**The Top 10 Course Management Mistakes That Golfers Make**by

**Jason Sutton,** P.G.A . Director of Instruction at Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, North Carolina. 2013 Carolinas PGA Teacher of the Year. I am an AimPoint Green Reading Certified Instructor, K-Vest certified, A Certified Coutour Putter fitter, D-Plane certified.

1. Not hitting enough club on approach shots – I think this stems firstly from not knowing how far each club carries to begin with. I encourage you to find someone who has a launch monitor and do a gapping session. Most golfers rely on their absolute best shot distance instead of their average which doesn’t leave room for a slight miss hit. Make a card with your distances on it and put it in your bag for reference. Don’t let your ego get in the way of your golf score.

2. Aiming at every flag no matter what – I use the stop light color code system when coaching students around the course. There are three types of flags. 1) Red – a flag that is tucked behind a bunker or a water hazard or that is very close to the edge of one side. 2) Yellow – this is an exposed pin that is closer to the front or the back of the green. It will bait you into trying to get it close but you have to make sure to take the correct club. 3) Green – This is a flag that is in the middle of the green or is very accessible for the ball to land and stop. These are “Go Zone” opportunities. There are typically about 6 of these per round so take advantage of these. For the average golfer 15-25 handicap, you will be well served to play to the largest part of the green and take your chances. You will be amazed at how your scores will decrease.

3. Hitting Driver on Every Hole – There is no rule that you have to hit driver on every par 4 or 5. It is important to know your strengths and weaknesses and driving can be a key weakness if you don’t play smart. We all have our holes that we struggle with at our home course. My advice is to change your strategy. Hit a fairway wood or a hybrid off the tee and see if your scores don’t improve. You must have room to miss your tee ball and still keep it in play. If the hole is super tight, play a shot that you know that you can get in play 80% of the time even if you give up a little distance. Don’t let your playing partners dictate your game plane. Stick to it!

4. Trying to Play the Hero Shot – One of my “NEVER’S” in course management is never hit two bad shots in a row if you can help it. This usually refers to trouble shots. You have pushed your tee shots into the trees and have to decide on what to do. 1) hit a 80 yard slice with a hybrid through a 6 foot gap just to hit the green or 2) punch out into the fairway in the large gap that you could drive your truck through. Most players choose #1 just because they saw Bubba Watson do it in the Masters. No. take your medicine and eliminate the big number. Wedge it on and try to make par the hard way but take double or worse out of the equation.

5. Putting To the Apex of the Putt –The apex is the top of the curve on a breaking putt. If you “Aim” at the apex, your ball will begin to break early in the putt and always miss low and will never make it to the “Apex.” The apex is an area that ball will roll through if the ball is started on the correct line. My advice is play 20% more break than you think and you will come out ahead in the long run. We always want the ball breaking toward the hole. If you under read your putts, you must hit the ball too hard or miss on the low side and have no chance.

6. Not taking advantage of the teeing ground – After you have picked your target off the tee, I would suggest you tee off on the side that you don’t want to miss it. For example – You have a par 4 with water down left side. Tee off on the left side of box which will open up your target area.

7. Using Too Much Loft Around the Green – There are times when you must play your toss shots up in the air over obstacles. But there are many more times when you have lots of green between your and hole and you still hit it up in the air and come up short. Don’t be one-dimensional. Learn to use your gap wedge to hit toss shots and learn to use less lofted clubs and hybrids to hit the higher percentage shots. Play the lowest shot allowable is my philosophy.

8. Know your strengths and weaknesses - For you higher handicaps, I suggest that you find your favorite club that you can hit into the air just about every time. Fairway woods are difficult to hit off of the ground for most players. It is OK to hit your tee shot, hit 2 seven irons up to the green and finish the hole. Work on your weaknesses on the practice range and have fun shooting lower scores. I once had a twice a year golfer shoot 43 during a playing lesson by hitting his 7 wood off the tee, 7 iron until we reached the green and pitched it on and made many pars and bogeys.

9. Letting A Bad Shot Ruin Your Round – It’s easier said than done but we must have an effective post shot routine. We all get upset over bad shots but when they carry over for several holes then we have a problem. I allow my students 10 seconds to be angry and once that club goes back into the bag we focus on the next shot. This takes practice but it will pay off in the long run.

10. Carrying Too Many Negative Thoughts or Swing Thoughts into the Play Box (address position) – We have all heard how important a pre-shot routine is in helping you stay focused on the shot at hand. Here is what I recommend. As you are standing behind the ball and preparing to play, ask yourself 2 questions…1) Where is my target? and 2)How do I want my ball to get there? This will help you block out distractions and help you focus on what’s important. Once you get into the play box, check your target, visualize the shot and “Don’t Forget To Breathe”.