

negative thinking? I think not; I like to think it's a reality in competition.

Having said all of the above, I continually am amazed at how many times I continue to see evidences of poor sportsmanship, (time for me to get on that soapbox again)! Folks, most shufflers today are way past 60 years of age, if we had anything to prove in our lives, it should have already happened. In fact, someday I wish a poll would be taken to see how many of our Tourney players actually played highly competitive sports in their younger years. From what I continue to see, I'd be surprised to see that number anywhere near 50 percent. The reason I am belaboring this is because I feel many of our players never learned how to win or lose! How many times have you sat in the stands and watched a top player make a great shot or a terrific strategy move without one hand clap? How often have you made a nice play only to have your opponent stay still or possibly mutter, "Lucky shot"? I could go on and on, but I won't. The point I'm continuing to try and make in this section is that true sportsmanship applauds excellence! Okay, I'm off the soapbox again. If you've carefully followed the narrative you'll note that I'm trying to say the *true competitor* is a *true sportsman*. If he/she is not, another word or two come to mind – *envy/jealousy*. Enough said!

One final thought on *how* everything we talked about in this section can help your emotional game. By truly giving credit where credit is due, it releases tension and anxiety in your being. We all need to set better examples of true sportsmanship.

#### D. Acceptance

"Be careful for what you wish for"

("Shuffleboard Bob")

Emotionally, we all go through our lives wishing for things. The trouble with this is that seldom are we satisfied if the wish comes to fruition – it's a lot like money, how much is actually enough? In the game of shuffleboard the same applies. Once into the competitive arena our wishes seem to increase the more success we have. Remember those early days of play, when many of us flew under the radar – no one knew us or was even concerned about us. As our winning ways developed, all of a sudden we began to get noticed because we became a threat to the top players. The point to be made here is that if our wish was to get into the upper echelon of players and this happens, then what? External pressures mount if you let it, as

players expect you to always win *and* everyone wants a piece of you. This external pressure can do a number on you if you let it. *Don't*. Just accept the results of you play. Another wish I hear many shufflers air (and I'm sure many shufflers secretly think) is, "Gee, I sure don't want to play a certain player". Again acceptance is the key here – we have no control over the draw in tourney play, sometimes it works in our favor and sometimes we have a tougher road. Emotionally, we can get caught up in this.

Let's look at another scenario we all face in tournament play:

1. Playing a Top Player – I relish this opportunity and you should too. This is a wonderful test of being in sync in your mental, physical, and emotional game. If you too are an expert player, what more could you ask? Way too many of us, myself included, worry needlessly about the outcome. I'm trying rapidly to move to *acceptance* regarding the games' outcome. As many of you already know, there are players that are terrific who you have little trouble with, whereas there are others who give you all you can handle. Yep, it drives me crazy too!
2. Playing a Newer Player – If many of you are like me you probably have mixed feelings about this one. On one hand this should be an easy match. However, on the other hand, you can put undue pressure on yourself because you're expected to win. Couple that with the fact that because the novice is playing *you* they tend to elevate their game. I don't know about you, but I find many players in this category normally play *career* against me. Does this seem to happen to you? I am going to say something now that I hope you'll think carefully about – many times that newer player will roll-over or struggle playing the top player. In my strategy sessions I try to get them to see they have no pressure – *they're not expected to win*. I let them know the *top player* is the one with all the pressure – they *are* expected to win. So all of this comes down to the fact that every time two players step onto the court, they're both facing their own demons. Conquer yours – play the game at hand *and* accept the outcome.

E. The Perfect Game

“Mistakes are a fact of life – it is the response to error that counts.”

