

Chapter Three

Play Smart Assertively

*Forget the last shot.
It takes so long to accept that you can't always replicate your swing.
The only thing you can control is your attitude toward the next shot.*

Mark McCumber

In baseball, a foul ball generally becomes some fan's souvenir, and the batter gets another chance.

When the football quarterback is in trouble, he throws the ball out of bounds and tries again.

In golf, we get to hit our foul balls or are penalized for those that go out of bounds. Our field of play isn't all smooth grass, but can be wet, rocky or knee deep in weeds. Mostly, we get to play the ball from where it went.

You are not Phil or Bubba.

Even professional golfers hit some terrifically bad shots. In fact, they hit the ball so much further than we do, their bad shots can be eligible for disaster relief.

Amazingly, in the most pressure packed of circumstances, they are also capable of imagining a glorious recovery shot... and pulling it off on their way to victory.

We are not those guys.

Sure, our trouble might be equally bad, but our ability to navigate through small openings or hook a wedge thirty yards on purpose probably does not exist.

When you are in trouble caused by a bad shot or unfortunate bounce, the most important thing is to allow the present shot to make your next shot a good one.

Turn negative talk into positive action.

We often hear golfers say, "I was *forced* to lay up."

Sometimes it becomes, "The *only option* I had was to punch out."

It is very subtle, but usually those phrases follow a defeatist attitude following a misplayed drive or approach shot. Often the golfer who is "forced" to lay up is thinking in the recesses of his

mind what could have been rather than what really is. And with those self-indulgent pity parties, the next shot is frequently of much less quality than what is called for.

For instance, if you are “forced” to simply punch out of the woods onto the fairway, you may be wallowing in golfer-pity to the extent that the approach shot to the green isn’t though out very well, and you end up in the greenside bunker.

Negative attitudes often lead to deeper trouble.

The important thing here is to take full charge of your attitude about the decision to play the smart shot back onto the fairway. When that play is the best play, verbalize it to yourself in that fashion.

“I am making the proper decision that will help me reach the best score possible on this hole.” should be your mantra. Be assertive in the decisions you make. Practice making positive and definitive decisions needed on the course.

Good scores are lost, not created.

Have you ever had your best round ever, when out of nowhere on the fourteenth hole you hit a drive out of bounds, try and hit the next drive so hard it only goes ninety yards, then muscle your fourth shot into the weeds to the right of the green, flail away at the ball twice before hitting into the bunker, come out of the bunker sixty feet from the hole then take a casual three putt for an eleven?

Sounds crazy, but I have seen it happen in many different ways. One moment of mental lack of attention, and the low score becomes a distant memory.

The simple fact exists. Those of us who are not professionals are seldom going to birdie our way into our lifetime low score. The day we score our very best will be the day we make the fewest mistakes. More importantly, the mistakes we make will be dealt with properly and with the least negative impact on our score.

Discover the starting step to success.

Your success at becoming a solid bogey golfer (remember, that means scoring in the 88 to 92 range consistently) hinges on understanding how important it is to have an assertive attitude towards making the smartest shot.

Laying up or punching out are not defeatist shots. They are the assertively determined and successfully completed smartest shot you can play. They are the shots that make the next shot meaningful.

Most golfers “play safe and layup” only when they have hit a terrible shot, and that is their only alternative.

The absolute starting point of knocking those ten strokes off your “average” score of 100 is to decide to play a wisely conservative style of golf after you have hit a good shot. How often have you seen someone, maybe even yourself, hit a decent drive right in the middle of the fairway, then try the 200-yards left to a green guarded by two large traps and a pond? Then complain as they leave the putting surface with a triple bogey caused by a wet ball and three putts?

Rather than try for a long shot into a well-guarded green, how much better would a chosen layup, middle of the green approach and two putt bogey look on the scorecard.

You will be in good company when you discover the power of playing smart assertively. Remember, Zach Johnson won the 2008 Masters tournament by laying up on every par 5 hole for the entire tournament.

As you learn how to combine present day limitations of your game with future expectations, your score will go lower and make every round of golf a life-enhancing event.