

Nerves in Golf Can be Cured

By CHARLES BROOK

When the master and the average player have acquired their respective standards of control of clubs and ball, there remains yet another control to be acquired, one that lies outside the province of the teaching professional and outside the scope of the professional who writes his book on the game.

Unfortunately, as yet, no effective guidance has been given towards the attainment of this other control, the overcoming of the adverse effect of "occasions."

For this enterprise, photographs, illustrations and practice, however assiduous, are of no avail. Even the American remedy of constant participation in tournaments is quite inadequate. What, you will say, can anyone do about "nerves" except to keep fit, exert one's will and hope for the best? Let us see.

In the past the best we contemplated to give us some measure of mastery of ourselves in times of "occasion pressure" has been some process of conscious self-discipline. Unfortunately, any conscious procedure carried out when the attack of nerves is pending or in operation has two serious defects: namely, it involves splitting the attention between the play and the nerves and it directs attention to the adverse condition within us which is the one thing adverse conditions must thrive upon, our unwilling attention to them.

When dealing with an attack of nerves, a first essential is to take the attention away from them. Hence any conscious procedure carried out at the time of a nerve attack is inappropriate. Those who have sought to overcome the situation by efforts of will are made to realize that, even where current success is attained, the exhaustion of nervous reserves is such

NEW MEMBERS OF THE USGA

REGULAR

- Augusta Country Club, Va.
- Bainbridge Country Club, Ga.
- Bassett Country Club, Va.
- Beauclerc Country Club, Fla.
- Columbia Golf and Country Club, N. Y.
- El Monte Golf Club, Utah
- Flora Country Club, Ill.
- Gilman Hot Springs Men's Golf Club, Cal.
- Great River Country Club, N. Y.
- Langley AFB Golf Association, Va.
- Memphis Navy Golf Course, Tenn.
- Pomona Country Club, Cal.
- Sterling Country Club, Colo.

ASSOCIATE

- Mountain Manor Inc. Golf Club, Pa.

that the temporary success is followed by a collapse, worse than that originally threatened, in the next or subsequent rounds.

As an approach to the problem let us examine how "occasions" produce "nerves" and see if we can ascertain through this channel the essentials for preventing their recurrence.

Whether "occasions" inspire us to achievement or reduce us to near impotence is found to depend on what we expect of them. By "expect," we mean a spontaneous and involuntary attitude of mind. If our expectation is such that we are confident, then we may well derive inspiration to high achievement. If our expectation is doubtful or apprehensive, then we shall start to exaggerate the importance of the occasion and develop a concept of the demands it makes of us that soon sets up a conviction that we are going to do badly, an expectation only too surely realized.

Reprinted from Golf Monthly, Edinburgh, Scotland, March, 1950.

The impulse to doubt and to be anxious has been ceaselessly encouraged by past experience and has attained its allotted place in the spontaneous and habitual thinking of most of us.

How "Expectation" Arises

How does this "expectation" arise and what establishes it? Can we successfully imitate a procedure that will produce the expectations we desire in place of those built into us by experience? These are surely the all-important questions on which freedom from "nerves" is going to depend.

It is found that, when an idea becomes fixed in the habitual part of the mind, it arises at the appropriate stimulus and insists on its own fulfilment. Such ideas are spontaneous and involuntary and, where they concern internal conditions, show they possess the power to take charge of our internal machinery to produce performance and conditions that constitute the fulfilment of the idea so fixed in the habitual part of the mind. Change the fixed idea and you get a change to performance and conditions that represent the fulfilment of the new fixed idea. These fixed ideas set up expectations of their own fulfilment through which the reactions are set up that realize these expectations. The chain is, therefore: fixed idea, expectation, realization.

Molding Spontaneous Thought

Now what makes an idea become one that we think spontaneously? How have those, already established in us by experience, been so entrenched? They become embedded in the habitual part of our minds by frequent repetition under conditions that by-pass our conscious thought and call for no conscious participation in the process. They become spontaneous when the pressure of the idea to be fixed has been maintained sufficiently to drive out conflicting fixed ideas, if any. A very simple example is that of the catchy tune in the musical show that is repeated cunningly through the whole entertainment and finally we go away humming it to ourselves. It has

become spontaneous. Note it has made its way into the habitual parts of our minds quite without our conscious minds having taken any active part in the process. Again and again it has been presented to our ears and has been, so to speak, imbibed by us just as a good advertisement is absorbed gradually and makes us a customer. No reasons, no arguments, none of the paraphernalia of argument and persuasion of the conscious mind. No facts and figures, no records and expert opinions. Just the reiteration that avoids the active attention of our conscious thought. To secure adequate pressure, much time has to be allowed by the advertiser, but a technique that uses sleep for this process of molding spontaneous thought is able to bring the time factor to practicable proportions.

By a technique that fulfills the above requirements, it is now possible to imitate successfully the process by which fixed ideas become established and so to replace an undesired spontaneous reaction to "occasions" by the desired confident reaction. This confident reaction takes for granted the successful fulfilment of the stroke planned and the player, having selected his club, taken his stance and visualized the shot he intends to play, takes no further conscious interest in the matter and leaves the execution of the stroke to that trained habitual part of him into which his professional has so diligently inculcated the technique of club and ball control. Under the changed conditions, his acquired skill is allowed full play, free from the former anxious interference accompanying fruitless efforts to improve on the smooth habitual ability so earnestly attained with the aid of his professional.

With this change of expectation to confidence, the confident reaction to "occasions" becomes automatic and a matter of routine and tends to make "occasions" inspire the spontaneously confident player to new standards of achievement. The adverse action of our imaginations becomes reversed into favorable supporting conduct. What we wish and what we expect begin to coincide.