(Nikki Giovanni)

Remember, the perfect game includes more than our shot-making – it also takes into account our mental processing and emotional responses to the first two. We are literally talking about Mission Impossible here! The last statement is not a negative one – rather it is a reality. We all know the only perfect games played are by those folks in the stands watching the players! I think by now you see my point – we all make mistakes in our play. The handling of adversity is usually what separates two players of equal shot-making ability. As we all know, it’s pretty easy to win a match when things are going our way. I see two key components to focus on when things start to fall apart. The first is the role of patience as the game progresses – put another way – don’t panic! So often I watch games in which if player B had just *stayed patient* and stayed with their game plan, the game would have stayed competitive. Instead, player B starts playing recklessly hoping something dramatic will happen. Usually it doesn’t. The second thing to keep in mind is to always analyze (mental) what is going on and not react (emotional) to it and let it influence your play. Granted, there are times when we all deviate from our game plan, but always remember, these need to also be calculated.

F. Focus –

“Think clearly *before* every shot – then *accept* the results!”

(Bob Rotella)

You will notice the order of the above quote – thinking, clear thinking - should precede any shot. More importantly, once the shot has been executed the results should quickly be accepted, and then you look forward. This is imperative to controlling the emotions. So often I hear a shuffler get miffed after a shot, beating himself up over his mental lapse. We cannot let this erode our thinking because if we do, focus is lost. As was mentioned in the last section, anyone’s chances for a perfect game, at one time or another, are impeded one way or another. To keep emotional balance, some shufflers actually *expect* certain things to happen every game, hence when they do,

they're able to accept it a little easier and refocus. My friend, Ed Tallboom (who I won my first National with in Hemet, CA), says that if he ends up in the kitchen he says to himself. "Well, there's my kitchen for this game." The same set can be used for take-outs and hammers. Think about it, nobody's perfect. If you set a reasonable quota for your play, it will enable you to keep your focus better.

## Part 3A – Review of Literature

This section on the emotional side of shuffleboard focuses on what learned men in the field think about how to control emotions. Excerpts from four golf books will follow, along with a newspaper article on relieving stress in your game. Please read this section carefully – the ideas put forth have helped me immensely.

- A. Thoughts of Dr. Valiente as he talks about playing fearlessly in his book: Conquering the Mental Game

“Most worries are reruns”

(Claude McDonald)

I strongly feel that the section you are about to read is as important as any found in the entire text! Dr. Valiente’s basic premise in this section is that *fear* (a powerful emotion) limits one’s true potential. He stated emphatically that the greatest players play fearlessly – note he doesn’t say *recklessly*. He is quick to point out that confidence doesn’t try to ignore fear, rather it overcomes it. Whether it is the fear of losing, embarrassment, poor shot-making, etc., fear can cripple us. He also feels that these fears and others which we all experience, is usually perceived as more threatening to us than it really is. How to cope with the above? He feels we need to ask ourselves the right questions for three reasons: One - our mind will respond to our questions, two – the proper questions will help keep us in focus, and three – our answers to our questions will help us better to visualize what we’re trying to do.

According to Dr. Valiente fear causes four problems for us physiologically:

1. Our Hands – Even without knowing it, when we are nervous or fearful our grip changes; usually we’re holding the cue too tightly. (Check your grip the next time you feel anxious).
2. Our Tempo – Most shufflers realize this one, that’s why it’s so important to have a pre-shot routine – so that you can rely on it during times of stress.
3. Deceleration – Generally this involves quitting on the stroke and coming up short – whether it be a hide or a hammer.

4. A Jerk or Flinch – This involves coming out of the shot too early – accentuate that follow-through even more.

Dr. Valiente feels that way too many players allow the ego to interfere with play. Many players continue to want to look good for others - *that* becomes their focus. He feels you should have your focus on playing the course – in our case, the court. I couldn't agree more with this – *if* you cannot play the court properly, you're generally doomed in your match.

Dr. Valiente urges every player to develop self-efficacy (self-realization). We hear so much being said about developing confidence. He feels that every player must have an innate (built-in) belief in his/her ability to succeed – *that* is the essence of confidence. A healthy, hearty and resilient belief serves as a *buffer* between failure and eventual success. Please reread that last sentence again. He states, as do many experts, that players of equal ability must draw on this inner strength – whomever is most successful is usually the victor. Put another way, a player's self-realization provides the effort, perseverance, and adaptive thought patterns required to continue further skill development. Gary Player, one of the all-time golfing greats, felt that his confidence in tourney play was always 105%. Folks we're talking real confidence here, not false boasting by some we often hear. We all need adversity to cultivate mental toughness; furthermore, we must admit our faults. The latter must be correctly identified so we can improve upon them. (Hopefully the survey, which you'll take near the end of this writing, will be helpful with that identification.)

