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## Take the time to practice

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John hits an errant tee shot into the trees. Instead of chipping out and playing for an up-and-down par or at worse bogey, he tries to hit a fantasy shot over and around the trees in front of him.



**Faldo knows the key to a good round is practicing and becoming knowledgeable about the terrain before stepping to the first tee** (Allsport)

Too proud to chip out and "take his medicine," his ego gets in the way of decision making. He steps outside the limits of his skills and plays a dumb shot.

He confidently plays the shot and the ball strikes a tree and goes out of bounds. He has to replay the shot with a penalty stroke.

He chips the ball back into play because now he knows the shot is too difficult. He triple

bogeys the hole and is furious because he should have made no worse than a bogey.

John's ill-advised decision caused the blemish on his card.

This type of thinking was perpetuated in the movie *Tin Cup*, starring Kevin Costner. On the last hole of the U.S. Open, Costner, playing an

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egomaniac golf pro, decides to go for a 250-yard carry over water.

He thinks he can pull the shot off. He is confident when he stands over the ball. But he dunks shot after shot into the water until he holes out the last ball in his bag.

Poor risk management is a killer to shooting low numbers. Your ability to manage risk and make the right decisions on the course are vital to shooting good scores.

It's important to develop a strategy for every round based on your skills and knowledge of the golf course. You can do your homework ahead of time with a practice round.

One of the great challenges about golf is that it is a thinking man's game.

A smart golfer who knows when to take risks will always beat the reckless golfer that is prisoner to his ego and emotions.

A reckless game plan coupled with overconfidence is a recipe for high numbers. Confidence is a great asset in golf, but overconfidence can prevent you from playing "smart golf."

You must have the confidence that you can hit any shot well, but that doesn't mean letting your boldness cause you to hit low-percentage shots.

Pulling out driver on every par-4, cutting the corner on every dogleg, going for every par-4 in two and aiming at the pin on every hole sometimes yields birdies, but usually leads to more double bogeys.

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On the other hand, a cautious or careful game plan does not help you score your best either. A cautious player is so afraid of making mistakes that his or her game revolves around avoiding mistakes.

This player is in a protect mode, which leads to tentative swings and fearful putting. In protect mode, the goal is not to make a high number or a mistake, which is a tentative way to play.

Have you ever putted well when trying not to three-putt?

Good course management is playing smart golf, which starts before you reach the first tee.

Your game plan should balance both conservative and bold shots at the right times. The smart golfer assesses the risk-reward ratio on every shot when making decisions.

What are the risks of going for a par-5 in two on this particular hole?  
What are the rewards?

The rewards are simple -- a possible birdie or maybe a chance at eagle.

What are the risks? A high score on the hole.

These are some of the questions to consider when weighing risks and rewards.

### **Performance Tip:**

Part of playing smart golf is doing your homework ahead of time. A practice round to study the course is essential for planning your round and setting a game plan.

Here is a checklist of tasks you should do during a practice round or when walking the golf course:

- Check accuracy of the yardage book or yardage plates.
- Measure distance to fairway bunkers or hazards and to carry those obstacles.
- Note the distance to wide parts of fairways.
- Record the distance to carry green-side bunkers or hazards.
- Pick smart targets off tees and around greens that are eye-catching.
- Study the contour, speed and slope of the greens.
- Become familiar with the subtle breaks on each green.
- Note trouble areas around the greens.
- Note the best spot on the green to have the best putt.

**Editor's note:** Instruction features appear every Wednesday on GolfWeb.

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