

Athletics, as a network, reaches just about every home in the country and represents a powerful channel through which we can bring about positive changes in all of childhood. We want to access this network to offer new role models for a new generation of children. Our goal is to offer coaches, players and parents the latest information on learning and human development and to blend this with the most effective coaching styles in athletics today.

Surround children with unconditional acceptance and provide models of performance that are free of conflict and you can't keep them from expressing at their highest levels. The zone, that state when time stops and the great shots are oh-so-easy, is literally child's play for kids and adults who feel safe within themselves. This is *The Intelligence of Play* and the message we will deliver to parents, coaches and players all over America.

Chuck Hogan: In any given sport; basketball, baseball, football, golf, whatever it might be, there are a few individuals who are really on top of the game. They are spectacular and everyone comes to watch them because these *magical athletes* are in this wonderful state of ease. Even when they are off, they are still better than most. What is that little difference that makes such a huge difference? That's what I investigated for a long, long time and it became apparent that they were literally at ease. There was an absence of dis-ease.

As I investigated more deeply and came across the works of Joseph Chilton Pearce, I discovered that the difference is that these players were truly safe to play. There was nothing holding them back. Everyone else has something holding them back.

At what point did you begin notice this difference?

It began in childhood, with little league, junior golf, and just being an athlete myself. There were times when I could play freely and times when I would gag my guts out because of the pressure. Some people played with this pressure and thrived - others collapsed. The insight was that some people felt the pressure but they weren't trying to prove themselves, they were safe to enter the experience freely and totally.

As I worked with athletes I began asking questions and distinguishing between anxiety and pressure, between thriving and collapsing. I saw lots of athletes, golfers in particular, who had wonderful skills. Their technical and mechanical skills were awesome, and yet they just couldn't get the job done. It became evident that there is a huge difference between fear and indecision. People with indecision can change. People in real fear are in fight-or-flight. They're looking for ways to leave and it is these people, interestingly enough, who are injury prone. Those that are safe to play rarely sustain major injuries.

You seem to be describing a form of self-sabotage which can have a tremendous impact on performance?

Some players can be conscious that there's a lot of heat and thrive on it. Others become conscious of the heat and there's nothing they can do about it. No amount of work or compensation can make up for it. For these, when the pressure becomes strong enough, they will find a way out.

It is difficult for people to appreciate that when they have re-occurring collapses in performance that they are really creating definite results. The pattern that they think is bad has been learned magnificently.

There are people who *fall apart* and they'll do it over and over and over again with virtually the same pattern every time. They continue to beat themselves up, think they're doing bad, rather than understanding that this is a unique piece of learning. They think they're stupid or incompetent which is simply not the case. They're not the victims. They're not stupid. They're doing quite well. They're just not getting the outcome they would like. And without understanding this, it's almost impossible to self-correct. That's terribly difficult for most people to deal with.

How do we build these patterns of self-sabotage?

One person goes through grade school, high school, college, and their parents and coaches tell them to *go for it*. That's what they learn. They hold a vision that they're going to be a world class athlete and they go for it. And the other person with the same skill hears, "son, you know, it is fine that you are doing this, but don't forget to get a good education so you have something to *fall back* on." The message is *fall back*. When that athlete gets on the threshold of becoming great, that *fall back* system kicks in. Should they actually become great, that anxiety is still there. Remember, they're designed to *fall back*, and they manifest it.

It goes back to being safe. If you're not safe to play the game freely, then your self-worth depends on things like winning, money and trophies. It is based on stuff. The players that seem impervious to this really, really love to play the game. They're going to play anyway. It's great that they get stuff along the way, but they don't play for the money or their name in the paper. They play the game because they love to play.

Go across the board and you'll find that the best players are the ones that simply love to play the game. And this is what we have lost - the ability to play for the love of play itself. Most play to get the stuff and I've never seen that person play at the level of those who are playing for the sake of the game.

What makes the difference?

Most play and have to compensate for something missing, something lacking, something that they need to make them whole, and it takes huge amounts of energy. You can see that they're not playing with elegance or ease. They're trying to show that they're better than the next person because nobody gave them permission to be okay without beating somebody else up. They call it competition. I call it compensation.

The person that's whole, one that comes through a nurturing environment, is not playing to win or lose. They're playing because that's what they love to do. They enter into the experience completely and play for all its worth. Whether they win or lose is not the issue. Sure they would rather not lose, but if they do, they are not going home feeling like they lost part of their self-esteem.

Is there a connection between the loss of nurturing or attention adults give to children and the general direction athletics is moving?

You would have to have your head buried very deep not to recognize that very few people play the game for the game anymore. Everybody plays to win. Everybody plays for the stuff, for the trophies.

Go to a little league game and watch parents beating each other or the Ump because of a bad call. They are out there in the middle of the field screaming at each other and screaming at the kids, "Why didn't you win?" As if the child didn't want to win. It's becoming more and more brutal all the time. It's a disaster and few people seem to recognize it. It is the same disaster that is taking place in our schools, on the playgrounds, in our homes and everywhere else. It just boggles my mind that we fail to see this.

