

Golf With Your Heart!

New Research at the Institute of HeartMath Indicates The Yips Are a Result of Your Heart, Not Your Head.

Peter Fox

Article reproduced from Golf Mentor - Golf writings and videos are favorite works of Peter Fox, sports media specialist. Author of A Lifetime of Better Golf and producer of Golf Reform Is At Hand, he was ESPN's Founding Executive Producer. Emotion Management: Golf's Next Frontier is a recent collaborative effort. It trains athletes to access the "the zone." Contributor to Golf Digest Productions & golf.com & pga.com, Fox blogs & mentors golfers

The black hole of indecision and spasm that Tommy Armour called "The Yips" has been the scourge of the golf language since he coined it. I am twice removed from that source, being the protege of his protege, J. R. Burrill, with whom I conferred before attributing the dreaded phrase to The Silver Scot.

In the annals of golf no single malady has affected the superior performance of the game's geniuses like The Yips has. A collision with a bus nearly ended Ben Hogan's career, but it didn't. The Yips did.

To this day Johnny Miller's face screws up in pain as he describes how The Yips killed the promise of his golfing genius.

It is a non-discriminatory affliction affecting any and many. The Yips transcend golf. It's just that Armour gave it a name that stuck in the lexicon. Writers yip and call it a cramp. Singers forget lyrics and call it a block.

First-time kissers yip and smooch a nose. In the spectrum that is known as golf instruction, The Yips has earned voodoo-like aspersions. Golfers don't talk about it, as though having The Yips is a character failing.

Golf researchers have peered into the brain to find the source of the problem. While they can see some of the effects, they don't know the cause and haven't found much that can help -- that is until recently. New research at the Institute of HeartMath has found that we've been looking in the wrong place. We need to look instead to the heart. Turns out the songsters and poets have been right all along when they said that our heart has a mind of its own.

I learned that and how the heart relates to The Yips when I was introduced to the marvels of HeartMath(r) and the science behind it. As a fellow who has been around sports at high levels, I was invited to consult with Doc Childre, founder and Chairman of HeartMath. Doc and his colleagues expanded on the discovery that the heart does in fact have its own nervous system called the "heart-brain" and participates in an ongoing two-way communication with the brain in our head.

This research stunningly shows that a lot of emotional sequencing actually begins in the heart, not the brain. To me, who has been around the block a few times when it comes to

golf instruction, it meant that much of the recent attention being given to the mental part of golf was starting in the wrong place. From my years of golf coaching, I knew that The Yips are all about emotions. Now here was Dr. Rollin McCraty, Institute of HeartMath Director of Research, describing a condition in which one's heart rhythms get out of sync due to fear or anger in the seat of emotions-the heart. Then the heart sends an out-of-sync signal to the brain, which triggers a state called cortical inhibition.

When he said the first symptom of cortical inhibition was impaired decision making and the second was impaired coordination, this cross inflicted Yipper yelled: Eureka!

Fortunately, he went on to say, people can learn how to change emotional state and get their heart rhythms back in sync, creating an opposite state called cortical facilitation where brain function improves along with concentration and confidence. We had a lively discussion about how this leads to "athletes in the zone" which was discussed in this space last month by Laird Small. How this works and how The Yips can be helped or even cured is described here, adapted from HeartMath's new work "Managing Emotions: Golf's Next Frontier" with which I am proud to be associated.

Heart-Brain Synchronization

There is a nervous system pathway that carries signals from the heart to the brain, as well as another pathway that carries messages from the brain to the heart. What this means is the heart and brain "talk" to one another-and together they "talk" to the body. Surprisingly, the heart sends more information to the brain than the other way around! The pattern of the heart's rhythm tells the brain what the heart and body are experiencing.

When you're feeling tense, nervous, worried, doubtful, or frustrated, the heart sends a stress signal to the brain.

The thalamus, a key brain center, helps synchronize activity within the brain. When your heart sends a stress signal to the thalamus, it interferes with the ability of the thalamus to synchronize brain functions. The result is your reactions are often out of sync and you cannot think as clearly. This is how you can blow a shot or make a poor decision that you wouldn't normally. When that happens time again, your brain reinforces the pattern in your neural circuits and in the emotional memory center of your brain, called the amygdala. As you get older, the pattern gets more engrained.

This means, when you take hold of your putter, your heart automatically signals stress and your brain automatically thinks "The Yips," triggering nervous system chaos. However, at any age, you can intervene at the source, your heart, to change the neural response.

The good news is that at any age, you can change your heart's input to your brain to create heart-brain synchronization, emotional stability and harmony. By using Freeze-Framer (now called emWave®) software with heart rhythm monitor and HeartMath's Quick Coherence(tm) technique provided in the easy-to-get tutorial, you create heart-brain synchronization and retrain your nervous system response. This documented state is characterized by reduced nervous system chaos, reduced muscle tremor (including The "Yips"), improved motor skills and faster reaction times. Concentration and confidence also increase because your reflexes work faster, you think more clearly, and see more options.

Using the Quick Coherence technique regularly as you play allows you to maintain fluidity and "touch" throughout your swing, resulting in improved putting, ball striking, accuracy and lower scores.

Well, who wouldn't want that? So I tried HeartMath's Freeze-Framer (emWave®) technology to monitor my emotional state and trained with their Quick Coherence technique to change my heart rhythm pattern. It took me to a smooth emotional state.

Now, I golf with my heart. The Yips are gone when I do.

My advice is to learn and practice the Quick Coherence technique with the Freeze-Framer. You have nothing to lose. When your golf game improves, your game of life will, too.

For more information about on the HeartMath System, visit www.beyondthebarriers.co.uk