

## **CPGA Playing Ability Test (PAT) - Preparing to Succeed**

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I know firsthand the pressures and challenges involved with the Canadian PGA Playing Ability Test (PAT). I participated in the first PAT ever conducted by the CPGA in 1985. There is no question that it can be challenging and unnerving as there is a lot at stake. The following is some pertinent information regarding the PAT and a list of suggestions for your consideration as you prepare for the challenge. I hope you find this helpful. Good luck!

### ***Common Errors that lead to Poor Performance at PAT***

PAT Candidates should be aware that the following behaviours and habits generally lead to poor performance at the PAT.

- Waiting to prepare for the PAT until just a few weeks before the test
- Not having a comprehensive strategy on how to succeed at the PAT
- Not having sufficient playing and practice time during the season prior to the PAT – irregular, not focused
- Not having enough exposure/experience to playing under competitive pressure before the event – the PAT makes them very nervous
- Not having sufficient course knowledge or experience at the tournament site – having only one or no practice round
- Not having the necessary skill to hit tee shots, wedge shots, and putts as required to succeed under pressure
- Not knowing how to play with intelligent golf strategy that leads to minimizing risk and optimizing the odds of hitting greens in regulation in order to pass the PAT
- Not being able to appropriately handle stress and mental game challenges that the PAT presents
- Playing with less than optimally fit clubs and balls
- Not being prepared or equipped to deal with less than ideal weather and course conditions

- Not arriving at the PAT confident that they are more than prepared to succeed – needing a better than average performance in order to pass the PAT

### ***Passing the PAT - How do you prepare to succeed?***

PAT Candidates will give themselves their best chance to succeed by being aware of the following information and governing themselves accordingly.

### ***Understand the test – what are you required to do?***

In order to pass the PAT, male and female candidates are required to shoot a score of +15 over the course rating for 36 holes. This equates generally to posting a score of 155 over 36 holes for males and 158 for females. The course length for this test is generally about 6300 yards for males and 5800 yards for females. The hole locations are typically “friendly”. The PAT is all about the candidate demonstrating that he/she has the skill to shoot the required scores under competitive conditions.

### ***How “good” do you have to be to pass the PAT?***

Statistically speaking, in order to successfully pass the PAT, you need to be able to perform at a 6 handicap level or better under competitive pressure for 36 holes. There are many ways to arrive at a golf score; however, candidates who pass the PAT typically have to perform as follows: hit about nine or more greens in regulation on average for both rounds; hit seven or more fairways per round; have an average of 31 or fewer putts per round; make 1.5 birdies or more per round; one or less double bogeys per round; and about five bogeys per round on average.

### ***Identify “Mentors”/Teachers to help you and Support Your Efforts***

PAT Candidates are strongly encouraged to work with a CPGA Professional who can mentor and coach them to successfully pass the PAT. This support is a key success strategy that should not be overlooked.

### ***What should a person do to prepare for the PAT?***

Candidates should focus their energies and attention on controlling the “controllables” as it relates to preparing for the PAT far in advance of the test so that they can successfully perform during the “exam”. Candidates need to arrive at the 1<sup>st</sup> Tee for the PAT with confidence - feeling like they will succeed knowing that they have put in the necessary time and energy into developing more than adequate physical ball hitting and short game skills, mental game skills and strategies; and appropriate course management and tactics required to pass the test.

- Equipment and balls – make sure that your equipment and balls fit you so that you can develop your skills and play your best under pressure. Get your equipment evaluated

and fitted by an experienced and qualified CPGA Professional who has expertise in this area early in the year. Monitor your equipment throughout the year. Have it checked two weeks prior to the event.

- Physical game - develop and hone fundamentals, ball striking and short game skills ideally under the supervision of a CPGA Professional – Successful male candidates are likely to need ball speed with a driver of 140 mph+; females 120mph+; the ability to hit nine or more greens on average per round; lose an average of two strokes or less per round from errant tee shots; 85% proficiency on putts four feet and less; two or fewer three putts per round; and the ability to hit the green within 25 feet of the pin 16/20 times from 100 yards.
- Mental Game – candidates need to have the ability to control their inner environment so that they can stay calm and focused under pressure and not interfere with their physical skills. They need to be prepared to be able to lower their tension level on command, handle adversity, focus on relevant cues and tasks at hand, and to take control of their thoughts and heart rate. There are many ways to learn and hone mental skills including working with a trained professional who has expertise in this area. Some excellent mental game books/tools available include: “How Great Golfers Think” by Bob Skura ([howgreatgolfersthink.com](http://howgreatgolfersthink.com)); “GolfMind” – a CD offered by The Subconscious Training Corporation; and, “Train Your Golf Brain” –a CD by Dr. Karl Morris.
- Practice – effective practice habits are likely to lead to skill development and confidence and competence under competitive pressure. Serious PAT Candidates should be training and practicing a minimum of 1.5 hours per day five days a week during the golf season. It may be helpful to look at practice as “studying” for the exam. Consistent and efficient practice habits are likely to give candidates their best chance to perform well in the PAT.
- Play – It is recommended that PAT Candidates play at least 45 holes of golf per week throughout the season and 72 holes of golf weekly for the month leading up to the PAT. Candidates should play under pressure as much as possible- tournaments and friendly wager games where all putts are holed and official scores are calculated.
- Preparation – PAT Candidates should devise a written game plan/course map for the PAT. They should play the “Test Course” regularly throughout the season (six times or more) before the PAT if possible. They should play a simulated “Practice PAT” – 36 holes- keep score. They should be prepared for any weather and course conditions that may emerge- rain, cold, wind, slow greens, etc. They should use a SkyCaddie or other like legal distance measuring devices. They should visualize themselves playing the

course successfully as planned and dealing with any stressors that may emerge and passing the PAT.

