

OUR TOWN

Author explores why bad golf happens to good people

By Kevin Baldwin
RECORD STAFF

NORTHBORO – “Golf is a game that is played on a 5-inch course – the distance between your ears,” pro golfer Bobby Jones once said.

Author Glenn Kessler quoted Jones as he described his new book, “Why Bad Golf Happens to Good People – It’s Your Brain Not Your Game.”

The self-published book is intended to be an easy to understand guide to help golfers improve their game by focusing on the mental aspects of playing golf more than the physical, according to Kessler.

“Ninety percent of golf is mental,” Kessler said. “This book is intended for the golfer who goes out, hits a shot, does great, but then goes to hit his next shot and it’s awful, even though nothing physically has changed. Hopefully, this book will help the average golfer understand the mental aspects of the game which come into play.”

This is the first book for Kessler. He said he was inspired to write it for two reasons.

“In 2002, between April and November, I lost my mother and two close friends,” Kessler said. “I decided to immerse myself into my writing and the study of sport psychology and this book was the result.”

The other reason Kessler wrote the book was his passion for the game.

“I’ve been an avid golfer now for 17 years,” Kessler said.

Kessler, 58, was born in Oceanside, N.Y., but has been a Northboro resident for 17 years. He established his psychology practice in 1983.

Kessler received a bachelor’s degree at the American University, a master’s degree in psychology from the University of Maryland and a Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut.

Kessler said he hopes the average golfers who read the book will pick up something which they can apply to their game.

“I want readers to understand the role of the mind,” Kessler said. “Seventy to 80 percent of professional golfers use mental coaches. The goal is to get the body and mind to work in harmony.”

The book contains case examples and practice tips.

“I’ve divided the book up into 18 holes of golf, and playing each hole represents a different aspect of the mental game,” Kessler said.

The book differs from other self-help golf books, according to Kessler.

“Numerous books on golf are out there, but what I found was they approach the game from a professional point of view and

the lay person might have difficulty understanding,” Kessler said. “Other books might be easy to understand but the techniques to improve one’s game might be hard to apply. My book does both.”

The foundation of all is awareness, according to Kessler, who said thinking affects feeling.

“Achieving a degree of awareness will help a person’s game,” Kessler said. “Emotions which are out of a golfer’s maximum performance arousal zone might interfere with performance.”

The book also discusses what Kessler described as the concept of arousal control.

“Anxiety emotionally takes a person out of their performance state, which is not just something that happens in golf, but could happen in any area of life,” Kessler said. “When you gain awareness, you can recognize what level of arousal works best for you and use the book to help maintain that level of arousal.”

Kessler advises relaxation and focus to improve one’s game.

“When you bring your anxiety down to a moderate level, you’ll be able to relax and more effectively play the shot in front of you,” Kessler said. “George Knudsen once said, ‘People play golf to relax, but you need to relax to play golf.’ In my book, I discuss how to calm oneself down to follow-through on a shot more fluidly”

According to Kessler, outcome thinking is when the mind is focused solely on the result of a shot which can introduce tension into the body and interferes with game performance.

“In the book, we discuss relaxation, and all the skills discussed are life skills which can be practiced anytime,” Kessler said. “I also talk about imagery, which is a powerful tool because the idea is: if you see it, believe in it, you can achieve it.”

Kessler said his book discusses how the mind can create a mental image of what the person wants the body to do.

“It’s like using a mental blueprint,” Kessler said.

Other concepts Kessler discusses in the book are building confidence, focus and concentration, and eliminating both external and internal distractions.

“Confidence is about how we can develop the self-talk or internal dialogue within each of us, developing a degree of confidence off the course which will allow one to achieve a level of success on the course,” Kessler said. “Distractions are external things like people talking or a lawnmower starting up, but internal distractions are thoughts and emotions which could equally affect one’s game.”

Golfers need to develop a pre-shot routine, according to Kessler.

“A pre-shot routine is a series

of physical and mental actions repeated consistently prior to hitting a shot,” Kessler said. “It’s a tool to get your mind and body to work in harmony.”

Kessler said the concepts discussed in his book can be applied to many situations, not just golf.

“I hope this book will help people not only with their golf game, but with the quality of life,” Kessler said. “I’ve worked with golfers on these skills, but I also have worked with an equestrian, a wrestler, even a hockey player. The skills in the book are applicable across the board. But, of course, my passion is golf.”

Kessler is a licensed psychologist and director of Kessler Psychological Associates of Northboro. He has been practicing in the field of applied psychology for over 25 years. Kessler has taught both graduate and undergraduate psychology courses and regularly gives lectures in the community on performance enhancement, as well as other topics in the field of psychology.

Kessler and wife, Joan, have two children: Andrew, 30, who lives in Framingham and runs a daycare in Natick; and David, 27, who works in the financial district in New York City.

The book is available at Tatnuck Bookseller, 18 Lyman St., Pro-Golf of Shrewsbury, 1000 Boston Turnpike, Amazon.com, iuniverse.com, or barnesandnoble.com.



Glenn Kessler