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competition preparation

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Often it will take a golfer a few holes to settle into their round. They only start warming up and finding their groove by the second or third hole they play. The first tee shot can often be a bit wayward, which can be both demoralising and unsettling.

When the first putt doesn't drop it is easy to conclude that the putts just aren't going to go your way and today is just not going to be your day! The aim of this article is to provide some ideas on how to approach each round in a way that will maximise your chances of a consistent and sustainable performance from the beginning of the round through to the last putt on the 18th.

To give yourself the best chance of achieving your golfing potential and performing consistently it makes sense to develop and implement a Competition Plan - a protocol to follow that allows you to feel good and ready to go from the start of the round through to the end of the round! In this article we will explore basic strategies and techniques that will help you attain the right frame of mind to play your best golf throughout four key competition phases:

1. Day before competition
2. Night before competition
3. Morning before competition
4. Warm-up

Day before competition:

Practice rounds are key, they are your rehearsal period and particularly useful if you haven't ever played the competition course or you haven't played the competition course recently. A key objective of a practice round is to establish a solid game plan – a clear idea of how best to play each hole. It is useful to use the practice round to gauge hazards and traps in relation to the distance you play to, experiment with potential chips, bunker shots, putting positions and so on. Identify those holes you could take a chance with and those you will always respect. I encourage my golfers to take the time to look at each hole backwards. It is amazing how much information you can glean from this simple check.





Example Night before competition checklist

The night before competition	
Check start time	
Do a final equipment check - check relevant clubs / clean clubs / iron clothes	
Buy sandwich / snack / water / bananas	
Review game plan - be clear about Chance and Respect holes	
Prepare yardage book (write out competition goals)	
Spend 5 minutes visualising self successfully playing each tee shot	
Spend 5 minutes visualising yourself living the competition goals you have set	
Relax - TV / Book / Magazine/ iPod / Playstation	
Plan for 8 hours sleep	

Where possible plan to walk the course backwards, starting at the 18th hole. You will be surprised at how much additional information you pick up walking the course in reverse. You should leave your practice round feeling that you understand the course and how to play each hole. Preparing like this helps to ensure a feeling of readiness and control and so confidence on the day.

Night before competition:
It is useful to identify a routine you can engage in the night before competition that will help ensure you are mentally ready and prepared

in the morning of the competition. This routine could include a start time check, an equipment check - balls, tees, glove, waterproofs, towel etc. Check your equipment is clean and that you have a sandwiches, snacks, water etc for during the round. These checkpoints are all small organisational checks but they can all make a huge impact on your round if you don't get them right!

It can be useful to review your game plan the night before the competition to consolidate the information you drew out of your practice round or the last time you played the course. You can

use this time to write out the competition goals you have set yourself for the day e.g. "to play one shot by one shot," "to commit to my pre-shot routine," "to commit to positive and constructive thinking throughout the round."

You can spend a few minutes using imagery - perhaps seeing yourself successfully playing that first tee shot or a hole that is particularly tricky. (For further information on visualisation see my 'Imagery' article, *EAT GOLF!* Issue 8 - available on-line at www.fairwaylife.com). It can also be useful to review positive experiences, perhaps from

your last practice session, practice round, a recent competition or the last time you played on this particular course. Review your mental library of good shots, positive experiences, achievements and so on. These practices will all work to enhance your confidence and help you feel ready!

Morning before competition:
Most of us have our wake up routines established. We know how much time we ideally need to wake up, get showered etc. Key points here are that you leave enough time to travel to the venue and complete your ideal warm up

before you tee off (see below) and that you fuel yourself correctly by eating an appropriate breakfast. To get your mind in the right gear you can also use this time to complete a thought control check, perhaps whilst you are in the car on the way to the event - "Am I thinking in a useful, constructive and helpful way?" - If I am great, if not lets CHOOSE to direct my thoughts through a more useful pathway. (For further information on self talk see my 'Thought Control' article in *EAT GOLF!* Issue 5).

It can be useful to drive slowly to the course, thus setting your

tempo for the day. Using music can be a good way to psych yourself up or relax yourself. The type of music to use will vary from person to person because music is very unique to the individual. If you find a piece of music or an album that works for you keep a copy in your car so that you can play it on the way to a competition. You could also use this time to review your competition goals.

Warm Up:
Establish a warm up that suits you and allows you to step up to the first tee feeling ready and good to go. You will need to practice this routine so that you become comfortable and familiar with it.

Identify how much time you should spend on the driving range, chipping, putting etc. Reflect on the content of your warm-up. Are there any specific practices that suit you? e.g. finishing with the club you know you will tee off with, playing your clubs in a certain order, rehearsing the first three holes by imaging them etc. Once you have identified a warm up that suits you build it into your routine and Competition Plan.

Ensure you arrive at the competition venue with plenty of time to complete this warm-up. Prepare and practice a reduced version of this warm up to cater for unexpected time delays.

Conclusion
Taking the time to figure out an approach to competition that suits you and helps you to attain the right frame of mind is a worthwhile exercise. Devise a competition plan that allows you to approach competition in a way that will maximise your chances of a more consistent and sustainable performance.

