



STRATEGY
**BY JACK
NICKLAUS**

PLAY YOUR BEST

GAME OF CARDS

A HOLE'S HANDICAP RANKING TELLS YOU HOW TO PLAY IT

ver look down an unfamiliar hole and have no idea what to do? Here's a hint: Go to the scorecard. The handicap number assigned to a hole represents its difficulty relative to the other holes on the course from 1 (hardest) to 18 (easiest). If your own handicap doesn't cover it – suppose your handicap is 12 and you're on the fourth handicap hole – that's a clue to play the hole more conservatively. According to the statistics, you're not supposed to reach that green in regulation. Time to guard against making a big number. Conversely, if your handicap is lower than that of the hole, look at its features with more confidence. Chances are you can execute the shots required for a solid par. Take the 15th at Cherry Creek Country Club in Denver (illustrated), which my son Jack and I co-designed. This 342-yard double dogleg presents many options, but its handicap of 16 suggests more golfers should play it aggressively. Do you qualify? — with Max Adler

**HOVER
CRAFT**

In waste bunkers, it's legal to ground your club, though I never do. Soling the club opens the possibility of improving your lie, and to me that feels like cheating. So I play them just like I do regular bunkers, hovering the club at address. I often hover from the fairway, too, because I like what it does for my rhythm. Beware: Golfers sometimes grip tighter from the extra effort of lifting the club to hover it. Be conscious of keeping your grip soft.

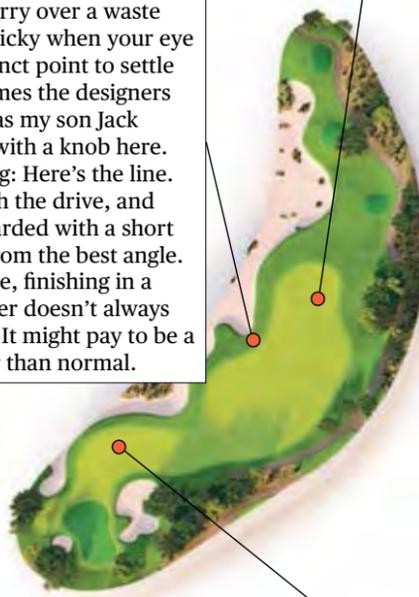
Illustration by Chris O'Riley

SAFER ROUTE

If you don't feel comfortable challenging the waste bunker, aim your drive here. The trade-off is, you'll face a longer shot in with a tougher angle. Coming into the green from this section of the fairway, the bunkers in front of and behind the green are very much in play. Also, the green is shallower, so distance control on any approach from here must be pretty precise.

A CUE TO BIG HITTERS

The beauty of waste bunkers is they take up a lot of space. A good one provides several civilised places to play from while giving the superintendent a large swath that doesn't eat up maintenance resources. As with a lake or any type of chasm, a carry over a waste bunker is tricky when your eye has no distinct point to settle on. Sometimes the designers offer help, as my son Jack and I have with a knob here. We're saying: Here's the line. Carry it with the drive, and you're rewarded with a short approach from the best angle. Unlike a lake, finishing in a waste bunker doesn't always cost a shot. It might pay to be a little bolder than normal.



THE SMART BAILOUT

Did your safer tee shot not leave an appetising approach? Or did you fail to clear the waste bunker and wind up in trouble? Either way, this tiny "second joint" of the double dogleg is the ideal place for any second shot not intended for the green. You'll get a straightforward chip up the length of the dance floor. Not to put too fine a point on it, but if your handicap is above 16 – the rating for this hole – planning to be here after two shots is a smart strategy.

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