What's the difference between the great champions and those who appear to have talent but don't make it?

The less than great champions are operating on some degree of anxiety and are moving away from that threat. The great champions are playing with stress but it isn't perceived as a threat. By some quirk or design of their early environment they discovered that the worst thing that was going to happen to them was nothing.

And the person that's in anxiety, if they don't perform, something bad is going to happen to them. Usually they feel some sort of exclusion, from their friends, from parents, from love, from acceptance.

As a sports educator working with some of the top athletes in the PGA and LPGA, what are the issues that come up?

With the very best players and with inexperienced players we work on clarity, absence of ambiguity and the elimination of self-induced fears. There are no dinosaurs on the

golf course. Nobody is going to eat you. All fear on the golf course is self-induced. We're always working on reframing those issues so the player is safe enough to enter that experience totally, which is the hallmark of the true champion.

If we can eliminate the interference of fear and ambiguity the brain will produce magnificent results. The conscious mind wants desperately to shoot the lowest scores, but won't let go of interfering. We develop the mechanisms or strategies for helping you get out of your own way. It always goes back to ambiguity and falsely created fears.

What happens when we feel threatened?

When the brain perceives something as friendly it moves toward it. When it perceives something threatening the concrete or pre-conscious mind tells the body to move away. Then our conscious mind, or that of the coach or adult says, "no, move forward, override that fear, go for it." We have to compensate for the fear of moving toward something that is threatening and the closer we get, the greater the fear becomes and this takes a great deal of energy. The intelligence of the body says ouch! Let's get out of here. *The Intelligence of Play* kicks in when this conflict is eliminated.

What makes any given situation safe or threatening is the manner in which we were introduced to it. The emotional content of our initial experience gets locked into the memory and every time a similar experience is registered the original pattern is reactivated - flooding the body with the same feelings of safety or fear contained in the early learning experiences. It is critical that we eliminate fear and anxiety from a child's early athletic experience.

Why do most adults feel that athletics is great for kids if the environment is this corrupt?

We feel we need to teach our kids how to win and lose because that's what we think life is all about, winning and losing. Most miss the whole point that *play* is what the game is all about. Many of us haven't learned what it means to really *play* so we compensate by creating a president's counsel on the physical fitness for children. Isn't that a bizarre idea?

We have created this false idea that we need to push children into sports, which we have completely taken over and organized, because they are sitting on their fannies eating potato chips. Kids want to play. They always got together on sand lots and formed groups and worked out their own rules. Then adults came along and said, "no, no, no, we'll do all that for you." It's crazy. So now we drop them off at an outside baby-sitter, which we call athletics, because we feel it's better than having them sitting around the TV or computer for 5, 6, 7 hours every day.

Do you think that children would organize and enjoy themselves more if sports weren't controlled by adults?

If children were protected from the marketing inputs of television and now the computer industry which tell them what and how to think about themselves, what to wear, to eat and listen to, they would develop their own imagination and discover true play. The question is - with those marketing forces in place and growing stronger, how can we create an athletic environment that is healthier than you either win or you're a loser? I'm saying that we need to help children discover how to really play again and this is what our *Intelligence of Play* project is all about.

If you could change just one thing that most coaches, instructors and parents do, what would that be?

I would reward play for the sake of play. It wouldn't be for stuff, for rewards. I wouldn't reward them at all. We'd just play and play and play and the experience of play would be its own reward. We would all enter into this and it would be so much fun that we'd never want to stop playing.

We have play, practice, and competition. What's the difference?

If play is its own reward and gives you energy, wouldn't you want to play more and more? Have you seen young people on skateboards doing things that I never thought the human body could do? They skateboard because it is fun. They watch each other and all of a sudden somebody comes up with a doubly-whip flop-flip-flop and - wow! I'll try that. That's how the process works.

True play is seeing a possibility and being free enough, safe enough, to actualize some possibility that we have not yet developed. Play is reaching into the unknown and finding there some new aspect of ourselves that didn't exist before. Practice is polishing this new possibility until it becomes automatic, which literally frees our attention to re-enter the unknown and through play, discover something else - and the cycle begins again. Competition, the root meaning of the word, means to *strive together*. Opponents are not something to beat; rather they are friends or colleagues who provide the necessary resistance causing us to dig more deeply into ourselves. Without this resistance most of us would settle for less than our full potential. We have lost sight of this critical difference between striving together for our common enrichment and the winner take all attitudes, which drives athletics today.

So what is practice?

I would replace the word practice with the word experience so that we enter the experience freely and totally, which means that we become the experience. When practice becomes the experience it's not practice. Practice for most people is getting ready to do something. Where the person is fully engaged they are the experience. It is not a vision of becoming. They're doing it now.

What needs to happen before someone can feel safe enough to enter the experience freely?

First, as Joe Pearce points out, it is unconditional acceptance. I accept you unconditionally. I don't care if you win or lose. I accept you. I love you unconditionally. Second is, rules without ambiguity. This issue of ambiguity is monumental. The human brain cannot move in two opposed directions at the same time. It cannot play and be afraid of not winning at the same time. It can't say no to drugs and this game is brought to you by Bud. Those are diametrically opposed messages and we're eating people alive.