Lastly, Dr. Valiente talks about the identification process – the tri-pod – as he calls it. It basically calls for an accurate judgment on our physical, mental, and emotional skills. Every player should strive to realize which factors are within a player's control and which are uncontrollable such as: weather, court variances, discs, etc. Acceptance of the uncontrollable factors is paramount in keeping emotional balance.

- B. Thoughts of Talane Miedaner in the book: Coach Yourself to Success

“Patience is really a minor form of despair disguised as a virtue”

(Ambrose Bierce)

Wow, that's really something to think about. In all sporting events we can see evidence of patience, probably in none more than

golf. I'll be honest with you I don't see how 95% or so of the players do it – especially playing for the big money that's their livelihood. As my friend Bill Greenberg, a school counselor in Las Vegas says, "That's why those particular players are out there!" Something to really think about.

I love this particular book by Miedaner. She gives three great ideas on improving one's emotional game. You've probably heard of the first one, but I'll talk about it anyway. *Basically, it states that trying – or saying you tried – to do something, is a waste of time.* For years I urged educators here in Las Vegas to look at this concept. (You'll notice I didn't say I tried to convince them.) Simply put, when any student is learning anything, they either *can do it* or *they can't*. Trying really means that the student, or anyone learning a skill, either does it or they don't. Grades earned by a student, in reality just means they have learned the skill or concept better than someone else. Well, enough of that – suffice to say I was unsuccessful in bringing about this change. I tried (hah) – just wanted to see if you were paying attention. *I could not, was unsuccessful, in making this happen!* Getting back to shuffleboard – in a match, a shot, or in a strategy we are either successful or unsuccessful. Period. This author points to *fear* many times impeding our efforts at success. Two examples – many times in practice we can do things we're unable to in a match. Another thing I see many times in Frame Games is that a player has the game in hand and can virtually do nothing wrong. Why, in both cases you may ask, are they successful? Easy, no pressure or fear exists. Following closely with this first concept, is the idea that the secret of getting what you want, is *not* wanting it. A personal example here: I, like many of you reading this, cannot do enough for shuffleboard. As I pen this book I've spent nine full shuffle seasons in Arizona trying to promote the game. I've been on local TV four different times and in 2003 I was on the front page of our local paper, The Mesa Tribune. What's the point? The point is that I've attempted, and continue to do so, to get shuffleboard out there to the public. That was and still is my motive – yet this notoriety keeps coming my way. I realize many of you have examples of this in your life, too. I believe the same thing happens in our games. If your motives are pure good things just seem to happen. In essence, don't want something so much that you emotionally become your own worst enemy. The last idea in Miedaner's book should come as no surprise – doing what you love gives one enormous energy. Here's hoping many of you will take that first step, if you haven't already, to do something positive. Take it from me; it will definitely improve your game.

- C. A compilation of thoughts from Tim Gallwey's book: The Inner Game of Golf and Bob Rotella's book: Golf is Not a Game of Perfect

"Times will change for the better, when you change."

(Maxwell Maltz)

Education and a willingness *can* bring about desired changes in all of us! Gallwey gives three terrific ideas on how to affect change. The first is a doozy. He feels that all of us have two selves. In Self 1 we experience pressure because we are trying to prove something to someone else - he calls this false competition. Now there is Self 2. It strives for excellence - this is true competition. *The successful shuffler is the player who can quiet Self 1 and let Self 2 learn and play without interference.* This is his second key component to solid play. Doubt is our fundamental cause of error - it causes tightness and fear. He also stresses what we talked about earlier: that is; don't *try* at all, just do it. We need to clearly visualize and see our result *before* the shot. We need to have much better awareness, it is the main faculty we have for learning. It's non-judgmental and focuses on what's happening. Remember, Self 2 relies on balance, rhythm, and tempo. Lastly, Gallwey strongly feels that slumps don't really exist - we create them in our minds (mental again). If you accept this premise/idea then you probably must accept the other; that *streaks* don't exist either. As you have heard before in this writing - just play and accept the results. I know, I know - this is easy to say yet hard to do. Remember, don't *try*, just do it.

