

The Golf Rules Review

An Intermittent Communique by the WWGA Golf Rules Maven

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MAXIMUM SCORE STROKE PLAY – WHAT IS IT?

We recently started playing Maximum Score for our Tuesday Games. This issue of the Golf Rules Review will provide some background and answer questions you may have about the Maximum Score stroke play format.

Background

In 2019 the USGA and the R&A made significant changes to the rules of golf. The overarching goals of these changes were to attract more people to golf and keep existing golfers. This meant changes to: 1) make the game accessible to newcomers and 2) Improve the pace of play to prevent the exodus of golfer who felt it took too long to play.

- To make the game accessible to newcomers, handicap indexes were raised to 54 for men (from 36) and women (from 40). Also, only three 18 holes rounds were necessary to establish a handicap.
- To speed up the pace of play, rules were relaxed on the putting green and in hazards/penalty areas. For out of bounds and lost balls, the E-5 rules went into effect and the time to search for a ball was reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes. All these rules were adopted by the WWGA.

The USGA also recognized requiring golfers to hole out for every hole had at least two downsides:

- 1) It leads to slow play and
- 2) It discourages golfers who feel they don't have a realistic chance to compete or make a good score for a round once they get a high score on one or two holes.

This led the USGA to implement a new stroke play format called "Maximum Score" (stroke play is what we play on Tuesdays).

What is Maximum Score stroke play?

Maximum Score stroke play is the friendliest USGA sanction format of golf. It allows golfers to pick-up without holing out when they have a bad hole. Maximum Score stroke play is the same as individual stroke play with one caveat; once you hit a set number of strokes, you pick up. You then record the maximum score set by your club, league, tournament, and you remain in the game. **You are not disqualified for picking up.** This format is unlikely to be used for elite players, but the USGA wanted it to be available for beginners and higher handicap golfers (which is all of us playing on Tuesday).

Why should we play Maximum Score for our Tuesday Games?

The goal of Maximum Score is to improve pace of play and keep players in the game.

- 1) We have noticed across all Tuesday groups, players with scores of triple pars or more. Without a Maximum Score format, they can't pick up without being DQ'd or withdrawing. These high scores slow down our pace of play.
- 2) We have Tuesday players, both with and without handicap flags, who have difficulty when their ball has a severe lie. Rather than risk injury, they withdraw. Maximum Score stroke play eliminates this because you can pick-up without withdrawing or being DQ'd. In fact, you may even skip holes without being DQ'd or withdrawing. Although you still need to putt for the Low Putts game.

Shouldn't we use Par Plus your Handicap Stroke(s) for our GHIN score when we use the drop area on MV #9?

That true for regular Stroke Play, not for Maximum Score stroke play. When you decide to use the drop area, you "picked up" under Maximum Score stroke play. Under the Maximum Score rules, you should be recording Double Par Plus 2 for your score.

However, for our Tuesday Games, we have always allowed the use of the drop area on MV #3 and #9. You may either hit from the drop area and record your actual score and putts or pick-up... whichever is the best for pace of play.

Note: This situation is not applicable to Stony Lick because they do not have any illegal drop zones.

What is the Maximum Score for Tuesday Games?

There are 2 components: 1) when you should pick-up and 2) what score to record when you pick-up.

- **Pick up at double par for Low Net and Field Shot Games, if you haven't reached the green.** For example, on a Par 5 if you aren't in the green on your 10th stroke, pick-up.
- **Pick up at Double Par less 2 for Low Putt games, if you haven't reached the green.** For example, on Par 4s, if you aren't on the green by your 6th stroke (8-2), pick-up and go putt from the furthest point on the green.

When you pick up, your **score for the hole is always double par plus 2 strokes** (8 on par 3s, 10 on par 4s and 12 on par 5s).

- Your putts on the scorecard are 'X' for low net and field shots.
- Record your actual putts for Low Putt games.

What if I forget to pick-up at double par (or double par less 2 for low putts)?

There is no penalty, just pick up as soon as you remember or are reminded. The goal of Maximum Score is to keep players in the game at a good pace of play.

Why do we have to add 2 strokes to the score?

For Low Net and Field shots, it is because you did not have to putt. Also, if someone holes out at double par, it would be unfair for them to have their score equal to someone who picked-up. For Low Putts, it is because we want the "pick-up" scores to be consistent across all games.

Wont this affect my Handicap in GHIN?

It shouldn't, provided **you record your score hole by hole into GHIN. This is a must for Maximum Score stroke play.** Our Maximum Score is equal to or higher than the GHIN maximum for even the highest handicap players. GHIN will automatically adjust these scores down to each player's maximum allowed for their handicaps when scores are entered holes by hole. Players who don't pick-up during the round, and prefer entering their total gross score into GHIN, may do so.

Why not just make players pick-up at their GHIN Maximum?

Many of our players do not know what their GHIN maximum is hole by hole because it can change after each round... so that method isn't do-able.

What if someone pick-ups and then wins over someone who did not have to pick-up?

Great! That is the USGA's intention of the Maximum Score Rule... to make players feel like they still have a chance to compete or make a good score. During our Trial Run on SL, a player did have to pick up on 2 holes but played very well on the other 7 holes (net pars and net birdies) and came in second place.

Why are we focused on pace of play? I pay my membership dues, I should be able to take all day. I am a new golfer, I should be able to take all the time I need while learning. I am out here to have fun, so what if I have triple par scores or more?

The USGA focuses on pace of play because golf is played on a shared course. At any one time, a course like MV could have up to 128 golfers and smaller course like SL could have up to 100 golfers. It's poor etiquette to make your playing partners and the people behind you unduly wait for you. In our Tuesday Games, it is even more important. When we allow our groups to play beyond the pace of play standard for each course, it is a poor reflection on our association, and we are using tee times that could have been available for other players. **A good pace of play makes the game more enjoyable for you, your playing partners, and the groups behind you.**

Three times you would be disqualified under Stroke Play but aren't under Maximum Score Stroke Play.

1) Any time you play outside the teeing ground, or 2) play the wrong ball (e.g. hit someone else ball or a ball that is not yours) or 3) advantageously play from the wrong place such as dropping on the wrong side of a penalty area, you can be DQ'd under regular stroke play. Under Maximum Score Stroke Play, you are not DQ'd. Instead, just record the Maximum Score for the hole. *Note: If you realize your error before you hole out, correct the error by returning to where your ball was before the mix up and replay the hole properly. Take a 2-stroke penalty and none of the strokes taken erroneously count. More information on playing the wrong ball or playing from the wrong place is found in Issue XXXI of the Golf Rules Review on the WWGA website.*