



Who is Dave Alred?
Alred is a leading performance coach. He's worked with Manchester City, England's rugby and cricket teams, several pro golfers and many others.



**BY DAVE
ALRED**

SECRETS TO PERFORMING UNDER PRESSURE

Words **Michael Weston** • Photography **Dan Gould, Getty Images**

One of the pioneers of performance coaching runs through techniques to make you a better player

Dr Dave Alred MBE is many things. He's a performance coach, yes, but he's also a maverick, a pioneer and a genius. He helps his clients to deliver when the pressure is at its most extreme. He's regarded as one of the best in the business, a leader in performance mindset and attitude. He holds a PhD in Performing Under Pressure from Loughborough University and is a member of the Coaching Hall of Fame.

It's why his list of clients includes Premier League footballers, international rugby players (remember Jonny Wilkinson?), England cricketers and professional golfers. It

explains the deep tan. When you're in demand, you rack up the air miles. For much of the year, he's in Australia, where he coaches the Queensland Reds rugby union team. And, of course, there's the time he spends on the road with Francesco Molinari, whose leap in form over the last couple of years has shone a light on his coaching principles.

Alred's first involvement in golf came when he was recruited to be part of Sir Clive Woodward's British Olympic Association

project, a spell that involved working with Melissa Reid. A year later, he was contacted by Luke Donald. The pair worked together for two-and-a-half years, and although the relationship would eventually run its course, it proved a successful partnership, with Donald rising to the top of the world rankings.

Padraig Harrington has also profited from time spent with the performance guru. "I love the man, he's brilliant," the Ryder Cup captain tells *Golf Monthly*. "I'm gleaning information from him all the time. Some of the stuff has really worked well for me. Performance coaching is the future of golf. If you're not



Alred was keynote speaker at the Jenahura Tour Academy

doing that, you're an idiot. Results-wise it wasn't there for me. I wasn't putting well, but the work we did was successful in many ways."

So, what kind of work are we talking about? With 'Fran', he's not the one focusing on alignment or swing positions; that's Denis Pugh, James Ridyard and Phil Kenyon's area of expertise. Alred is the meticulous planner. He structures practice sessions; he watches, listens and records.

It makes the synergy between the team vital. "Often I suggest things and people will say 'How about this?' Everybody's working in a specialism, but they also want to be interested in what's going on," says Alred. "I could not be as effective without working with these guys."

GM was recently given a rare opportunity to spend the day with Alred at Bearwood Lakes GC, where he was the keynote speaker at one of Jenahura Tour Academy's workshops. JTA aims to educate young players on what to expect at the top level of professional golf. So, what did they learn? Well, we can share a few secrets...



He helped Luke Donald reach World No.1

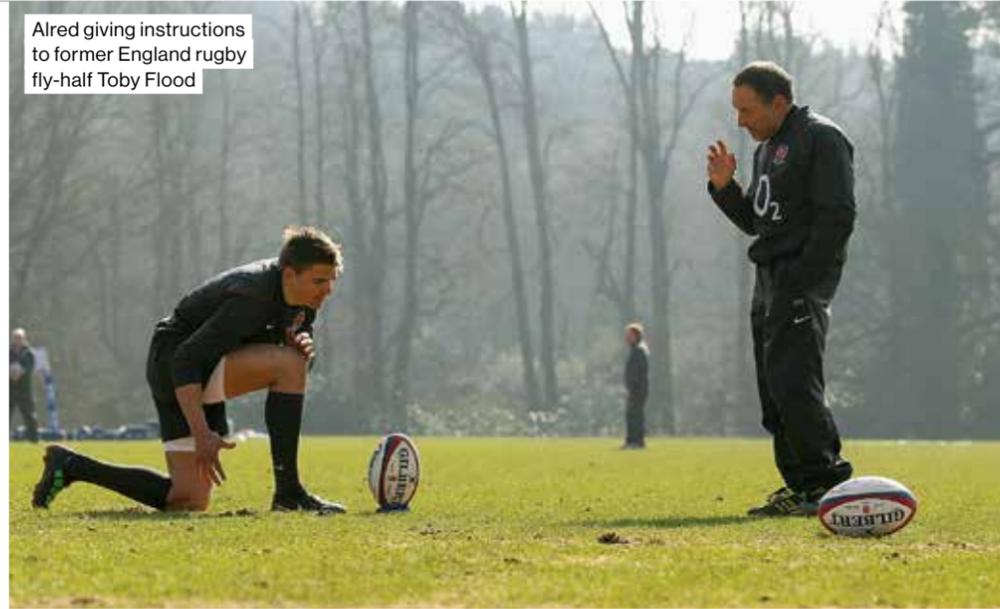
LEARN FROM THE MASTER WITH THESE 6 TOP TIPS

1 Practice 'under the pump'
Practice isn't about going through the motions – sessions such as this are fruitless. "When you're creating practices, you have to have practices with consequence, otherwise it's irrelevant," Alred explains. "I might not know so much about the swing, but what I do know is what makes people perform. I'm trying to create a performance model that makes people effective under the pump."

