losing the plot.

Although well meaning and really only doing what he was taught to do, the golf pro destroyed my game. Golf became an unhealthy obsession and I started to hate it. The only thing that kept me going was a strong discipline and the thought there must be a way to recapture the old form.

Back the the 13th hole.

I was now 5 down with 6 holes to play. It wasn't ideal that's for sure, but where there's life there's hope.

I took my 7 iron, aimed to the left, hooded the club slightly and swung freely. The ball came off low and with the right amount of hook spin. I knew right away it was a good one. The ball finished close and the few spectators gave a little golf clap.

It was the last shot I hit on that hole. My opponent first visited the swale and then the drop off at the back and conceded the hole. I was now 4 down. Five holes still to play.

Pitching the ball has never been the strongest part of my game. In fact, many of my golfing mates would say it has been a weakness. But I've gotten better at it, and some days I have managed to pitch the ball quite well. It might not ever be really flash, but I reckon it's now acceptable.

The 14th is a par 5 and I had to lay up because I missed the fairway in one of two enormous fairway traps. I had around 80 metres left for the approach and hit one of my most memorable pitches ever.

The pin was located behind the front bunker, on the right hand side. This green is notoriously fast and going long isn't an option if you've got par on your mind. Once again, I aimed out to the left and hit a draw shot. This time the ball flew off with extra spin, landing short and left of the pin, then taking a bounce forward and spinning back and to the right.

When all was said and done the ball was 4 foot below the hole. It was the perfect shot and I followed that up to make the birdie putt. Adam could only manage a par. I was now believing.

Sometimes you need some luck and you have to be ready to take it. You can't let some good fortune sidetrack your focus or performance (most of us let the bad stuff get in our way, but good play and luck can easily derail us).

My drive on 15 was out to the left and looked for all money I'd be in the trees. Luckily the ball dropped down, giving me a swing - enough room to conjure up something...

By now Adam was feeling the pinch. He'd lost three holes in a row and could feel my confidence growing. He did the wrong thing off the tee - he found the deep fairway bunker, the only spot that was dead. From here he was certain to make nothing better than bogey.

I recovered to the front of the green, hitting a huge slice around the trees, and then watched Adam play his 2nd and then an ordinary 3rd. He was certain to make no better than 5.

I was left with a massive putt on the largest green on the course. My ball found the very front of the green and the hole was located at the very back. The early part of the putt was uphill and then from the middle it swung to the right and downhill. The green was big and lightning quick. It wasn't an easy putt.

The putting yips might be the worse thing that can happen to a golfer. When you stand over a short putt and you know you're going to miss it before you take the club away, there is no worse feeling.

You're confidence is completely shot and no matter how hard you try you're never able to make those shortish putts with consistency.

Then, your entire game is riddled with fear.

You feel pressure on long putts because you know if you don't get the first putt close you're likely to 3-putt.

You get anxious on all short shots because you feel added pressure to get the ball really close to the hole.

Your iron play becomes too deliberate and and you steer the ball. When you miss a green you are almost certainly conceding defeat, knowing that your game is NOT ready to be relying on your short game.

So your game spirals out of control. You start despising golf and dread taking the putter from your bag. Thoughts of poor putting, embarrassment, fear and wasted opportunity consume you. Welcome to the horrible world of the putting yips.

I can almost pin point the day when I first experienced the yips. It was 1997 and I was playing in a local weekend competition.

At this point I was making some waves on the golf scene. I was a decent player, had managed to win a few events and was sort of consistent. My game wasn't totally reliable (I was still working things out) but I was doing ok.

By this time I was good enough to be taking lessons with some of the better coaches around town. This was the done thing (probably still is), you book in for a 30 minute lesson, have your swing put on video, receive some drills and then finish off hitting balls. You're in and out - almost like a production line of wannabe golfers who are trying to figure out the best way to hit that white ball into that small hole.

During that week of 1997 I had probably my only putting lesson. I can't remember why we did putting, but it was a break from the normal stuff of stance, grip, backswing, swing plane or body pivot. I was always a good putter - I had a short and sharp jab motion and would give the ball a fair rap. When I was on I was able to hole all sorts of putts from all over the place. I didn't miss many short putts - I played them hard, taking all the break out and smashing them into the back of the cup.

On this day the coach told me my stroke was no good. I had to take the putter back "low and slow" and find more rhythm. He told me that none of the good players had short and

sharp putting technique (it's funny how many of the old time players did though) and that I'd have to change if I was going to be any good.

