

# Mechanical Players vs. Feel Players

by Tom Simpson © February 2000

There are some players who play very consciously. They think about many many details of stroke, form, alignment, aim, etc. They have elaborate pre-shot routines to help ensure their consistency. They are aware of a lot of body sensations. They use whatever physics grasp they have of the game to help them plan and execute their shots. They try to do everything on purpose. I call these Mechanical Players (MP's). I'm somewhere on this end of the spectrum.

The Feel Players (FP's) are the opposite. They trust their body to do the right thing. They are not conscious of how they do what they do, and may not even be interested in knowing much about how things work or why. They appear to be looser and more fluid. Lots of really excellent players are in this category, and many pros. They get it done, but it looks easier when they do it.

To generalize, I'd say the MP's are probably held back by carefulness and too much "doing", while the FP's are held back by carelessness and too little knowledge.

Ah, the middle road!

As an MP, I've spent a lot of time and effort studying the FP Way. Those brief, shining moments when I'm really in the zone are much more FP than my usual game.

I see this as a continuum. While you can become very good at either end, you need some of the good stuff from the other end to balance you out and really raise your game.

MP's that somehow break through and "give up" control of the details and trust their bodies to deliver, can rise to another level. My take on this process (MP's can't help but think this way) is that it comes down to INTENT. When you can develop real clarity of intent, trust that intent, and leave doubt and mind chatter behind, the zone opens.

There is a martial arts maxim that says "To defeat the sword, you must first master the sword." This appeals to MP's, because we're happy to spend our time exploring all the details of the weapon, the proper footwork, balance, joint function, and on and on. But what it means at a deeper level is "Master the sword, and then give up your attachment to the details. Integrate the knowledge and then, when it's time to execute, put your energy into your intent." In pool talk, that's "Shut up and bear down."

At a practical, day-to-day training level, what I do is follow the Mechanical Way in the never-ending quest to perfect my form and fill in gaps in my knowledge. In a way, this is like practicing the shots you're already good at. Even though I know better, I indulge myself in mechanical stuff for a while, because this is my comfort zone, my fun. I know what I have to do to really get better, though, so I make forays into the Feel World. The best method I've found for this is to focus exclusively on the intended RESULT and shoot without hesitation – faster rhythm. It works, but my MP side doesn't trust it. ;o)

I think most MP's envy the FP's ease, confidence, and fluidity, but are afraid to give up their mechanicalness and "trust the force." Meanwhile, FP's secretly wish they knew more and had mechanical systems and procedures they could rely on, but they don't want to be mechanical, and they try to convince themselves they don't really need all that technical knowledge: "Hey, the ball goes in the hole, don't it?" Let's leave our comfort zones once in a while and learn from both extremes.