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CADDIE ON YOUR SHOULDER

TO LAY UP OR LAUNCH IT?

My drive has just fallen off the left side of the fairway of the fantastic 8th hole at Formby GC... and I now have a decision to make. A 485-yard par 5, the green is just about in reach of a solid hybrid...

but the target isn't exactly wide, and I could always lay up. Be it a reachable par 5 or a long par 4, this is a situation club golfers face all the time. On this occasion, here's why I believe the more aggressive play is the better one.

! MAKE THE CUT

If you do choose to lay up, Shot Scope data also reveals the importance of finding the fairway. Average proximity from 110 yards in the fairway is 64ft; in the rough it jumps to 80ft. The balance of longer/rough and shorter/fairway works out at 50 yards in the rough or 80 yards in the fairway; for both shots, average proximity is 48ft.

1 What the data tells us

According to shot-tracking specialists Shot Scope, we will have more success getting as close as possible to the green than by laying up. Their data capture tells us that golfers who try to get as close as possible average 4.2 shots to complete the hole, while golfers who lay up take 4.8 shots – more than half a shot worse. Clearly every hole has its own, unique set of hazards and conditions that shape the decision; but with all things being equal, fortune does indeed seem to favour the brave.

2 Does the lay-up make sense?

Like all great longer holes, Formby's 8th is all about angles. That bulge of fairway just the other side of the cross rough gives way to a twisting sliver of short grass that would be exacting to hit with the 7-iron or so I'd want to use to lay up. The only really safe lay-up is into that bulge, which would still leave a full short iron in... and with the pin on the top section of a two-tier green, a lofted approach is never ideal. In many situations, a lay-up can be the right play; not here though.

3 Should I take on the green?

As ever, we start with the lie. From your reading of the lie, try predicting the sound of impact; if it is hard and clicky – as here, with this wispy lie – the aggressive shot is on; if it's soft and muffled, a lay-up is probably the better call. We can also work in these factual considerations...

- This hole has no greenside bunkers.
- The apron bulges and is relatively generous.
- A low, running approach works better to a rear pin on a two-tier green.

If you can build your case with facts, the wise shot selection becomes a lot clearer.

4 Pick a side

With the decision to go for the green made, your attention switches to picturing the shot; how it will fly, where it will land, how it will kick. Of course, on shots over 200 yards we cannot be too exacting here; while we'd all love to attack the pin, a far more effective strategy is to pick the side of the green that offers the greater margin for error, and shoot for that. In this case, with the pin on the right of the green and that mound biting in from the right, adjusting my sights to the mid-left to left edge of the green makes far more sense.