



EXCLUSIVE  
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INSTRUCTION



# PLAYING SMART

**V**8 Supercars champion Marcos Ambrose dreams of slashing his handicap from 18 to single figures, so he can tee up in the 2005 Tasmanian Open Championship and show *Golf Australia* readers it is a possible leap in ability.

While Marcos continues to show improvement with his swing, his scores are still not doing anything to send his handicap into single figures.

Last month, I gave Marcos a plan to help eliminate high-risk shots from his game strategy. This proved troublesome as Marcos became too defensive, which is out of character after having watching him drive a V8 Supercar.

Marcos needs to learn to evaluate risk and reward and it didn't take long for a good example to present itself during a round at Lakelands.

We arrived at the 4th hole – which was playing 389 metres into a prevailing breeze – where there are several fairway bunkers on the left side of the fairway. Marcos wanted to play up the right but this left him with a long shot into the green.

Evaluating the risk and reward (pic 1), I suggested that if he hit into one of the bunkers on the shorter line to the green, he might still be able



1

PHOTOS: TRES BIEN PHOTOGRAPHY X 4



2

to hit the green with his second shot. A drive down the "safe" line would mean firing at the green with a long iron or fairway wood, which would more than likely result in him missing the green.

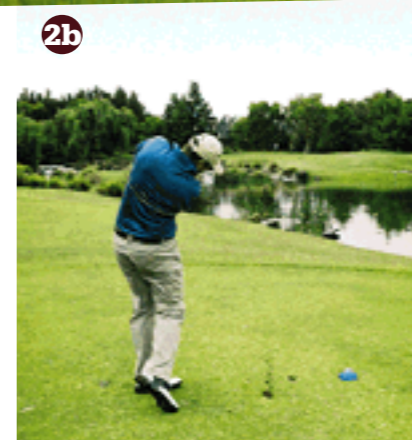
Even if Marcos misses the green from the trap he is no worse off than if he took the safe line. If his drive happens to fly over the traps he has a short iron approach and a chance at making a birdie.

Marcos decided to attack the hole and ended with a short birdie putt after sticking a 9-iron close to the flag for two shots. It was certainly better than his strategy on the same hole a week earlier, when he took the safe line and was left with a 3-iron to the green. He missed the green on that occasion and made a bogey.

To help instill the risk-reward



2a



2b

evaluation process, I got Marcos to play three shots from different parts of the tee when we arrived at the 117-metre par-3 14th (pic 2, 2a and 2b).

This exercise was used to help Marcos see how important selecting the correct side of the teeing area on par-3s is. This is the only time we can guarantee the angle to attack the green from.

The plan on all par-3s for Marcos is to score no worse than par. To do this, Marcos now walks onto the tee of a par-3 without a club selected and plans the line that presents the least risk, yet makes it easy to hit the green

in a position where two putts are, not only possible, but are an absolute certainty.

In fact, Marcos uses this method, of evaluating the shot without a club in hand, on all shots so as to promote open-minded thinking.

After the evaluation, I get Marcos to plan the shot, select a club for his plan and then commit to the shot. Once he's committed, there is no going back without starting the process from the beginning.

The practice swing comes next, while visualising a great outcome. Then Marcos walks in from behind the ball, sets the club, sets his body and starts the swing with a positive image on his mind.

I recommend to all my students that when the shot is played it is then time to relax. But with a student like Marcos this is tough as he expects perfection all of the time and gives himself a hard time if this is not the case. We are still working on this one.

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