

Mental game

Transform your performance in competitive rounds by learning how to control your levels of intensity with Golf Monthly's new mental coach, Gary Leboff



I work with a lot of sportsmen and women. One of the great benefits of helping such a wide variety of talented athletes is that it allows me to transport techniques across all sports.

There is one other major advantage. Comparing the mindsets of world-class performers enables me to pinpoint what works in some sports and what should be avoided like the plague in others.

One area that always pays dividends is intensity. I guarantee there is nothing – and I mean nothing – that will produce a faster, more dramatic improvement on your scorecard than learning how to use intensity to your advantage.

Before I explain further, consider, What IS the biggest question in golf?

Surprisingly, it isn't, "How can I get my handicap down?" Nor is it, "Should I spend more time on my long or my short game?" It's not even (though this comes up an awful lot on tour), "How the hell do I beat Tiger?"

No, the biggest question is this: "Why do I play better in practice than in competition?"

Whenever I meet a new client from any sport, I always ask them first, "Between one and 10, at what level of intensity do you perform at your best?"

Boxers had better be a 10. Boxing is war and anyone who enters the ring with a lower intensity level will be face down on the canvas before the end of round one.

Footballers always get it wrong. Whenever I ask them to assess their personal level of intensity, most declare (especially if they are showing off in front of team mates) that they are definitely a 10. Not so. Anyone playing at that level of intensity would go flying into knee-high tackles straight from the kick-off. The infamous 2006 World Cup match between Portugal and Holland (four players sent off, eight more booked) was a textbook example of over-intensity. My footballers play at an intensity level of 7 or 8.



Please give some thought to these questions:

A. Think back to the best round you ever played. Out of 10, what level of intensity best describes you on that day. Were you tense or relaxed? Calm or determined? Pumped up or chilled?

B. Now think of a round that went badly, preferably one played in competition. Out of 10, what level of intensity best describes you on that occasion?

The two figures should tell you a great deal. I want my players to operate at a level of around 3 or 4. Even in the heat of a Ryder Cup, intensity levels should be no more than a 5.

Few amateurs realise that preparation begins 12-18 hours before a ball is struck. Long before you get to the course, you need to generate the level of intensity that will allow you to excel.

Creating your perfect intensity score is a subtle process. I suggest you develop your own mixture using a number of ingredients. For instance:

A. Music – avoid heavy metal or thumping drum n' bass. AC/DC may be a great band but you need to find music that will generate calmness and an inner state of peace.

B. Driving – this can be an intense activity. Go 5mph slower than normal on your way to the course.

C. Eating – never rush food before playing. Relax your metabolism by pausing between mouthfuls.

D. Emotional balance – arguments are a major source of intensity. Avoid rows before playing at all costs if you want to play well. If you have to, just give in.

Intensity creates stress which leads to muddled thought, tightened muscles and quadruple bogeys. If you really want to answer the greatest question in golf – get to work on your intensity.

Gary's book *Dare* – a life-coaching book that includes plenty of golf tips – is published by Hodder Mobeus and is on sale for £10.99. You can email him at gary.leboff@virgin.net.