

The Mental Game

Otherwise known as

The Truth about Consistency

I promised myself that I would keep these articles “bite size” so that nobody got bored. But this is a huge subject and there is a lot to say about it so no guarantees about this article.

Jerry Briesath says that if you have been playing pool competitively for 5 years you already know how to shoot well. As well as many higher rated players. So why after 5 years do you look at your game and see very little improvement? You can make a great bank, run 6 balls in a row, and then duff an easy shot and your opponent runs out. You know you are the better player but you keep losing matches. Why does this happen? Why are we so inconsistent?

The answers to these questions are simple. The solutions on the other hand are anything but. Consistency has nothing to do with your ability, your equipment, or the table. Consistency doesn't change with the amount you practice. The problem with consistency is literally, all in your head. Our brains get in the way. It doesn't matter what the sport, the physical part of the game is about 10%. The mental part is about 90%. 90%!!!! That's huge. The road to be a professional athlete is littered with people who had all the physical attributes to be superstars but lacked the mental acuity. On the other side, we see people who lack the physical size required to play professional sports but because they had the right mental game they were still able to achieve great things. Muggsy Boggs, 6' tall played in the NBA. Doug Flutie was an all-star quarterback at Boston College. They said he was too small for the pros. He played more than ten seasons. Then there is Alvan Davis, All-star second baseman for the Seattle Mariners. He said he wasn't the best player in high school or in college. There was always someone overshadowing him throughout his career. He kept on working and playing. None of those other players made it to the pros. 90% mental!!!! To compound our problem, we can divide that mental part into two different parts again. Conscious and subconscious. Conscious being the things we can control, subconscious being all the things we can't. The subconscious is like a huge database and records how to do things automatically, things like heartbeat, blood pressure, etc. We trust that it does all those things without us thinking about it. Your subconscious is about 30,000 times more reliable than your conscious mind. Where we get in trouble with our pool is when we play with our conscious mind. As Dave Sapoli of Deadstroke University says, “Your conscious mind is a bad pool player.” It takes in all the distractions and negativity and puts doubt in your brain. We sabotage ourselves. The solution, we have to train ourselves in such a way so that things become automatic and we play more with the subconscious part of our brain. This isn't always an easy thing to learn. For one thing, when we get pressured, excited, or frustrated, we have a tendency to revert back to the way we are comfortable with, the way we've

always done it. You have to learn to trust your subconscious. You have way too much to analyze on the table to have to worry about stroke mechanics. We need to trust our ability. Our subconscious knows what to do, we just have to let it play. Here's how we make that happen.

First off. If you don't have a good stroke, you won't improve, and your consistency will be terrible. Remember I said consistency didn't change with the amount of practice you did. Let me qualify that. Consistency will not improve if you don't practice...the right drills. The mother drills are a set of drills designed to perfect your stroke. They are covered in another article so in essence of time we won't go back over them here. We do them to get the proper stroke into the subconscious.

Next. We need a pre-shot routine. The pre-shot routine is the trigger that tells your subconscious it's time to play. We do the same thing every time we get to the table. This transitions us into that subconscious mode. Just doing this one thing will increase your consistency. This is what we all want. It also allows us to focus, clear our minds, and create a systematic approach. During our PSR, what we don't want is wasted motion, wasted actions, wasted thoughts, or wasted energy. So here is what a pre shot routine should look like.

1. Trigger, walk to the table and do something to signal you are going into your PSR. This could be chalking your cue, counting the steps to walk around the table, anything that tells you you've started.
2. Assess-Look at the table and figure what you want to do. What ball to shoot, where is the cue ball going. Where is my run out.
3. Pick a small target-This is where you want the object ball to go. Chose where in the pocket you want it. The smaller the better.
4. Visualize-This is tough. When I played basketball I was told to visualize the ball going in the hoop. See your shot and the object ball going into the pocket.
5. Align your shoot
6. Stroke the ball.

A final word on the mental game. Pressure. Many people don't like playing in front of other people or when there is a championship on the line. This fear is natural but again, it's all in your head. It's still just the same game you played before. In the movie Hoosiers, Gene Hackman coached a group of teenage misfits to the state basketball championship. When they got to the gym he pulled out a tape measure and measured the height of the basketball rim. He looked at the tape measure and said, "Hmm." Looking back at his mystified team he smiled mischievously and then said, "These hoops are exactly 10 ft high. Same as ours back home." He was telling his team it was just another game, it didn't matter where it was.

Use your pre-shot routine to focus and get to that subconscious mind. Trust your subconscious. Tune out the minutia. It'll make you more consistent.