So we spent the 30 minutes on the green trying to find a better stroke. It wasn't too hard and by the end of the lesson he said I had the makings of a better technique.

I used to love practice. I could spend hours doing drills and hitting balls - I was determined to do whatever it took to become a better player. I would do anything the coaches told me. I was the ideal pupil - I did what I was told and never questioned them.

For the rest of the week I spent hours on the local putting green. It was a public course, but they had this amazing golf green for practice. It's no longer there (it made way for a Pro Shop extension) but a heap of the local players would congregate, talking golf, putting and sharing stories. The green was huge and if you were a keen been like me, would keep you entertained for hours.

My stroke was coming along and by the weekend I was confident of performing well in the tournament. I warmed up and made my way to the first tee.

The local course was nothing flash, but it was golf and I felt I should play as much as I should. Their greens were slow, much slower than the practice green I had become comfortable with. And this was the start of my problems ...

... my first putt only traveled half way to the hole. I didn't hit it hard enough. These greens were really slow. 3 putt.

I was also trying hard to implement the new stroke. Low and slow. Low and slow.

By the turn I had had over 20 putts. I was three putting everything and was well and truly out of the tournament. And it was annoying, it was a fairly easy course and I should have been dominating. Then it got worse.

By the 12th I started to feel awful over all the putts. It was a strange and really uncomfortable feeling - I just couldn't take the putter away from the ball, and when I finally managed it, the stroke was horrendous. I was putting like a rank beginner. Didn't hit the hole from 3 foot on 12. Missed another gimme on 13 and three-putted 14 and 15 too. This was a nightmare.

If it wasn't so serious it would have been hilarious. I'm sure my playing partners thought it was funny, but I was in a state of shock. I didn't know what to do.

On 16 (a par 5) I ripped two incredible shots onto the green to 4 feet. The first putt didn't hit the hole and I yipped the second so badly that I thought my body had developed some sort of terrible twitch. I tapped in for an "easy" par and then felt like crying.

“What is going on here?”, I wondered

I had managed to destroy my putting game in a week. Trying to change my stroke was a stupid idea and then practising on a slick green, only to find a slow putting surface for the tournament, was enough to send me over the edge. Instead of thinking about the target and how to plot myself around the course, I was panicking at the thought of having to putt. It was ridiculous and to that point the worst experience I'd ever had on a golf course.

I was a yipper for many years and they certainly dominated my thoughts. I had trouble sleeping and I'd often wake from bad dreams about missed putts and embarrassing myself. At the peak of this infliction, I'd even feel yippy watching other golfers putt - I'd miss a heart beat if I watched a golfer miss a short putt.

It took me years to battle my way out of it. I tried everything from new putters to changing my technique. I putted looking at the hole and with my eyes closed. Nothing worked. In desperation I even putted with a 2 iron in an attempt to short circuit the effects the putting yips had on me.

In 2004 I traveled to the USA and spent some time with Aaron Baddeley - we played at the same golf course in Melbourne and I was one of the few golfers who could give him a run for his money.

Aaron hosted me for a few days and we played some golf and my putting was still a problem. Aaron was already a star - he won the Australian Open as an amateur and backed that up by winning it again the following year as a professional. He was now playing on the PGA Tour and was having some success.

My putting game was still pretty bad. I felt nervous over the short putts and was always happy to avoid 3-putting. Aaron was the opposite - he made everything he looked at and had this uncanny ability to make putting look like it was the simplest skill in the world. I suppose to Aaron it was, he looked at the hole, walked in, got comfortable and then stroked the putt. No fuss. No confusion.

“Aaron, your putting is unbelievable. You make so many putts”

“Thanks Cameron. Do you know who taught me how to putt?”

“No, who?”.

“Cameron, you showed me this putting style when I was 16. I have never changed it and probably never will. It works a treat and feels so comfortable to me”.

I was in shock. I remember helping Aaron around 1995 with some things but I had no idea he was crediting me with helping him turn his putting game from his weakest link to his strongest asset.

“Cameron turned my putting from my weakest link to my strongest asset”

This was the kick in the bum I needed. I almost immediately stopped feeling sorry for myself and starting acting like a kid who could putt. I stopped worrying so much about every single putt and even started accepting the odd miss. I certainly stopped beating myself up about it and went back to doing things I knew worked. Aaron helped me realise that I had the skill, talent and knowledge to be a better putter.

I'm not going to say that my putting game improved immediately, it took a while, but I plugged away at things and bit by bit I became a guy who could make putts that counted.