- Stats Collection /Analysis – PAT Candidates should keep track of their performance statistics throughout the year. This identifies strengths and makes the golfer aware of areas in his/her game that need to be improved. Shot By Shot ([shotbyshot.com](http://shotbyshot.com)) is an industry leading online golf stats program. I highly recommend. We use it extensively in the RCGA High Performance Program.
- Fitness and Nutrition – PAT Candidates should be committed to getting into appropriate condition that leads to optimal golf performance – cardio endurance, strength, and flexibility. As well, they should have nutrition and hydration habits and strategies that enhance performance possibilities.

### **CPGA Playing Ability Test (PAT) - Preparing to Succeed**

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#### ***Off Season***

The off season requires several things to be done to ensure success during the PAT. This is where the fitness, psychology and main preparation is done. This is where cardio, strength and muscular endurance are the heaviest. This coupled with swing maintenance, lessons and coaching (somewhat of a minimum unless major changes are needed) and more of a limbering stretching focus for the swing, should take place. A good trainer and someone with similar goals to train and work out with would be ideal. The first stage should be a realistic schedule and something that is manageable and also fun. Fun has different meanings for different people, but make it fun and you will stick at it for longer. Psychology can and should be started throughout this time. Negative psychology is one of the biggest factors that I see as a reason for failure of the PAT. It appears that dealing with tension, frustration, and finding coping skills to allow you to perform can and should be done on a regular basis. Visualization, breathing and relaxation are all good skills to have in golf as well as in life.

#### ***In Season***

As we get closer to the event and as the season starts, the focus shifts far more to playing and striking golf balls, and of course the most often overlooked short game. Time is a factor but playing the game is a huge and critical aspect of preparation and will ensure success at the PAT. Many people feel as though they “need to practice” which usually means at the range. I disagree. The game is golf and it cannot, no matter how we try, be re-created on the range. If you have time get used to the unmistakable skills of playing. If you don't have time, hit the range and have a purpose. When you play and practice it should be the same feeling, create

situations on the range and have a purpose with each shot. If you can visit the golf course where the PAT will be held, it will be able to give you an idea of the course and the type of shots that you will need. Once you have this info, you can practice effectively. If you practice short game (or “when” I should say) practice as many different situations and shots as you can. Practice one off shots, practice situations, practice from good lies and bad, drop the ball and have a safe go to shot to rely on. When putting, putt with one ball for a while then when developing rhythm, tempo and comfort, putt with multiple balls. The ratio of practice time to playing should be 50 – 50 that is three rounds, three practice sessions. In those practice sessions 50 – 50 should be full swing/game situations and short game scenarios and drills. The training should now be tapered down to maintenance and relaxation. Psychology can and should involve on-course and on-range situations.

### ***Month of PAT***

This is game time; at LEAST one round a week should be competitive with strong players. Challenge yourself and allow yourself to feel pressure and uneasiness, a feeling you will probably have at the PAT. When you do this enough times the PAT will be slightly less stressful and you may even enjoy and embrace the challenge.

### ***Two weeks out from event***

A couple of days at the start of the week, focus on hitting balls in a blocked practice fashion, somewhere in the 200 – 3300 ball range (working on one or two types of shots, and multiple strokes roughly a thousand over three days). Afterwards, play and practice with emphasis on your short game and putting for the remainder of the week. Start to visualize and prepare for each hole and each shot.

### ***Week of the event***

Play a couple of games, (competitive if you can) and you should be ready. No “cramming needed” you are confident as you have prepared well, you are fit and therefore your mind is clear and focused. You know how to cope with distractions and how to relax when the tension rises. At the practice round, check out the greens and know as much as you can. Here is when you form your game plan and then try to execute during the round. It is the execution of the game plan that will require your undivided attention. The day of the event, warm up as you normally do at home. Focus on your game plan and attempt without interference (tension control) to execute each shot. Try not to add the score as you go, simply execute and perform to the best of your ability. When you get to the end of the round add them up and see how you did. This may be the toughest skill to teach yourself throughout the year.

### ***PAT Re-Try***

Look at it this way, you’ve seen the course and now you know how it feels! Take a look at your game, honestly and critically and FIX it. In other words if you struggled off the tee, see if it cost

you strokes. If you didn't need to hit the driver, were your irons good or not and so forth. Once you have a really good idea of where the mistakes were made go to work. Think of it positively as a second chance and not as a failure and turn that negative self talk and negative psychology into a positive. Ian Woosnam tried for 8 years to get his Tour card in Europe and eventually won the Masters. Be determined, learn from your mistakes and set up a more realistic game plan at the course, and you will succeed. Find a way to play to your strengths, and accentuate those shots and feelings. You know you are good enough to play the game, so think of all the good shots and draw upon these visuals when you can. Play a few times in between, enjoy the game and try to take that attitude of enjoyment and fun to the 2<sup>nd</sup> try. Don't then make it happen, let it happen.