

Hi, guys.....

I told you I'd send out some information on handicaps, and by damn, here it is. This also is posted at the club house. If you want to go straight to the source, here's the link to the appropriate Web site:

<http://www.usga.org/Rule-Books/Handicap-System-Manual/Handicap-Manual/>

Handicaps 101

Several people have asked questions about handicaps, so here's a review of the USGA rules and some information, including answers to frequently asked questions. Mark, Matt or Nick can answer the ones that aren't asked so frequently.

Q: What is a handicap index?

A: It is a measure of your scoring potential. The formula for calculating it takes the course difficulty into consideration as well as the scores you shoot.

Q: What is the difference between a handicap index and a course handicap?

A: Your course handicap is your handicap – the number of strokes you get – on a specific course, based on your handicap index and the difficulty of the course. Somewhere on the wall of every golf course clubhouse is a chart showing what the course handicap is for every handicap index. A course of average difficulty has a slope rating of 113. Your handicap index and course handicap would be the same on such a course.

Q: What scores do I have to report?

A: All of them. Doesn't matter if your score is better than usual or worse than usual. The handicap system only works if all scores are accurately reported.

Q: Do I always report my actual score?

A: Not necessarily. You must adjust it based on the Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) formula.

Q: What is the ESC?

A: It is a device used to minimize the impact of a "blow-up" hole. If you parred 17 holes but put 7 balls into Lake Kennedy on #8 and five-putted for a 20, your actual score would be 79. That's what would be used if you were in competition or had bet on the round or something like that. However, a 79 is not a good reflection of your skill level, so it isn't used to determine your handicap. When you report your score for handicap purposes, instead of a 20 on #8 you put down the maximum permitted under ESC rules for your course handicap. If your course handicap is 0-9, the most you can take on any hole is a double bogey. If your handicap is 10-19, the most you can take is a 7. If your handicap is 20-29, the most you can take is an 8. For handicaps of 30-39, you can take a 9. For handicaps of 40 or more, you can take a 10. So in this case, if you are an 8 handicap, you report a 65 for the round.

Q: What if it starts to rain and I don't finish a round?

A: If you have played 13 holes of an 18-hole round or 7 holes of a 9-hole round, you must report a score for the full round based on your course handicap. Example: Suppose you have a course handicap of 10, you are playing the original 18 holes at Airport National, and for some reason you have to quit after 13 holes. Your handicap shows you get a stroke on #14, #15 and #17. So you report your score as if you bogeyed those holes and parred #16 and #18. It doesn't matter if you've been playing well or poorly. If you were at even par after 13, you would finish 3 over. If you were 20 over after 13, you would finish 23 over.

Q: I put four balls into the pond on #4 and said to hell with it and played two or three balls the rest of the round. I don't have to enter a score for handicap for that round, do I?

A: Sorry, but yes, you do. Count the score you made with one of the balls on each hole.

Q: What are course and slope ratings?

A: A course rating is what the USGA thinks a scratch golfer would shoot. It usually is in the general area of par. A slope rating is between 55 and 155 and does not refer to the number of strokes. It is an indicator of the relative difference between what a scratch golfer and a bogey golfer would shoot. The idea is that as the difficulty of the course increases, the score of the bogey golfer will increase more rapidly than that of the scratch golfer. It is called a slope rating because it refers to the angle of the line between the two hypothetical scores if they were graphed.

Q: I realize handicap indexes are computed automatically, but I'm a nerd. What's the math?

A: A differential is calculated for each round by subtracting the course rating from the golfer's score, dividing the result by the slope rating and multiplying by 113, rounding off the result to the nearest tenth. To calculate a handicap index you take the average of the best 10 scores of your last 20, multiply the result by 0.96 and drop (not round off) any fractional remainder. (You can have a handicap if you have fewer than 10 scores, but the USGA requires at least 5 rounds.) There is a modification of the formula to deal with tournament scores that are significantly better than the index, but that's REALLY nerdy.