Back to the 15th hole and that long putt.

I was inspired by Baddeley's putting performance and the fact I was the guy who had showed him the technique that is now described as “look and shoot”. My philosophy is pretty simple...

... look at the hole, get a feel for the putt (including the speed and break) and walk in and hit the ball. There is no room for self-doubt or fear - you are letting your subconscious take over and perform the motion - there is no conscious thought about what you're doing. It can be a little scary but it's exhilarating at the same time - especially when the putts start to go where you want them.

The first putt was around 95 out of 100 in terms of difficulty. But I wasn't about to change my style or attitude because of the complexity of the putt - I went through my normal routine and putted the ball.

When I struck the putt I had an awful moment where I thought I hadn't hit it hard enough. The ball went up the hill and started slowing down considerably before taking the break to the right. It almost looked like it was going to stop. But it didn't. The green was like glass, and the ball kept trundling down the hill and stopped only 6 feet short of the cup. For a putt of over 70 feet, it wasn't a bad effort.

But there was work to do. Adam had scrambled his way to a bogey so I was left with this 6 footer on a stupidly quick green with a decent amount of break to win the hole.

These are the putts that separate the men from the boys. If you can learn to make most of these type of putts you'll maximise your scoring potential. Miss them often, and you'll always be struggling to play consistently and to your handicap. Good players (no matter their handicap) make a lot of these putts - and it was this type of putt that had given me nightmares for many years.

As mentioned, my putting philosophy is simple. It's also easy NOT to do. When the pressure is on golfers tend to change their approach.

- they try too hard
- they steer the ball
- they over-think
- they get away from what works

Again, I committed to doing MY thing and not to waver. This is where courage and commitment comes into play and why so much of the game is mental. It takes trust to put your faith in your subconscious and leave your conscious mind out of it.

I walked into the ball knowing this was an important putt. There was a heap of left-to-right break and it was still a tad downhill. I wanted to make it and completely let myself go.

I was aware I was aiming to the left, but I couldn't tell you how much. I got set, took a peek at the hole as a last second check and then putted the ball.

There is always that uncertainty when you first strike a short putt - is it in or is it missing? I knew I had hit a good putt - it felt nice, with the ball striking the sweet spot. When I looked up I saw the ball traveling on a left-to-right arc and then find the middle of the hole.

I was elated. The putt was pure and it got me back to 2 down with three holes to play.

Adam was now feeling the full brunt of my confidence.

Automatic Golf is the term I used to describe the way I play and coach golf. I walk my talk and think it's unreasonable for any type of coach not to do the same. Teaching and coaching are different. A coach works with you and takes time to understand what it is you want to achieve. A coach is there every step of the way and understands the issues of trying to improve performance. A coach is passionate about what they do.

A teacher just tells you what to do. It's almost textbook - telling each student the same thing day after day. In my mind it's boring and scientific study has shown it to be one of the least effective ways to learn new skills. Is it any wonder that most kids dislike school?

I'm a golf coach and Automatic Golf fits perfectly into my worldview of learning, performance and enjoyment.

It's not a cookie-cutter approach. It's also not an information dump where the student sits in class (or the driving range) and is expected to absorb a tonne of information. Information is only a part of the equation. Getting clients to implement and learn is important. And so is

playing the game and having fun. Golf improvement for so many golfers is nothing short of a tedious and uninspiring activity.

AG is about exploring and moving to the edges of your comfort zone. It might feel normal to be told that your swing is off plane by two degrees, your head is moving too far away from the ball, you're over rotated, you're coming over the ball and your angle of attack is too steep - but is any of this helping you?

A real coach might take the time to understand your goals and why you play golf. They'll almost certainly challenge you to hit some different shots but they won't tell you HOW to do it. They'll push and prod you in the right direction, encouraging you to break habits but they won't bombard you.

It may even feel uncomfortable. You won't be sure. But stick with it and learning will take place. And this happens at the subconscious level, away from the conscious mind. You'll get a breakthrough, a moment of clarity, a better shot or a new sensation that gives you a jolt.

These are the moments that are truly memorable and give us the most satisfaction. Golf is more than your swing technique, and the sooner you're able to move away from technique the better you'll do. There are deeper and more significant experiences that are waiting for you - golf technique is first base at best.

You are so much more than your golf technique. So much.

My path to understanding automatic and natural learning was a different one.

When I first started playing golf I was instinctive and automatic. This was a time when golf was most enjoyable and I was on the fastest learning curve. I could feel myself improving day by day and there was no mystery to this crazy game.

