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**GUIDE TO BREAKING 80**

***By: Corey Stith, PGA***

***INTRODUCTION***

The barriers to breaking 100 and 90 are largely about playing smart and avoiding big mistakes. Breaking 80 still involves these principles but starts to require more skill. If you want to break 80, you either need to be great at something, or “serviceable” at everything. What does this mean?

I have played with people or personally had rounds of golf in which this was evident. I have played with guys who hit their tee shots what seemed like, all over the golf course, but were magicians with wedges from 100 yards and in. I have also played with guys who were above-average ball strikers (compared to their handicap), but could not chip or putt very well. There are many paths to breaking 80, but remember you need to do something great or everything relatively well.

Example of two 5 handicaps (break 80 regularly):

Player 1: Hits 40% of fairways, 5/18 greens in regulation, 28 putts per round

Player 2: Hits 60% of fairways, 9/18 greens in regulation, 32 putts per round

So, in this example…

Player 1 is a below average ball striker (for a 5 handicap), but a GREAT putter. Player 2 is GOOD at all aspects, but not great.

Essentially, you can be a solid ball striker (hit several fairways and greens) to break 80 without a stellar short game.

OR

Be a decent ball striker (hit some fairways and greens) but have a stellar short game to break 80.

To break 80, you do not have to do the following:

- Make a lot of birdies

- Make a lot of putts outside 10 feet

- Hit a bunch of fairways

- Hit a ton of greens

- Take a lot of risk

You DO need to do the following:

- Keep tee shots in play

- Hit some fairways (around 40-50% on average)

- Hit some greens (around 30-40 % on average) to make easier pars

- Have a serviceable short game

- Avoid big numbers

**DISCLAIMER:** *I believe to have consistency in breaking 80, you need to hit as many greens in regulation as possible. This is always going to be the path of least resistance in breaking 80 regularly.*

This would mean that ball striking must become MORE OF, not the ONLY priority.

***BECOMING A BETTER BALL STRIKER***

What does it mean to be a good “ball striker?”

You must hit the ball solid most of the time. Avoid big mistakes like chunks, tops and thin shots. You also (obviously) need to have a predictable ball flight.

How do we strike the ball more solid?

*MOST IMPORTANT FUNDAMENTAL (In my opinion): Low Point Control*

Controlling your low point simply means that we make ball-first contact and the bottom of our swing arc is just in front of the ball. You have heard of terms like “hands ahead at impact,” “forward shaft lean,” and so on.

Now, this is MUCH easier said than done. If you are needing to improve low point control, you more than likely need to work on your swing and fundamentals. However, simply focusing on staying centered (not swaying off the ball or moving up and down) and having more weight/hands leaning forward will most likely make your ball striking better. With full swing iron and wedge shots, your main focus is taking a divot ahead of the ball.

Now, let’s say you don’t want to make and swing changes, ask yourself this question:

When I review my stats after rounds, what is the most obvious and easiest path to shaving some strokes?

Example:

You look back at your last 10 rounds. Here are the averages…

Fairways: 7/14

Greens: 7/18

Putts: 35

3-Putts: 3.5 per round

Up and Down: 20% average

The easiest way to shave strokes is focusing on better speed control with lag putts (avoiding 3-putts). You could also work on getting chips and pitches closer in order to get the up and down percentage higher.

Every golfer in the world can improve their short wedge shots, chipping, bunker play and putting. Not every golfer can improve their swing enough to become a machine at hitting fairways and greens.

***MENTAL APPROACH TO BREAKING 80***

I can assure you, if you make multiple doubles (or worse) each round, it is going to be hard to break 80 consistently, if not impossible. This is why the mental aspect is still a large part in our process. Let’s look at a few examples as to how you may be inviting double and triple bogeys to your scorecard…

1) Tight, short par 4 (275 yards) with OB on both sides and bunkers surrounding the green. You hit driver because you “know” you can drive the green. You hit it OB, then bury your next tee shot in the greenside bunker and make 7.

2) You hit two bad shots in a row and are still in trouble (in the trees) on a Par 5. You are furious and decide to go for broke by trying to make up for the previous two shots in one swing. It takes you three shots to get out of the trees. You end up making a 9.

3) Your second shot on a par 4 finds the deep rough short and left of the green. There is a bunker in front of you and the pin is tucked close to the green edge. You try to hit a perfectly executed flop shot and leave it in the bunker. Hit bunker shot 30 foot past the hole and 2-putt for 6.

These examples are not exact, but I am sure you can remember similar instances.

Now, look at the sensible way to play smarter in those three scenarios…

1) You hit 6-iron 160 yards into the fairway. Approach shot is 115 yards with a PW and it finds the center of the green. 2-putt and make 4.

\*\*\*3 shots saved

2) You are on your 3rd shot on the Par 5 after the first two bad swings. You take a deep breath, collect your thoughts and sensibly pitch the ball back into the fairway. Your 4th shot ends up 100 yards out. You knock your 5th shot on the green and 2-putt. You make 7.

\*\*\*2 shots saved

3) You are facing that difficult 3rd shot out of the deep rough with a bunker in front, pin tucked. You play the ball back in your stance a little bit, pitch it to the middle of the green and 2-putt. You make 5.

\*\*\*3 shots saved

As you can see, that would be EIGHT strokes saved by simply playing smarter. Just because we have the ability to be riskier now, does not mean we should.

***CONCLUSION***

If you are wanting to break the 80 barrier, the easiest way to do so is be a great ball striker and hit a lot of greens in regulation. This takes the pressure off your short game. However, this is not the only path to breaking 80. You do need to be a serviceable ball striker if you want more shots at breaking 80. You also need to evaluate your current stats and develop a game plan to practice your weak areas. It is much easier to drastically improve in areas you are weak, then get slightly better at the things you are already pretty good at. Lastly, never forget, you still have to play smart!!!