

Handicaps

July 2008

The Handicap Experts

Who in the world are the best experts at determining what is fair in a round of golf? Most people would say the USGA, which introduced handicapping in 1912. Is the USGA system the best for handicapping players? Absolutely—and it is really the only system to adopt.

Where We Differ from the USGA System

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|------|-------------------------|---|
| I. | USGA [5.1]* | A basic premise of the USGA Handicap System is that a player will post every acceptable round for peer review. Fairness is the goal of the USGA Handicap system. A strong peer review element is the essence of handicap fairness. |
| | SRPGA | We use tournament scores from longer than a year ago (up to 16 years ago!) |
| II. | USGA [10-3.c.i.] | The number of eligible tournament scores will be counted on a revolving twelve-month basis. [10-3.c.iv.] At each handicap revision, each T-Score in the "Best T-Score File" is checked to see if the score is older than one year and no longer part of the player's current twenty score history. If so, the score is deleted from the file. |
| | SRPGA | We use tournament scores from longer than a year ago (up to 16 years ago!) |
| III. | USGA [5-1b/1] | A club may not decline to accept "away scores" [non-SRPGA scores] for handicap purposes. A basic premise of the USGA Handicap System is that a player will post every acceptable round for peer review. |
| IV. | USGA [5-1a] | If 13 or more holes are played, the player must post an 18-hole score. If 7 to 12 holes are played, the player must post a nine-hole score. <i>On the holes you didn't play, record a par plus any handicap strokes you would have received. You must play by the principles of the Rules of Golf in order to post your score. For instance, if you use a mulligan, you aren't playing a hole under the Rules of Golf, so treat it as a</i> |

hole not played and record par plus any handicap strokes you would have received.

SRPGA We don't post partial scores, for example, summer league. Nor do we post x-out rounds that are still appropriate.

* References are to the USGA Handicap Manual

Arguments Against Returning to the USGA

1. We already use the USGA System.
2. The USGA costs too much.
3. People will cheat. The way a person establishes a falsely high handicap is “by selectively posting scores, or posting some higher than they’ve actually shot.” By having only SRPGA scores in our system, people can’t cheat in our tournaments.
4. We’re a social club.

We already use the USGA System

While it is true that we are using software that mimics the calculations of the USGA system,

1. We are NOT a sanctioned USGA club (we cannot claim to be using USGA handicaps, for example, when we play against other golf associations such as in NESRA, and our members cannot use our handicaps to enter tournaments that require USGA handicaps).
2. We have 100 percent compliance with posting SRPGA tournament scores, but we grossly omit 100 percent of non-SRPGA scores. There is essentially zero peer review of outside scores. Also, we only post complete (18 hole) scores and no 9 hole scores (like summer league) or X-out rounds that have enough holes played.

The USGA costs too much

This is a value judgment that can only be answered by the individual. The argument for using the USGA system can be posed as a question: “What price do you put on fairness?”

We have one of the cheapest golf associations around—for seniors attending the annual dinner, membership is free. We used to pay much more when we were under the AGA.

Costs with and without USGA Handicaps

| | Our Current Dues | Add Hcp. Fee | Total |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|-------|
| SRPGA | 30 | NA | 30 |
| AGA handicap (2009) | 30 | 25 | 55 |
| MyScorecard | 30 | 10* | 40 |

Comparison of Other Golf Associations

| | | |
|--------------------|-----|--|
| SRPGA | 30 | |
| AGA Club w. Hcp. | 50 | |
| Painted Mountain | 50 | |
| Papago | 70 | \$85 after Dec. 15, \$105 after July 1 (incl. 2009) |
| Cave Creek | 70 | |
| Apache Cr ML | 105 | 125 first year |
| Long Bow | 125 | |
| | | |
| AZ Women's GA | 100 | |
| AGA membership | 20 | No handicap |
| Apache Cr Hcp Only | 50 | Just the USGA handicap |

* We were offered a \$7/member rate last year as an incentive to join.