But I got away from this natural way. I went down a technical approach and paid the penalty. I was never happy. My game was a mess and I wasn't sure what to do about it.

A member of my club told me to read *The Inner Game of Golf*. The words in the book came to life and the concept of thinking less and playing more resonated with me. It made sense and I could relate to the stories of golfers who lost their games when they attempted to get technical.

Inner game concepts had me playing better than ever and I couldn't encourage a golfer more strongly to go get a copy. The book is a masterpiece and every golfer should read it.

Sidenote: My mentor and coach, Scott Barrow, is a terrible golfer. He really is but he's a champion coach and has helped me a great deal with my coaching, writing and golf game. Scott has just read *The Inner Game of Golf*. And he loved it. Said it's timeless and way

ahead of its time. So go get a copy if you haven't read it - or read it again if it's on your bookshelf.

The lure of golf improvement and following the status quo is strong and soon enough I'd be back on the wagon, trying to improve my swing and all that goes with that. I was still young and too naive (maybe dumb) to see the errors of my way.

I stumbled around for a few years, doing a bit of this and a bit of that. One day I'd be playing well, hitting the ball, scoring and playing instinctively. The next day I'd try and mimic my previous performance, not understanding that copying a skill is all but impossible. Why do we all try and copy when we MUST create each performance?

My golf swing was still bothering me and I wanted answers. I wanted to know the secrets of the golf swing. I wanted the truth.

Science was the way forward. In 2003 I met a sports scientist who had access to a multi-million dollar research lab. From here, the world's most detailed analysis on the golf swing was born.

The research was full on. The entire body was tested for motion and muscle activity simultaneously - and it was all done in 3D so the scientists could see the swing at the intricate level. If anyone was going to give me the answers to the swing, it was going to be these guys.

From here, I worked with the scientists to decipher the data. My goal was to produce a simple and easy swing model that allowed any golfer, no matter their ability, to swing with power and confidence. The swing model became known as BioSwing.

You may be wondering why I'm now talking about science when just a minute ago I was all over Automatic Golf and natural learning. There is a good reason for all of this...

... the best part of the scientific study was being asked to present the findings to the International Society of Biomechanics in Sport Conference in Canada. I became one of the first non scientists to speak at this event and it was here that I took my learning and understanding to an entirely new level.

Here's what I found.

My presentation was well received and the scientists enjoyed my casual style (I'm not a scientist and I didn't want to compete with those guys), saying it was refreshing to see something a little different.

I do my best work in a social setting and the beers certainly helped (I think they liked my Aussie jokes too). I got to speak with these really smart people at length about golf science, the golf swing and learning. And one thing that repeated itself from these clever scientists

was that “science” is only part of the equation. They encouraged me to keep learning and understanding the swing - but don’t become obsessed by it. The real skill and the future of improvement is in being able to coach it.

A presentation from the Austrian Ski Team really hit home this point. They had devised some really strange drills for their elite ski team to perform during the summer months. Up to this point, skiers had used roller blading for summer training - but it was found, after detailed analysis, that roller blading was hurting performance, not helping.

So the training drills were a way for the skiers to learn something new without complication. As far as the skiers were concerned, they could focus on the training exercises without needing to understand the complexity behind them. It was a perfect win-win and how science should work.

Sadly, the golf world likes to keep things complex. I’ve just received an email from a cricket coach - when he coaches cricket he works with a player’s natural style and focuses on really basic concepts (this is something he says is non-negotiable). He says he gets great results.

When this same coach was playing golf the other day he scored 24 points on the front nine. He let a poor drive rattle him and he spent time during the turn surfing Youtube videos looking for an answer. Not surprisingly, he struggled on the back nine, only getting 11 points. This sort of thing happens all the time.

Golf coaching needs to grow up. We need to get away from this “technical” and “quick-fix” mindset and start working with a better system. It’s broken and needs an overhaul.

Back to the golf course.

I was still 2 down and only three holes to play. But I felt like I was in the box seat. I was riding high and keen to keep the momentum going.

In situations like these it’s easy to get ahead of yourself, to think too much and basically get in your own way. Years of study, research and practice has taught me you have to resist the urge to control the situation - that you’ve got to keep swinging freely and let the swing/motion be controlled at the subconscious level. And it doesn’t matter how nervous or what kind of pressure you feel.