On the chipping green, Alred demonstrates a way of creating pressure. Keeping strictly within a tightly marked zone, the aim for the players is to chip the ball no further than the one before. Success means executing five delicate chips in a row. It sounds easy, but there's little room for error, and one poor shot spells the end. This is practising under the pump. Give it a go. Come that back nine in the Club Championship, you may just find yourself performing better when it matters most.

2 The number of reps is key
The person tipping over another bucket of balls and swishing away without a break – you can write them off. "Think of your brain as a bone idle 12-year-old who wants to be cool," says Alred. "You focus on the first one, second one, and then some more, then

Alred giving instructions to former England rugby fly-half Toby Flood



suddenly you hit a bad one. The brain shuts down unless you take a substantial break, because you start to play in your subconscious."

The answer? Ten sets of five. This gives you ten 'match shots'. "Stop, go and hit a six-foot putt or a chip," says Alred. "That's another match shot. You have one shot, one club, one opportunity. The guy who does ten sets of five is infinitely more prepared for the tournament than the bloke who does one set of 50."

3 Get in the 'ugly zone'
The idea that someone would spend an entire session in the comfort zone sends shivers down Alred's spine. During Jonny Wilkinson's spell at Toulon, Alred observed him kicking low spirals at the bottom of a post protector from about 30 yards. It was a very difficult kick, and they coined the phrase the 'ugly zone'.



Alred boasts an infectious enthusiasm

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL
Watching Dave Alred at work

When Alred speaks, he has everyone's attention. They want to know his secrets. He's often intense, although no one is more aware of the brain's capacity to retain information. This is why the seriousness is often interrupted with amusing anecdotes. We learn about his past obsession with observing dolphins (something to do with animal behaviour) and how he once found himself talking to horses while working with the Brunei polo squad.

He uses colourful language, too, because some points just need extra reinforcement. On the course, he's full of energy and positive encouragement. His infectious enthusiasm stems from his fascination with human behaviour. "As adults, our learning is f*****," he says. "Look how three-year-olds behave, they go nuts with excitement."

It's the subject matter that really motivates him. He's not someone you'd ever find basking in the glory of his

"The guy who does ten sets of five is infinitely more prepared than the bloke who does one set of 50"

"When the post protectors were even lower, it got into butt ugly and all the rest of it," he laughs. "I use it all the time. People will say, 'Jeepers, I'm really in the ugly zone now', but it's said with a smile. When the learning gets deeper and more enjoyable, people will progress much more effectively." So, worth thinking about the next time you spend an entire session chipping to the same easy pin.

4 Understand 'repair work'
Let's say you're working on something technical on the range – 'repair work' – and you slice the ball. Immediately you become focused on the outcome, rather than the process. "When you're

learning something, you should do it into a net, so you can't see where the ball goes," says Alred. "You shut off the outcome, because you cannot help but try and manipulate what you do and therefore compromise your commitment to the change. That's a conflict."

5 Keep a journal
Ideally, you'd track your own performance and accomplishments using the 'No Limits Performance Journal'. As far as Alred is concerned, it's the bible. "Justin Rose is desperate to get his hands on one, but he's not going to. He can't afford it," he jokes.

The reasons for keeping one are simple: it helps you set goals and formulate plans, and gives you somewhere to record your thoughts. If you're serious about your practice, you need that pen and paper to cement the learning process.

Just ask PGA EuroPro Tour player Billy Watson, who tells *Golf Monthly* how he changed his practice sessions immediately after the day spent with Alred. "When I go to practise now, I know exactly what I will be working on," he says. "I use the same method for all the gym work, too. It makes it a lot easier when going back through your day and seeing what you have accomplished."



Alred with Denis Pugh and Francesco Molinari

6 Give yourself credit
It may sound puffy, but Alred gets very perplexed by golfers' mindsets. He believes that 'negative avoidance' is the default mindset, such as "I don't want to make a mistake" and "I don't want to go into the water" – which he describes as a "fundamental flaw".

"In golf, when people hit bad shots, all hell breaks loose," he says. "What you're doing is reinforcing the very behaviour that you're trying to avoid. I see people hit good shots but I don't see them reinforcing it, such as, 'That was really good, it came right out of the middle, I loved the shape and it matched my intention perfectly.'"

The answer is to fill your brain up with what you want to achieve. "See that 9-iron going beyond the pin," says Alred, "and then coming back two metres, or see that soft 8-iron that is bounce, bounce, check. When you play the shot, you say, 'Well, how did that match my intention?' Straight away, that's a much better way of looking at it."

● **The Jenahura Tour Academy is an educational platform for aspiring professional golfers, created by tournament professionals and supported by highly respected industry experts, including: Ryder Cup players, European Tour winners, tour caddies and the best specialist coaches in the business. For more information, visit jenahura.com/academy**