

What Is Contenderosis?

Many players I've spoken to over the last few years have asked me what exactly is Contenderosis and what can be done about it. Along with other symptoms such as leader board gravity, the yips, and obvious self sabotage, Contenderosis is a mental permission to only contend and not to win. This condition is difficult to diagnosis by one's self since the subconscious mind sends up smoke screens to camouflage the real issues. Frequently, the camouflage sounds like denial, for example, "Who me? I don't have any problems with my mind." Or "I'm not crazy, come on!" or blaming conditions or external circumstances for poor performance, "Those fairways were too narrow" or "The greens sucked today."

The fact is crazy players do not seek help, for a crazy person is out of touch with reality and my not grasp the notion of mindset help or negative mind programming. So therefore, the recognition of a problem is a sign of a healthy mind.

As an example of Contenderosis, I'm including a case history from a player who came to me from Alaska to work on his game. Let's call him Ace.

Ace: I play a decent game until I get under pressure. I talk myself out of it, it seems. More often than not, I lose it. . . my confidence. I doubt myself. I feel a lot of embarrassment when I mishit a shot.

Ryan: Duration of this problem?

Ace: I guess forever. When I was younger, I don't think it bothered me at all. I've only started tournament play in the last few years.

Ryan: What makes it worse?

Ace: I play a good game around the guys I've known all my life but the closer I get to winning the money, the more I start duffing it. I feel the pressure. I'm not usually a hacker.

Ryan: What do you want from me?

Ace: I'd like to focus my concentration. I get nervous in competition. I feel the pressure of it and talk myself out of it.

Analysis: The key subconscious elements here are Ace's prohibition against winning and feeling OK to win around guys he knows.

I gave him a suggestion to have a dream about the cause of his problem and this is what he brought in.

Dream: *"White wall standing alone with black words on it. As I walked toward it trying to read it, the wall fell down."*

Analysis: When the writing is on the wall, it's usually a negative omen that doom is imminent. Ace's dream actually showed him that the impending danger was gone as he walked toward it. In other words, he was solving the problem the closer he came to the issue.

Then as he retraced the feeling in the dream back to a scene when he was 12 years old, caught between loyalty to two groups of friends where he couldn't decide on which group to please. Immediately, Ace recognized those feelings show up when he's in competition under pressure to win a match. He felt a conflict between his need to win and his need for affiliation to his peers (his need to be liked and accepted). In other words, when Ace competed and got near winning, he regressed to feeling like that 12 year old boy (Ace was 37 at the time). Opponents generally don't like being bested so his needs contradicted each other and the need for acceptance took over because it's more important than one's money.

So with many positive suggestions countering his Ponce de Leon Syndrome (discovering the fountain of youth and responding as a child when an adult response was required), Ace let go of this inflexible mindset.

I knew from this dream interpretation that I was on the right track with Ace but one more part needed to be explained. The issue of the pressure was

found on a subsequent regression to be connected in Ace's subconscious mind to a time in his childhood where he felt stuck, option-less, and completely under the control of his parents. It was a time when he felt "pressure to get out and couldn't." Notice his words, the actual words he described and experience in his childhood. Once he connected his words and feelings from the past to his experience in competition, he knew those thoughts and feeling bled into the here and now from his past.

By connecting up his here and now with the past, Ace was able to let go of the negative mindset and his fear of winning. The last time I spoke to Ace, he was winning regularly and still maintained his friendships with his buddies! But watch out for him, he likes to win now!

As a classic example of Contenderosis, the subconscious reacts as it did in an earlier time in one's life and interferes with a player's skills and abilities. You can witness this on the pro tours, in your life, and those of your friends and players around you. The cure is to find the connections to the past, bring them to light, nullify them, and then play in the present time so that one's potential can be reached.

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