I let rip on 16 tee - found the fairway and pitched the approach to 10 feet. Adam was spiraling out of control - he played conservatively off the tee (a pretty good play in my opinion) but then got way too aggressive with the second, not only flying through the green

but also the bunker behind. He was getting in his own way and over-thinking. He now had an impossible recovery.

He had a poor lie, had to hit up and over a bunker and then attempt to land the ball on a small, hard and incredibly fast green. I didn't give him any chance, the shot was impossible and even Phil Mickelson couldn't get it close - the laws of physics were against him.

Adam took one almighty swipe at the ball, he had nothing to lose and went for the miracle shot. The ball came out high, really high and looked like it would come up short. It didn't. Adam's ball landed an inch over the bunker and was running towards the cup.

It was an amazing shot. I was sitting pretty, thinking I'd soon be only 1 down and heading to the 17th. My heart skipped at least one beat as I watched the ball travel towards the hole. It was moving at good pace, but it was on the perfect line...

... the ball hit the edge of the flag, which killed some of the momentum and finished 15 feet from the hole. It really was an incredible shot, one of the best I'd seen. If his ball was only a fraction more to the right, he would have hit the flagstick square on and maybe made the shot. To finish only a few paces from the cup was still an amazing effort and got him right back in the match.

I couldn't watch his putt. He had putted so well for most of the day, except on 12, and I was sure he'd make it. I forced my mind to stay in the present, I closed my eyes and became aware of all the sounds around the 16th green.

I could hear my breathing and the murmur of the small gallery (about 30 people). I looked up to see Adam's ball on the edge of the hole. It was close, but not in. He had missed. Again.

Two putts from 10 feet for the win is easy. At least it sounds easy. What happens if you get a rush of blood or duff the ground? A few years earlier, when I was yipping badly, I had a putt from 3 feet and hit the ground first. The ball only traveled half way and the next putt wasn't conceded. I thought for all money I'd miss the second putt - I didn't, but it was a very uncomfortable experience.

I stepped up to the ball and played quickly. This was no time to stuff up and get in the way. The ball rolled with dead pace into the middle of the hole. The members let out a cheer, most of them not realising I had two putts to win the hole.

1 down. Two to play.

The 17th is a tight hole. It's actually a classic. You can lay up off the tee to the wider part of the fairway quite easily, but this leaves a longer approach, often from an uneven lie. My play was always to hit a longer shot from the tee and allow a shorter and easier approach.

I nailed my tee shot. I can still recall that pure feeling this shot gave me. When you're under the pump and really want to do well, it's an exhilarating feeling to hit a flush shot. The ball took off down the left of the fairway and drew back to the middle. It was long and only left me 100 metres to the pin.

Adam wasn't so lucky. Once again he played conservatively from the tee, a long iron, but it missed the fairway and found the rough on the right. From here he caught a little "flyer" and the ball ended in the back trap. Like most of the holes on this course, going long is a big no no. Adam would have virtually no chance of getting up and down from that spot - already I was thinking about getting back to square.

My approach to the 17th caused all sorts of mental torture for me. I wasn't sure if I try and hit it close, and snag an easy birdie, or play safe, towards the front of the green and miss the nasty bunker that Adam was in. I figured the worst thing to do would be to follow Adam, so I chose a club I knew wouldn't go long and swung freely.

I miss hit the sand iron slightly and the ball came up a long way short. I was still on the green but had another long putt to work out. Adam was actually closer than me, so I was away.

Long putting is as simple as throwing a ball to someone. If you want to toss an object, you look and react to the target. There is no thought on how hard to throw or any other rubbish. If the target moves, you naturally adjust your radar. There's nothing to it.

And this is how long putting should be. There's no thought on the HOW, just on WHAT you want to do. On the 17th green I had a good look at the putt, made a couple of practice strokes and then walked in and hit the putt. This putt was way easier than the one on 15, it was uphill all the way and almost no break. The ball hit the sweet spot and it rolled up the hill and settled next to the hole. It was never going in, but it was close. Adam, watching from the bunker, conceded the putt and I walked off to the 18th tee.

I was cocky now and knew Adam would have all sorts of trouble matching my par. He was under the pump and facing another tough shot. The back bunker was deep and the green sloped away from him - the pin was cut close, in a sucker position and unless he hit the flag he wouldn't be unable to stop it.

His shot wasn't good. The ball came out hot and raced past the pin. His long putt for par didn't have a chance and the match was square.

I had already teed up my ball on the 18th before he putted and didn't waste any time once the result was known. This was a little act of defiance, ego and control all rolled into one. I was on a roll and I wasn't going to give him any breathing room.

