



Sergio's Ever Changing Perception & Perspective

by Richard Zokol – MindTRAK Golf

To the amazement of most onlookers even the world's best professional golfers make costly mental mistakes. In most situations they do so unknowingly. These errors are actually public and quite apparent. It is only when their situation is measured objectively, with a different perspective, that we can glean vital insight.

All of which brings us to place Sergio Garcia under the microscope—as a case study. On Sunday April 9, 2017 the golfing world watched transfixed as Garcia fulfilled the promise of a career suggested almost 20-years ago of delivering on a major championship victory. After so many disappointments, so much self-doubt, and numerous humiliating defeats, Garcia broke through to finally win his first major—the 81st Masters. It was an emotional triumph. Some suggest he was inspired by the final round coinciding with what would have been the late Severiano Ballesteros' 60th birthday. Ballesteros, a fellow Spaniard and 2-time Masters Champion was Garcia's mentor. Still others suggest the "Golf Gods" finally had seen enough anguish and simply relented to make it happen. But in reality what actually happened?

The breakthrough occurred inside Garcia's mind. For the first time in a major Sergio Garcia was able to truly detach emotionally from results he desperately craved for so long—and simply play golf one shot at a time. He got out of his own way. In the heat of battle coming around Amen Corner on Sunday, Sergio was able to stay in the moment, in the present, each step of the way, rather than being fixated on results or the consequence of his actions. In this process and looking back it appears he unknowingly stumbled into emotional freedom in that situation. If he actually knew how or what happened, he wouldn't have defaulted back to that old perspective and mindset. It was captivating. But what happened? Part of the answer lies in his personal journey as a golfer.

Garcia had unwittingly become his own worst enemy over two decades, building his own emotional incarceration. Like most golfers he had unknowingly slipped into an unhealthy, disparaging mindset. He had acquired an antagonistic perspective. His emotional conditioning expressed frustration and anger when results didn't go his way. Some of these outbursts were public and confrontational. Famously, at the 2002 US Open at Bethpage, Garcia found himself in a state of mind where he could not draw the club back without incessant wagging, re-gripping and hesitation. Like a pack of wolves the merciless New York galleries smelt Garcia's fear and started ridiculing, jeering, and heckling him. Garcia's own self-doubt triggered his well-established conditioned emotional reaction. His confidence vanished and his mental state fragile, Garcia's emotional response even included obscene gestures directed back to the crowd—yet another bad decision on Garcia's part—taking on a New York horde. This from a player who put the golf world on notice when he exploded onto the scene as a 19-year-old at the 1999 PGA Championship at Medinah, scissor-kicking his way to challenge Tiger in the closing holes that Sunday before losing to Tiger by a shot. His future of winning major championships seemed limitless.

But the golfing mind is fertile ground. It will grow all seeds planted—including destructive thoughts. Nurturing these thoughts support self-doubt, and focusing on the pain of unrealized promises is toxic. Which in turn creates only more anxiety, these thoughts move golfers down the rabbit hole of *Golf Insanity*, you could say, Garcia's mindset was infected.



After Garcia's playoff loss at the 2007 *Open Championship* at Carnoustie, following the lip-out of the 12-foot putt on the 72nd hole that would have bestowed him as the, "*Champions Golfer of the Year*," he lamented, "*I play against more than 156 other players.*" Indeed, his most daunting competitor wasn't Tiger Woods or other top PGA Tour players—it was his mindset. A few years later at the 2012 *Masters*, Garcia hit even a deeper low point when he openly stated, "*I'm not good enough [to win a major] and today I know it,*" he said, "*I've been trying for 13-years and I don't feel capable of winning. I don't know what happened to me. Maybe it's something psychological. After 13-years, my chances are over, I'm not good enough for the majors. That's it.*" Again Garcia was right. His self-destructive perspective was the key barrier to his limitations, impairing his golf capability.

Five years later on Master's Sunday 2017 a different Sergio Garcia finally emerged with a different perspective. Garcia seemed much more consistent with the prognostications of almost 20-years earlier. Armed with a different mindset and a new support system, his new fiancé, he was finally able to shift his perception on the golf course. He appeared to find peace of mind possibly through a new perception and perspective—he got his breakthrough. Perhaps the discovery of the more important circumstances of life made his habitual mental battles less important. Perhaps he was simply exhausted with his internal struggle. Perhaps his intuition finally took charge and he connected to playing without fear or he simply stumbled into playing golf with that sacred sense of presence. Perhaps he finally realized he had to give up control in order to actually gain control. All could be true. The best way to gain insight with what Garcia had found after so much heartbreak is to listen to him in his own words.

Question asked: If I asked you of what you are most proud this afternoon, would it be a shot or a hole or would it be a demonstration of your character?

SERGIO GARCIA: *"Definitely demonstration of my character, and my mentality. You know, how positive I stayed even when things weren't going that well on 10 and 11. So even on 13, I didn't hit that bad a drive. I've been hitting that drive every day like a high cut. This drive was probably going three yards left of the ones I've hit the other three days, and unfortunately it hit the tree and went in the bush. But even that, you know, in the past, I would have -- I would have started going, you know, at my caddie, and oh, you know, why doesn't it go through and whatever (laughter). But you know, I was like, well, if that's what is supposed to happen, let it happen. Let's try to make a great 5 here and see if we can put a hell of a finish to have a chance. And if not, we'll shake Justin's hand and congratulate him for winning. So I think that that I've been doing very well throughout the whole week, and it's something I need to keep improving and keep getting better at it."*

Rub of the Mind—When Sergio's tee-shot on the 13th hole clipping the trees at the inside of the dogleg, his ball ended up in a bush across Rae's Creek in an unplayable lie, we all thought it was over. Based on past behavior most viewers expected Sergio Garcia to implode emotionally once again. But what did he do differently? He accepted whatever results and moved on, which created a noticeable calm and we could see a different expression in his body language. For a moment Garcia's transformation was the result of his internal acceptance. He let it go. He had finally realized peace of mind in competition and the emotional calm that came with accepting whatever happened was fine. With this new perspective he emotionally detached from results and was able to turn the thought key. It was the key that unlocked the door to emotional freedom—but what Sergio and we all need to understand is that emotional freedom isn't obtained once you change your perspective; the real key is to turn a healthy perspective into a habit.