If the child is attempting to read and gets beat up and suffers emotional pain from being a poor reader, then the meaning of the words on the page are "ouch, this hurts." To the nervous system that means "ouch, move away." To the conscious mind, driven by parents and teachers, it means "you must move toward." No wonder we only develop five or ten percent of our potential.

We have the same thing in sports. We want you to go out there and play and be a good sport but if you don't win, I'm going to kick your butt. "I want you to *work hard at play* son!" Those are opposing messages. The human brain can't handle it. We need to eliminate ambiguity.

This demands tremendous clarity from adults.

I love my children but I have probably done great damage to them with all the right intent - because of ambiguity. We live in ambiguity and the world is growing more and more ambiguous. It's a horrendous challenge. Adults can begin by reducing the ambiguous situations we create for children every day.

This takes us back to mom and dad.

When we watch our favorite team win their division and one of these *magical athletes* looks to see if his mother is watching - what does that tell you? When are we going to understand that she, the mother, is the first and primary source that gives us permission to play the game freely. Virtually every athlete in a position to make such a tribute desperately wants to say, "There's my source. There is my safe place. This is what allowed me to be where I am today." If we can understand what that is, we've got some hope.

So, parents, coaches and educators - they are the target.

I don't know any parent who doesn't want the best for their children, but I'm not too sure we have a model for how that gets done anymore. Joe Pearce has outlined both the problem and the solution - unconditional acceptance and rules without ambiguity - that

is the foundation. With *The Intelligence of Play* we are suggesting that there are models. Somehow Michael Jordan's mother and father did something pretty unique as did Larry Byrd's mother and father. What is it? If we have some idea what that is, I think that we could all do it.

You have been talking with golf instructors from all over the country. What are the most important ideas you share with them?

We need to create ways for children to discover play for the joy of play, to enter into it freely and play the game so that the playing is winning. Don't set up the game to win or lose. Come up with inventive ways to keep the play going. We also need to allow for individuality. We need to help every person find the way that works best for him or her.

In terms of skill development there can't be such a thing as failure. There just can't be. There can only be matching the model or mismatching the model. You either did it like this or you didn't, and if you didn't, this is an opportunity to figure out how to get closer next time. The idea of failure has to be removed completely.

If adults can't do this, there is no chance that children are going to be able to do it. If we can't have fun, they're not going to have fun. If we're bored, they'll be bored. If we've got to win to prove we're having fun, they'll have to win to have fun. The question is not so much what kids need to do, it is what we need to do?

Is Chuck Hogan a lone voice?

There are many people working on similar tracks. I think all of us understand that there is more athletics than just technique or mechanics. I consider myself someone interested in the entire human being; psychologically, emotionally and physically, and how we blend these into this thing called performance.

How has Joe Pearce contributed to your view of human performance?

Joe's view of childhood and parenting confirmed what I had gathered up to that point and still confirms it every time I explore a new dimension of his vision. It's all right there collected in this one volume called *The Magical Child*.

I'm not the optimist that many people are. I'm not even the optimist that Joe Pearce is. Once we distance ourselves from the natural order of things - once we string ourselves out a couple more generations - when we have kids having kids who literally have no neural wiring for human values - then we are pretty much done for.

We are creating generation after generation of people who are dependent upon stuff for self-worth. Maybe I'm too sensitive but when I hear of children six years old being charged with attempted murder, I know we're slipping and the window is closing much quicker than we think. If we don't get it together, I'm suggesting in a couple of

generations, we'll slide over the edge and not have any way of getting back. We won't be able to pull ourselves out because we won't remember what nurturing is all about. There are lots of people that have never seen a cow except in a picture. The same thing is becoming true of nurturing.

In a discussion with corporate executives this fellow said, "You know I'd like to help you out. I live in one of the safest neighborhood in the United States and I'm scared to death to let my 4 and 6 six year old sons play in the front yard for fear that they're going to end up as faces on a milk carton." What have we done?

The capacity to nurture originates most deeply with women and this very capacity has been tremendously devalued in our culture. Joe made the point that men learn how to nurture from women. If they lose or fail to develop this capacity - there will be no one left.

We've got this thing all backwards. What we've got are the values of un-bonded males controlling the purse strings of the country, including the schools and the family. And women, trying to gain some equality are acting more and more like these men. This really scares me to death. The capacity to nurture - to care for another as much or more than we care for ourselves will disappear and with it will go the biological foundation for love, compassion and *The Intelligence of Play*.

Chuck Hogan has been a professional instructor since 1969. He has coached more than eighty four clients, thousands of amateur students, taught hundreds of golf schools and teach the teacher venues in all PGA section of the U.S. as well as conducted PGA teaching seminars in Canada, Sweden, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia and South America. Chuck has authored five books, hundreds of magazine arterials five major videos and consulted with dozens of golf schools and corporate training programs. His current project, *Golf & the Intelligence of Play*, is a revolutionary approach to parenting for peak performance, life long development and joy.