I can only imagine what it's like to lose six straight holes and be standing on the 18th tee all square. Adam had had a putt, albeit a difficult one, to win the match on the 12th green.

That putt only just missed. He hadn't played that well since that hole, mixed in some overly conservative strategy with some stupid stuff. He wasn't hacking his way around the course, but he wasn't playing that well. And he just couldn't find a way to finish me off - he was searching for the one shot or putt that would seal the deal. But it was elusive.

My drive was nothing special on 18. I had reinvented my game a few years earlier by giving up trying to hit my drive as far as possible. For years I'd attempted to hit bullet-straight drives, launching them high into the air and going for as much hang-time as possible.

This never worked so well for me. It seemed I was always struggling and going about things the wrong way. Then one day I had a moment of clarity ...

... driving the ball is every bit as important as putting and the short game. But it's only important if you can get the ball in play. I'm not talking about "hitting fairways" but getting the ball somewhere between the trees. If I was "between the trees" I could advance the ball somewhere towards the green, oftentimes, the rough or fairway bunker wasn't too bad an option. The biggest crime with driving is hitting the ball out of play...

... long rough, the trees, scrub, water or out of bounds. It was here that you really made golf difficult. When I gave myself the entire width of the fairway, plus some of the rough and other areas that weren't completely penal, driving became a whole lot easier.

I can't begin to tell you how important this realisation was to me. Instead of hitting fairways (the fairways hit stat could be the worst in the game) I could swing more freely. My objective was to get the ball "between the trees". I just wanted to be in play.

No longer was driving the ball a great distance the goal. I simply had to get the ball into play and the game would take care of itself. It was at this time I stopped trying to hit the ball straight from the tee, I started playing with a right to left ball flight. Here's the go.

I could aim down the right side of the fairway, pull the trigger and watch the ball start right and then curve back towards the middle. I then had the entire fairway to play with and even the rough on the left. This right-to-left shot was easy for me, something inside my swing DNA made this shot a possible and I could do it time after time.

On a perfect shot the ball would drift a few yards back to the left - to anyone watching it would seem like a dead straight shot.

If I hit the ball straight I was still in play (I never aimed where a straight shot would get me in trouble)

And if the ball over curved, there was a heap of room to play with. A really big slice just didn't happen that often - that would have required a mutant swing, and that was not programed into my system.

The only real problem would have been the double cross - when instead of hitting a fade/slice I'd hit the draw/hook. But again, this was a mutant swing and as long as I swung freely this double cross didn't happen. Over the years I've hit a few really bad drives - I don't think it's possible to get rid of the bad stuff entirely - but it's a rarity. My driving became the very best part of my game and I hit the ball into play a lot more than I missed.

The byproduct of driving this way was hitting the ball longer and straighter than I'd ever hit the ball before. By "straighter" I'm talking about getting the ball to finish on the fairway. By giving myself more room from the tee, I was able to relax and not try so bloody hard. My body responded by performing at its peak more of the time. Even my misses were in much better shape.

And this is what happened on the 18th. As was my way I'd tee the ball up on the left hand side of the tee box and look down the right hand side (this just gave me a better angle). I'd set up with an open stance and then hit the ball without a care in the world - by this stage in my development I'd gotten so good at this shot that the thought of doing anything else wasn't a consideration.

Except this time I hit the ball a fraction high on the clubface and a little on the toe. The ball started out to the right but started curving more quickly to the left. The drive was a lot higher than normal and I thought for a moment that it could end up in the trees further left.

But it didn't. Because of the angles I'd created the ball came down softly on the left edge of the fairway. It wasn't the longest or best drive, but the ball was in play.

Can you see how important this is? By playing with your natural shot from the tee you're giving yourself an advantage. Essentially, you're at least doubling the size of your target area and this makes the game so much easier. Adopt this strategy over a year and I'll guarantee your game will change for the better - use it for a lifetime and you'll become an excellent driver of the golf ball, getting the ball into play the vast majority of the time.

When this happens you **MUST** become a better golfer. You'll be putting for more birdies and pars and there will be a significant reduction in penalty shots. Golf simply becomes far simpler and easier when you're hitting your second shot from between the trees.

Adam's drive was better than mine. In fact, considering all that was going on, it was a beauty. Nobody would have been surprised if he hit a snap hook or a wicked slice and lost the plot. He didn't, the guy was showing some ticker.

