

## **My Mind - Friend or Foe?**

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Fear of the unknown happens to everyone at some point in their lives. Bowling in front of your home town crowd; bowling against your idol; and bowling against what you have been told are the best players in the world, creates fear - fear of the unknown, some might even call it anxiety or apprehension. Your hands shake, sweat, and get cold. You feel nervous, can't remember things, make technical errors, mental and physical preparation abandon you or resemble the slightest distinction of a thought and your overall performance has you talking to yourself. You have a general discomfort that dominates everything else including your overall game plan to becoming a champion.

Research shows that these physical reactions are the same for fear, anger and excitement. It's your mind that determines how you react to the various stimuli while standing, observing, playing (post and pre game time) and walking off the lanes after a shot. The great Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu (399-295 BC) said, "When an archer is shooting for nothing, he has all his skill. If he shoots for a brass buckle, he is already nervous. But if he shoots for a gold ring, he goes blind or sees two targets - He is out of his mind!: Realize this about the archer - YOU. Your skill has not changed. But the prize, the competition and your emotions divide you. You care. You think more of winning than of making the shot. And the need to win drains you of power.

Training your brain how to think during a competition is an important skill to learn and learning to believe in what you trained your brain to think is also an important skill. Learning and believing that no one shot is more important than the first one you deliver is important. Learning and believing that the most important shot of a 300 game is not the last one delivered, but the first one thrown. Learning and believing what you tell yourself before and while you perform greatly influences the quality of your performance. Learning and believing that every shot your deliver is important, whether it's a strike or spare. Learning and believing that before your walk out on the competition floor, remind yourself that you have trained in the most effective way you know and now is the time to trust what you've learned. Learn and believe, you can always improve, but right now for this tournament, you have done the best you can to get ready.

Remember you have trained for so long, you no longer have to worry or be concerned about your mechanics, physical adjustments or different methods of delivering the shot - your body knows what to do. When you perform, you can trust your muscle memory to do most of the work for you. No effort or thought is required to bring back all that you have trained.

Single out just one aspect of your performance that you want to focus on. Think about this, not when you are performing, but before you step up on the approach. Some people, for instance, might want to think about a solid stance or the grip of the ball. Others might want to concentrate on their balance at the foul line or height of their follow through. Choosing more than one item to consider, however, would only burden your ability to concentrate, so choose carefully and stay focused to the thought you've created.

Once your competition starts, do not judge yourself as you are performing, it's something you can do later. Simply observe it without verbal description. When you are about to make the shot, for example, do it with commitment and dedication and then feel it as you are doing it. There is nothing verbal about this process. It's all about feel and self talk.

Do not think about how the crowd is reacting to your play, either. Worrying about what your teacher/instructor or family is thinking further removes you from the moment at hand and your performance - another distraction that will take away your ability to concentrate on what's going on in the present and staying focused to the task at hand - making the shot.

Finally, enjoy! Yes enjoy what you are doing. Don't forget that your performance is the time when you can finally share what you have trained so hard to learn and believe. This is a time for gratification and not a time for correcting errors or other faults. Competitors tend to be too self-critical in performance. Your place of training is the place for that. Competition is the time for celebrating your skills - mentally and physically.