

Mickelson's mental coach is by his side at Deutsche Bank Championship

By Emily Kay
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NORTON, Mass. -- You don't get to be No. 8 in the world of golf without a world of self-confidence. Yet, with all that Phil Mickelson has been through in the few years -- the breast cancer that his wife and mother have battled, as well as fighting through his own diagnosis of psoriatic arthritis -- who could blame the big lefty if his concentration on the course had lagged a bit?

Indeed, Mickelson conceded after missing a three-foot putt on the 11th hole at the British Open that he had "let my mind slip."

As we noted at the time, Mickelson opened up to TV's Charlie Rose about his psychological issues.

"Other things than making that putt were going through my mind and that's something I've got to work on," Mickelson told Rose on July 25. "I've got to work on my focus because missing a three-foot putt is not a technical thing, it's more of a mental focus."

Despite his admitted brain freeze at The Open, Mickelson was already working on what he told Rose was "a whole different mentality." In addition, he was on his "way back to playing the way I'd like to play, playing the way I always have played and with a much more positive, fun outlook."

It was about that time that Mickelson enlisted the assistance of Julie Elion, a coach who has for 19 years helped professional golfers with the mental aspects of their games. The founder and director of the Center for Athletic Performance and Enhancement in Washington, D.C., Elion works with a handful of LPGA and 10 PGA golfers. Among her clients is J.B. Holmes, whom she was with as he underwent his recent successful brain surgery.



Julie Elion (r.) joins Jim Mackay (c.) as the newest member of Phil Mickelson's (l.) entourage (Photo: Emily Kay)

We caught up with Elion, who has been as constant a presence this past week as Phil's long-time caddie, Jim "Bones" Mackay, as Mickelson started Monday's finale of the second FedEx Cup playoff event. She respects Mickelson's request to keep their talks private, but it's safe to say -- as her website notes -- that she "helps prepare her players for success by focusing on believing in themselves first as a person, and second as an athlete."

As Golf Digest's Tim Rosaforte observed recently, Mickelson intimates believe Elion helped the four-time major champ overcome bad weather and rough conditions to finish T2 at the British Open.

After almost missing the cut this week in Boston, Mickelson clubbed his way back into the mix on Sunday and began Labor Day's final round at 7-under -- four strokes back of 54-hole leader Bubba Watson. With three birdies and a bogey, Lefty was 9-under through 12 -- six shots off the 15-under (through eight) pace set by co-leaders Luke Donald and Webb Simpson.