The 18th green is a two tired green and the hole was located on the back middle. It was a fair hole location, with many more treacherous options available. I still remember the shot clearly to this day - I had 127 metres to the pin and I selected the sand iron. I was pumped up and wanted to swing hard. This was no time to stuff about and try a shot I wasn't comfortable with. When under the pump I played best when I swing loose and hard. So this was the plan.

Without any mucking around or fiddling with my swing, I stepped up to the ball and swung hard. The goal was to start the ball left of the pin and then draw it back to the target (have you noticed that I fade by driver and draw my iron? This is a quirky part of my game). It's hard to get too much curve on the shorter irons and the ball stayed out to the left. The highlight was making good contact and seeing the ball fly all the way to the back tier - I was pin high, 25 feet from the hole.

“Over to you Adam”, was my thought. I did what I needed to do. I was on the green and in good shape. The pressure was now on him. He then did something I wasn't expecting...

... his approach was from 115 metres and he hit a great shot. It sailed high into the air and had eyes for the pin. It was an awesome shot and when it came down it settled not far from the cup, about 6 feet.

There was a roar from his team, in fact, there was applause from everyone who saw it. The guy was taking a beating and he somehow stood up to what was going on. It was a brilliant shot from a guy who could certainly play the game.

I was focused but Adam's shot gave me a jolt. I didn't want to come all this way and lose the match on the last. Now things were in his favour, I had to get back to work.

There is no doubt that much of playing good golf when you're under pressure is to stay calm and focused on what you want. At its simplest form, this is the perfect mental routine. But how many of us can do it? We get distracted and lose the plot.

And I certainly was captain of that team for a long time. I had hardly ever played to my potential (except when I was just starting out) and spend years in the golfing doldrums. Just when I thought I was under control, I'd make a dumb mistake (or a series of mistakes) and let the good round slip through my fingers. If I'm honest, I knew I was fragile and tried to hide behind a false level of bravado and a strong practice ethic. But I was hopeless, mentally weak and not ready to play golf to my best level.

But now was different. On that last green I was calm and focused my mind on the objective:

“Roll the ball into the hole”.

That's all I had to do and I didn't get in my way or let the situation get the better of me. It's almost like you're robotic, but you still get to feel and hear all the everything around you.

- the beating heart
- the adrenaline flowing through the body
- the excited murmur from the gallery
- your thoughts and emotions

But none of these affect you negatively. They make you stronger and you harness the energy that comes from it. This is how you play better under pressure, not worse.

I looked at my putt from behind the ball. My good mate was standing inline with the ball and hole. I gave him a thumbs up signal, walked in and stroked the putt...

... there was no fear. There was no apprehension. There was certainly no sign of a yip. I stroked the putt like it was any other. It felt good.

When I looked up the ball was well on its way. It rolled beautifully on the manicured surface, hugging the bent grass. Time seemed to stand still. There was silence - it was almost like it was just me and the ball and nothing else mattered.

I wasn't worried about my score or the crowd. I watched the ball excitedly as it made its way to the hole.

I have never liked the saying, "it never looked like missing" because it's over used, especially by golf commentators who can't think of anything more intelligent to say. They (commentators) are experts in hindsight. It's a dumb saying because we've all hit putts that "never look like missing" but somehow, at the last instant they take a hop or a bad bounce and somehow defy physics and miss the hole. I suppose it's the beauty of golf, we're never sure until the ball actually finds the bottom of the hole.

The putt stayed on the right edge of the hole for most of the journey. To the untrained eye it would look for certain that the putt would drift further right and miss the hole. The 18th green was subtle and the putt never did what you thought - as it slowed down it moved to the left and went right into the hole.

What happened next is a blur. There was lots of cheering and I was elated but also conscious that there was still more golf to be played. Adam still had a very makable putt that would square the match. I still remember thinking that, "I now can't lose".

Adam was deliberate - taking his time and checking the putt from all sorts of angles. It was a tough putt - really quick and deceptive too. It looked for certain that it must move to the left. But it wouldn't. It was almost dead straight.

Adam settled into his routine, took a look at the hole and then stroked the putt. It was moving slowly, he barely breathed on it and it trickled towards the hole. It missed. The putt stayed out to the right - it hugged the right edge of the hole but it didn't drop.

I had won the match. It was the defining point in my golf career. I felt that I was now a golfer and I had realised my dream of playing my best golf under pressure.

That win made up for a lot of disappointment.

Losing my natural game by trying to implement swing technique that didn't suit me.

The hours of frustration, the tears, of working hard at something but getting worse.