Bob Rotella cites three components to successful emotional balance. First off, he believes in streaks that players have. In fact, he goes a bit further. He believes that a hot streak really represents a player's true capability! Very interesting... His second concept revolves around the idea that a player's attitude is a key component. It is what can make a good player, great! A good attitude (acceptance) enables a player to be free of fear and decisive in his/her decisions. Rotella has a nice formula to remember, (possibly this could be written in your notes). It is: acceptance = patience = success. His last point is something I continually struggle with, (maybe you do to). It is that *we should not demand perfection in our game* - according to Rotella, by expecting this on every play we're setting ourselves up for tension and anxiety. He even states it a bit stronger - "it's deadly". Again, as with



so much that has been said, easy to say but harder to do. But, now you know – remember, Knowledge is Power!

- D. A compilation of ideas from B.J. Tomasi in his book: The 30-Second Golf Swing and Cohn and Winters in their book: The Mental Art of Putting

“If good luck comes rarely, bad luck is just as rare”

(Maxwell Maltz)

I’m probably in the minority because I think very little luck is involved in a pure game of shuffleboard. I realize that unexpected things happen in any given game, but they happen to my opponent, also. Tomasi, however, strongly underlines the need to *never, never* get down on ourselves no matter what the circumstance. We cannot/ should not look back on what has just happened because we constantly need to be in the moment. Emotionally, to keep on an even keel, we need to *over-emotionalize* on the good shots that happen, not the bad ones. He feels the more we emotionalize an event, the faster and more vividly we’ll remember it; hence, remember the good ones!

Cohn and Winters contend that our emotional balance will be more stable if we remember one simple fact. They strongly suggest the player keep in mind that missing on any shot – whether a take-out, hide, or hammer – simply means we were unsuccessful, not a failure. All too often even the most successful shuffler misses a shot they don’t expect to. It’s imperative to *forget about it* and *focus on that next shot*. Think about some of the ideas above the next time you feel like you’ve failed.

- E. Thoughts of Dr. Callahan to be found at:  
[www.breakthroughperformance.net](http://www.breakthroughperformance.net) (from an article in the Mesa Tribune on 01/13/05)

“A man can succeed at almost anything for which he has unlimited enthusiasm.”

(Talane Miedaner)

Ok, in this last installment of looking at emotional balance, we’re going to “push the envelope” a bit. Dr. Callahan is working on stress reduction with a technique called the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) or “tapping”. Very simply, he describes this

technique as acupuncture without needles. It's a method of releasing energy by physically tapping on certain of the body's pressure points. Using the index and middle finger, he recommends tapping each of the eight pressure points seven to ten times and recite out-loud three times, the challenge or problem you're facing. He states in the article that his job is not to teach you your sport (shuffleboard), but to get you to neutral, so you can play with much more clarity! Like a lot of you, I'll try anything to improve my game. Some examples of positive affirmations include the following - I accept myself on the following hammer or, I can still turn this game around. The tapping points are below:

1. Eyebrow: Where the eyebrow begins near bridge of nose (Affects bladder)
2. Eye corner: Outside corner of the eye at the temple (Affects gall bladder)
3. Under eye: Lower edge of eye socket, in the middle of the eye (Affects stomach)
4. Under nose: Midway between the upper lip and the base of the nose (Affects governing vessels)
5. Chin: Midway between the lower lip and the point of the chin (Affects controlling vessels)
6. Collarbone: About one inch below the depression where the clavicles meet in the upper chest (Affects kidney)
7. Under arm: About four inches under armpit on the bra line or on a line just below male nipple (Affects spleen)
8. Karate chop point: Middle of the fleshy side of either hand (Affects small intestine)