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! SAND STORM

Data from the latest shot-tracking technology paints a very bleak picture for the typical club golfer's success from fairway bunkers. Ultimately, this is not a shot amateurs get to practise very often. So this winter, find a quiet time to hit some full-swing sand shots and gain confidence. Removing the fear of fairway traps will free you up to employ the swing and strategy you want to use.

CADDIE ON YOUR SHOULDER

PLAN YOUR ADVANCE

↙ This is the stunning dog-leg-left, par-5 17th at Formby Golf Club. Measuring around 480 yards off the tees of the day, it is reachable with two solid strikes for some and represents a decent opportunity to card a four. That said, there is still enough trouble around to

ensure a poor or vague strategy will still see you post a big number – most notably in the three bunkers in play off the tee.

These four principles will make sure you give yourself your best chance of getting the better of the hole... and not vice versa.

1 Two or three-shot strategy?

Your first question must be: Am I going to try to get as close to the green as possible in two shots, or settle for three? The answer informs everything that follows. The strategy you choose is less important than the fact you have one; having a clear plan is at the heart of making confident clubbing choices and committed swings. But in making your choice, first ask...

- Do I have the firepower to get close to or on the green in two, or am I kidding myself?
- How well am I playing?
- What is the state of the round/match?
- Does the hole suit my shape?

2 Two-shot strategy: Don't get cute

If you decide to get as close to the green as possible in two, your immediate inclination is to make the hole as straight and short as possible. On dog-legs like this, that means setting up to cut the corner. This is a trap course designers love to set for you, including James Braid who shaped Formby's closing holes. His two bunkers up the left, plus penal rough on the inside of the dog-leg, make cutting the corner a risk not worth taking. Even when playing aggressively, shoot for the widest part of the fairway from the tee.

3 Three-shot strategy: Plan the hole backwards

A three-shot strategy brings a pitch approach in to play. This third shot will set up your score for the hole, so everything you do from the tee should be based around finding the ideal position from which to play it. This means leaving the tee shot in the best position to find that ideal pitching spot with the second. A tee shot up the left makes it easier to place your second in the right half of the fairway, and vice versa. Within this, it's vital you avoid all hazards off the tee, so pick a club short enough to take them out of play.

4 Common ground

Whichever strategy you settle on, be sure to adopt all the usual and necessary disciplines that give you your best chance of making a good start to the hole...

- Take all weather conditions into account.
- Take a moment to visualise the shot. Having a clear mental picture helps your brain send the appropriate messages to your muscles.
- Make a practice swing, rehearsing any technical move you are working on.
- Having chosen your line, pick an object near to you on that line and use it to set your aim.
- Reconnect with your target, commit and fire.