

Play safer shoot lower

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Amateurs often have very high expectations, attempt too many difficult shots and put themselves under unnecessary pressure. These four simple rules will help you keep your scores down, without the need to take chances



RULE ONE: Map out the hole

Plan how to best play each hole using the clubs you are most comfortable with. If you're not confident with the driver, leave it in the bag – a 5-wood will still give you decent distance off the tee and is easier to hit. Even a 5-iron should give you a chance to reach most par 4s in three strokes. This leads us nicely on to Rule Two...



RULE TWO: Use your handicap



If you're not a scratch golfer, use your handicap to gain the best results on the course.

■ Handicap 36

Aim to be on the green in the same number of strokes as the par of the hole. So on a par 4, try to be on the green in four shots. Two putts will then give you a double bogey – do this all the way round and you will play to your handicap. If you find you can reach the green in one shot fewer then go for it – but don't try to force the ball as you are likely to put yourself in trouble.



■ Handicap 18

Aim to be on the green in one shot less than the par of the hole – so you should try to take three shots to reach a par 4. Two putts will see you record a nett par on your card.

■ Handicap 9

On holes where you receive a stroke lay up if necessary and ensure you make bogey at worst. You need to hit the green in regulation on the rest of the course.

RULE THREE: Know when to attack



Look at the scorecard and note the holes on which you receive shots. Can you reach any of these in fewer than the regulation number of strokes for your handicap? These are your "birdie" holes, so look to make the most of them. If you are in any doubt, don't force the issue – play the hole according to your handicap.

RULE FOUR: Stay in the present



It is important to take one shot at a time – dwelling on poor results will affect the outcome of your next stroke. If you play a bad shot try laughing to yourself or humming a tune. It might sound daft but it helps to lift your spirits!



Forget the hole you have just played – whether it was good or bad – and start afresh on the next. You can't do anything about the outcome once you've stepped off the green – you need to devote your concentration to the job at hand.



Don't count up your scores as you play as this can place you under undue pressure and spoil your concentration. Add your total up at the end of the round – you might be in for a pleasant surprise.