MyScorecard <http://www.myscorecard.com/cgi-bin/index.pl>

People will cheat

Cheaters, also called sandbaggers. Those in the handicap enforcement business refrain from using the stronger word, "cheater," because it carries heavy implications and goes against the gentlemanly spirit of the game. On the other hand, the very term "sandbagger" may be part of the problem. It's a cutesy word that covers up the nature of the crime.

We might be better off calling a spade a spade, meaning that anyone who intentionally establishes a falsely high handicap is a **cheater**, no more or less than the golfer who mismarks his ball on the green or foot-wedges it in the rough.
Combating Cheaters.

What can improve the number and accuracy of scores posted? Many experts believe that diligence in stressing the cheating aspect if they don't properly post. Keep hammering away. Some suggestions:

- Annual announcement (see related doc, "USGA Handicap Recommendations")
- Sign at tournament reminding to post outside scores
- Publish list of tournament flight placers that are unusually frequent
- Add a differential (sec. 8-3d)

Some of the measures devised by Clifton Bogardus, former handicap chairman at Southward Ho C.C. in Bayshore, NY, resulted in an increase in scores posted of 42 percent overall, and a huge, 14-fold jump in "away scores" posted.

"The biggest problem we faced was educating the members as to what the committee was trying to accomplish, and what was expected from them."

To that end, Bogardus's committee, excerpted portions of the USGA Handicap System and enlarged them, then posted them on the bulletin board. "The damned print in that USGA manual is so small, half the members had trouble reading it, so they wouldn't bother."

Bogardus says the way to a clear conscience regarding handicap problems is buried in Section 8-3d of the USGA Handicap System, which reads: "It is equitable, provided the failure of a player to return a low score is occasional or inadvertent, to enter a differential equal to the lowest of the differentials used to compute his last handicap."

In 1986, a gentleman in Montana named Kirk Johnson took his club, Green Meadow C.C., to court when they lowered his handicap (under Section 8-3d) because they believed he did not post his low scores. The case made it to the Montana State Supreme Court, which decided that the club "not only had the right, but the responsibility under the USGA Handicap System to do so."

We're a Social Club, Not a True Competitive Club

"We're a social organization whose purpose is to promote the enjoyment of the game and not to rigidly follow USGA mandates for a competitive league."

Reply. It is true that we emphasize the social enjoyment of our tournaments, and as Becky has said, all golf associations are social entities. However, it is unmistakable that we ARE a competitive organization. We currently allow ONLY SRPGA *competition* scores into our handicap system. We charge members and guests a fee above "just the golf" that goes towards *competitive* prizes. We must

admit that we are a spade. We must call ourselves a spade, or we are lying to ourselves. Oh, No! as Mr. Bill says.

If we are only a social golf organization, then no competitions would be played. We would not have to keep a handicap system to make the non-competition fair. We would not require players to abide by the USGA rules. We would not only allow members to play non-conforming clubs and balls, but we would ENCOURAGE members to use this illegal equipment because they would do better than they would with legal equipment, which would enhance their enjoyment of their rounds in SRPGA non-tournaments. And for those who want to use the foot wedge, what's wrong with that.

And ultimately, this would be immensely less work for the directors. No scores would need to be totaled or recorded. No winners determined. Entries could probably be made directly in the pro shop and tee times would be known at the time of the entries. Payments would never be lost because they could be done at the pro shop by credit card. What a burden would be lifted from directors' shoulders.

Other's Thoughts on Controlling Handicap Cheating

- Instruct players to please sign an entrance slip for all tournaments: "I verify, on my honor as an honest SRPGA member, that I have accurately entered ALL my scores, good and bad, into our handicap system and thus maximize the fairness of our tournaments."
- Place signs at tournaments reminding players to enter their non-SRPGA scores when playing outside the golf association.
- Track the winners of prize money for the previous 3 years, which may show a small group of individuals who consistently win. Publishing that list has resulted in a "noticeable drop-off involving the leading winners" over time in some clubs.
- Issue warnings to individuals whose scores in SRPGA tournaments are noticeably and routinely better than their overall handicap.
- Encourage members to rat on their fellow golfers who are not accurately reporting all their scores. Peer pressure can be amazingly effective.

References

1. Mike Corcoran, Associate Editor of Pope of Slope
2. USGA
3. Fairfield Golf Association