All those bad rounds.

The fear and self-doubt that riddled my body.

The pain and annoyance of following a system that didn't work

The following week there was a repeat performance of sorts. I defeated a very good golfer on his home course, sinking a 10 foot putt on the last green for victory. I knew I had taken the step from keen golfer, to one who could play the game in all sorts of situations.

Those two weeks were defining for me. It was validation that I could play the game and that my coaching ideas and thoughts on playing golf were correct.

The last eight years have been the best of my career. I've unlocked a consistent and enjoyable golf game. And I've done it without spending hours on the practice fairway or the need to tweak my game. In fact, I hardly need to practice - playing golf is all the practice I need.

The greatest thrill is driving to the course and having some sort of knowing that I'll be able to play near my potential. There's still the ups and downs, but there's nothing so extreme. Golf gives me way more satisfaction and I'll walk from the course with more energy than when I started. Golf holds little mystery and it's hard to express the enjoyment and satisfaction that this brings...

My most satisfying achievement has come from sharing my story with golfers from all over the planet. Most golfers are just like me, they love the game and want to find a way of playing better golf more of the time. Most struggle with the game and the heartache comes from not understanding our learning system and how skills should be performed. So we get frustrated and end up on what I call the "golf instruction merry-go-round".

But there's light at the end of the tunnel. We have to think less about our swing and technique and focus more on playing the game. This is a fundamental shift that can be scary, it goes against the norm and this can be uncomfortable. But in my mind, it's the only way forward.

At the start of this document there's a question, "Cameron, how can you help me?".

My answer? I'm different from most coaches. I understand golf swing science at the intricate level, but I'm not obsessed by it. Swing instruction is only a small part of the game. What's more important is getting a client to work within the constraints of his learning system - to not bombard and make golf improvement too difficult. I like golfers to go deeper inside themselves and find their true swing and technique. Oftentimes the golfer will surprise themselves with what comes out.

I help golfers play their best golf by using the perfect blend of science, biomechanics and natural learning. I make golf improvement no harder than riding a bike or driving a car. It's natural learning that works with your system and not against.

For the last 10 years I feel I've made golf improvement as simple as it can be. I'm not interested in swing fads or the latest gimmicks. You won't see any of these types of products on my site - I don't touch them.

I'd love for you to go away and explore the art of the possible - to play golf your way and have some fun golf. I'd be thrilled if you could write to me and tell me that you've had a breakthrough and that you've found something more meaningful than a long drive or some handicap goal (your handicap really is a stupid number).

Or maybe you'll find something else. Whatever it is it doesn't matter, as long as you have fun and keep learning. The fact is that only a very small population of golfers glean from the game anywhere near the enjoyment that's on offer. We're all too caught up in the distractions and interruptions that are swing theories and quick-tips (it's the golf industry's fault!).

In recent times I've focused my time and energy into my [Letter](#). I pour my heart into it each month and only send it to my VIP subscribers. I'm only interested in working with serious golfers who are passionate about the game and are not looking for any type of miracle cure. Miracle cures don't exist.

To make a shift with your golf game requires little more than a conscious decision to do so. You've got to leave the old-fashioned and outdated quick fix methodology behind and replace it with something that has been shown to work time and time again.

There's really no extra work or practice you need to do. In fact, you'll probably work less on your game and get better results.

Please consider the following very carefully....

What would happen to your golf game if you made the same mental shifts that I made?

Think about that for a second. What would it be like to play more consistently and with more enjoyment?

If you no longer had to keep up with the latest technology or swing theory or new gimmick, what would that do for you?

How do you think you'd view golf then? What would it be like to play how you really know you can? Do you think golf would be more enjoyable and meaningful if you could stop the tweaking and constant fixing?

You bet it would!

Please note that I'm not talking about making you a scratch golfer or getting you shooting record scores each time. It's about unlocking *your* best inner game for your talent, dedication and commitment. This is far more meaningful than a quick-tip or some false promise you can read in many magazines or internet sites.

I've given you a snapshot into a different way. A system of playing golf that is just that - "playing golf". It leads to a level of mastery that very few golfers ever get to experience. I challenge the norm and get you thinking differently about golf and the learning process. But it works and helps you unleash that inner golfer that you know is inside you.

I truly hope you get to find *your* own level of mastery. Good luck.

Cameron Strachan

P.S. If you'd like to join my VIP list and get the Cameron Strachan Letter sent to your door each month (plus lots of bonus goodies) then head to;

www.CameronStrachanLetter.com