

Keep Thinking

By S. MAX MCCREADY
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How do I prepare myself mentally for a game against a leading American? What mental state am I in before and during the game? These are questions I have been asked, and the answers throw some light on the vital difference between the amateurs of Britain and of America.

To play any game in the highest class, we know, requires months of physical and mental practice. Both are equally im-

portant and results are never attained without a perfect balance between the two. In actual competition, I contend that the amateurs of my country are as good strikers of the golf ball as our friends across the sea. How, then, do we come unstuck? I am convinced,

without a shadow of a doubt, on the mental attitude toward the game.

The best example of this perfect balance must surely be an old friend, Willie Turnesa; and if any of our young hopefuls wish to attain the highest honors in golf, then I advise them to study his methods at all opportunities and from all angles. That inscrutable little man, tuned up to perfection from the moment he steps up on the first tee, completely oblivious to all his surroundings, never relaxes his grip on himself for one moment. How many of us can say in this country that we have approached a tournament in a like state of mind? To play against such a man and to feel that tenacity of purpose spreading itself all around makes



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one realize that hitting and hoping will never get us very far. Willie is not alone in his attitude to golf; each and every American amateur has schooled himself in this phase of the game, some to a greater, some a lesser but all to a necessary extent.

Firstly, then, it is of vital importance that the mental side of the game is developed to as great an extent as the physical before the tournament begins.

What about during the actual playing of the game? Here again the state of mind plays a vital part. Destructive shots are a direct result of mental lethargy. How can they be otherwise? The same swing that has been hitting the ball bullet-like to the pin is not suddenly going to collapse and cause the ball to fly off at an angle. The answer is that for one vital second the mind is removed from the task in hand and the shot is played from memory.

I can give a perfect example of this during the 1950 Amateur at St. Andrews. I was locked in mortal combat with big Bill Campbell and, as I thought, about to eliminate him, having arrived at the 18th green dormie one. Both on the green in two good shots, I was left, Bill having missed his putt, with two putts for the match from nine yards. As I bent over the ball, having lined up the putt to the best of my ability, I suddenly thought "My goodness, I'm hungry!" In the middle of this terrible thought, I knocked the putt exactly halfway to the hole. From that moment the result was never in doubt and I was soundly beaten at the 19th.

There it is, the answer to so many of our lost games, the loss of control at the vital moment, the direct result of lack of mental practice. Until such time as our leading golfers can tune the mind to last out the game, the edge will always be against us.

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