

# SIDELINES

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# RELLAY

## Finding excellence through training of mind not just body

An athlete sits in his room, eyes closed, picturing himself approaching the 18th green as the large gallery gathered for the tournament begins to cheer. He steps up and sinks a perfect 20-foot putt to win the tournament.

A daydream? A child's fantasy? Nope. It's serious athletic training, which someday could become as important as practicing chipping and putting techniques, says Stephen Eiring, a private consultant in the field of mental training in athletics.

"What happens is that if they (the athletes) have a real keen feeling sense of the image while they are having this experience (with imagery), then they are also training their physiology to reproduce that movement much easier when they are out actually doing it," Eiring says of using imagery.

"Imagery is a training program; it's a physical conditioning program because it affects the nervous system.

"What's happening when you are having an image, neuro-muscular signals are being sent to all the muscles that are necessary to actually, physically create that movement but the signals are at a very low amplitude... so you can train in your mind while you are off the course."

Eiring uses "inner training" techniques such as imagery focusing and hypnosis to help his clients increase their body awareness and consistently reach their peak performances, whether it be for golf, tennis or even schoolwork and creative writing.



Stephen Eiring

The 31-year-old Eiring started his mental training consulting business about a year ago, just six months after he finished working for another firm that "had become quite well known in the field of consulting athletes in the inner game," Eiring says.

His former employer, Sports Enhancement Associates, formerly based in Eugene, received much national attention for helping professional golfer Peter Jacobsen with his game.

Eiring worked as an apprentice for Sports Enhancement for about a year. The company decided the Eugene weather wasn't conducive to their business of working mostly with golfers and decided to move on, but Eiring decided to stay and use his background to start his own business.

In the past, he has taught meditation, focusing and, for the last three years, has been working with imagery. Eiring also is certified in neurolinguistic programming using hypnosis.

Currently, Eiring is working on his master's thesis in transpersonal psychology: "It's emphasis is on optimum states of peak performance in both creativity and athletics," Eiring says.

And for Eiring and his students, the bottom line is peak performance. Essentially, he says, his program helps athletes in several ways:

- It reminds people of their potential, using imagery and hypnosis.
- It teaches them techniques so they can culture and maintain their peak performance.
- It assists people in designing and becoming self-sufficient so that they can trust themselves and have tools that allow them to self-correct.

Problems ranging from inconsistency in performance to loss of confidence or even "choking" have brought athletes to Eiring, and he uses various mixes of his mental training "tools" to help them get back to a level of peak performance.

Eiring says he tries to help clients believe that "playing well is very easy. I think most of them know that playing, whether they're sports or they're performing arts, that when you are at your peak, it's completely easy and natural; there is a flow and fluidity about it, and there isn't trying involved."

Trying hard, although it is ingrained in our culture, is counter-productive, Eiring says. And the tightness that comes when the pressure is on can be self-defeating.

"When you are attached to the outcome whether you are a golfer or whether you are a newspaper writer — when too much is riding on the quality of your work — you start to feel pressure and you start to doubt whether you can do it," Eiring says.

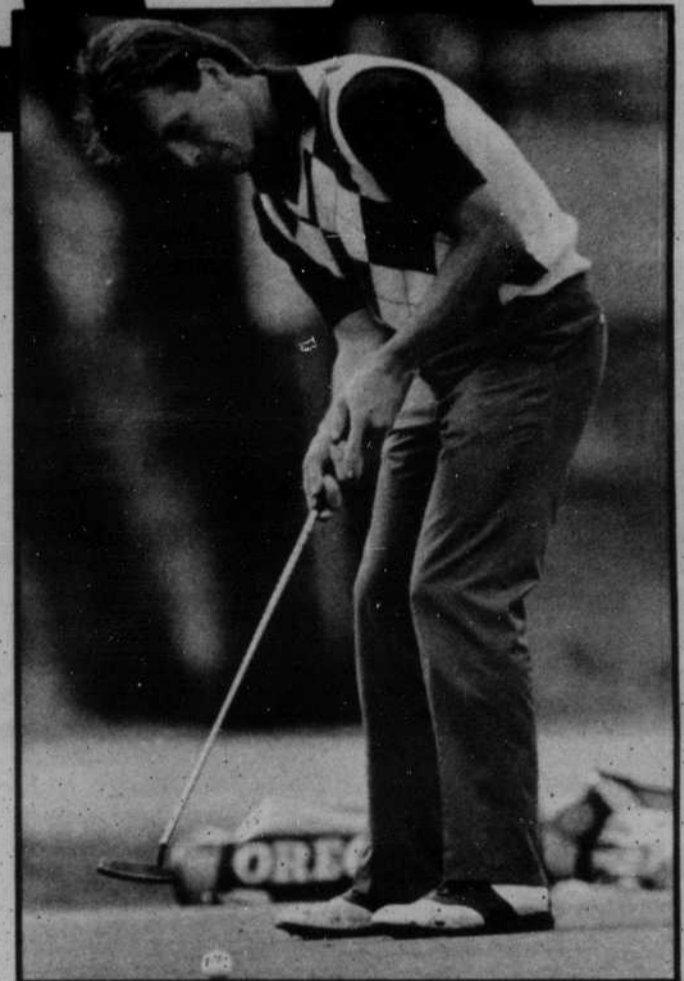
"Some of the techniques like focusing that I teach people help them let go of that over-concern so they can just be themselves. So trusting yourself and being able to let go of pressure are common problems, concerns, for both artists and athletes."

Among the athletes that Eiring has helped get on track is Oregon golfer Tim Scott.

Last summer, prior to meeting Eiring, Scott was averaging around 76, and "not playing that bad, but just not scoring," Scott says.

"I don't know what was holding me back, but I just didn't feel I was getting what I should have out of my golf game," Scott says. "And that's probably why (I called Eiring)."

Eiring, who also has an interest in golfing, and Scott first talked on a green at the Emerald Valley Golf Course. Scott called Eiring later, and they began working together consistently in August 1985. They worked together three times a week for a month.



Tim Scott

"I started working with him, and I played a lot better at the end of the summer," Scott says, and by summer's end, Scott was ready to "tournament test" what he had learned.

But in his first two tournaments last fall, Scott says he played awfully. "I just didn't use what I knew, what he had been telling me: I had doubt (about my game); in other words, and I didn't play well. It was really kind of depressing because I thought I was going to play good."

But both Eiring and Scott say Eiring's training methods are not a quick-fix program, and Scott says that although he wasn't as successful as he had hoped, he never really lost faith in the program. Instead, he just began working harder.

"I never really had any doubts, although I was really disappointed in my play because I was really expecting too much. I thought it was going to be a quick-fix kind of thing."

"I think the thing that I found out most about the mental stuff is that it takes practice just like the physical stuff does," Scott says.

Now, Scott has improved his average to just below 73 and meets with Eiring about once a month to have lunch and check up on things, Scott says. "I give him feedback to help him, and he gives me help on problems I may have or encouragement, or whatever," Scott says.

Scott now has moved up to among the top spots on the Oregon men's golf team, and says his story is somewhat of a mental training success story.

He thinks once athletes reach a certain level in competition, the only thing separating the great players from the rest could be the mental side of the game.

"The whole thing with golf is concentration. It's 99 percent mental in my estimation," Scott says. "And if you have things bugging you or if you have self-doubt... then you're not totally in tune with what you want to do, and your success rate is going to be a lot lower."

Being "in tune" and increasing body awareness are things Eiring hopes to improve in people through

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