

The Golf Rules Review

An Intermittent Communique by the 2020 WWGA Golf Rules Maven

Issue I

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New World Golf Handicap System in 2020

2019 saw major exciting and welcomed changes to the Rules of Golf. The changes were jointly written and administered by USGA and the R&A (which covers the rules outside the US) and adopted around the world. In 2020, the major change being implemented is a complete re-vamp of the golf handicap system undertaken by the USGA and the R&A. They have taken the best of 6 systems used around the world and merged them into one system. The new system provides uniformity in course ratings and handicap calculations and allows a player's handicap index to be used from course to course and country to country. Below are Q&As to help give you an overview of the new system.

What are some key changes that will affect new players at The Woods or occasional golfers at The Woods?

Studies have shown that golfers with a handicap play more golf than those without. To encourage as many golfers as possible to establish and maintain a handicap, the following has changed:

- The maximum allowed handicap index has been increased to 54 for men and women. Previously the maximum allowable index was 36.4 for men and 40.4 for women. Tournament committees will still be able to have a lower maximum limit for entry or use in competitions and they can also flight their tournament so players of similar abilities play within each flight.
- Golfers can establish a handicap based on three 18 hole rounds of golf. Previously 5 rounds were required. Scores can be a combination of 9 hole and 18 hole rounds. By requiring fewer scores, golfers who play only sporadically may be more likely to obtain an index.
- A new golfer's handicap will be available the day after their third 18 hole score is submitted.

What are some key changes that affect the handicap calculations?

- To more accurately reflect a player's current ability, handicaps will be updated and available the day after a golfer enters a score for their round. Twice monthly updates of handicaps are gone.
- Handicaps will be based on averaging the players lowest 8 of their last 20 scores. This will allow better scores to weigh more heavily and create more equity between erratic or inexperienced players and more consistent or experienced players. Previously the lowest 10 of the last 20 scores were used.

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Did you know....

Although the word Handicap did not come into use until the late 19th century, the earliest record of golf handicapping is in a diary from a 17th century student in Edinburgh Scotland. Initially handicapping was a negotiation between competing golfers on the number of strokes given and which holes. This evolved to taking the difference between the average of a golfer's 3 best scores for the year versus Par for the course.

As the sport grew so did discontent with the fairness of handicapping as better golfers were less likely to play to their handicap compounded by the lack of consideration for varying difficulties between courses. In the late 1890s, The Ladies Golf Union decided to assign Course Ratings to various clubs, instead of clubs using their own. A uniform system across Great Britain was created in 1926.

Meanwhile in 1911, the USGA introduced their national handicap system which included a Par rating, that assessed the average good score of a scratch golfer on every course. *(continue on nest page)*

- An Exceptional Score Reduction will take place when a score of 7 or more strokes below a player's handicap index is submitted. Previously, only Tournament scores were evaluated, now all scores are evaluated versus the handicap index.
- Caps will be used to limit extreme upward movement of a handicap index during a 12 month period. This can be overridden for special circumstance such as an injury. Players with significant volatility in their scores will be impacted more often by these caps than the consistent player.
- The Maximum score for handicap purposes will change to Net Double Bogey which is Double Bogey plus the golfer's handicap stroke(s) for the hole. This has been used successful in other parts of the world and puts the US on the same basis.
- Scores entered into the handicap system on the day they were played will be adjusted if necessary for abnormal playing conditions. This provides a mechanism to more accurately assess the difficult of the course. Prior to the World Handicap System, similar adjustments were made in other handicaps systems around the world, but not in the US.

Is it true I will lose my 9 hole handicap?

Yes, 9 hole scores will be combined and used to produce one handicap index that can be appropriately applied to 9 or 18 hole rounds. Under the old USGA system, when a player with a 9 hole handicap competed in a 18 hole tournament, their handicap was doubled. This sometimes caused a 1-2 stroke disadvantage versus an 18 hole handicap.



Over the years, the USGA has introduced Equitable Stroke Control to cap the strokes a golfer could take on any hole for handicap purposes.

The next significant change by the USGA was the creation of Slope Ratings. These ratings enabled handicaps to allow for the relative differences in difficulty between scratch and bogey golfers on a course.

The World Handicap System adopted the USGA Course Rating and Slope System while also incorporating features from other countries such as Net Double Bogey.

Did you know... the USGA has resorted to the courts to protect the integrity of its handicap system.