

WHAT PAR IS

The evolution of yardage scales to define "perfect play"

Par is one of many things which American golfers take for granted. Yet it had no official status in the United States until 1911 and still has little if any official status in the British Isles, where bogey, the score an average good golfer might be expected to make on a hole, holds sway.

Par Defined in 1911

Par means perfect play without flukes and under ordinary weather conditions, always allowing two strokes on each putting green. It came into official usage in 1911 when the Executive Committee of the USGA resolved to prepare a handicap list of men who were members of Member Clubs. To this end, it issued "Directions for Computing Par" so that the handicaps might have a uniform base. These directions included a yardage scale and defined par as "perfect play without flukes and under ordinary weather conditions, always allowing two strokes on each putting green."

In 1917, the yardage scale for men was revised to take into account "the longer flight of the modern ball." The maximum for a par 3 hole was increased from 225 to 250 yards. The maximum for a par 4 hole was increased from 425 to 445 yards.

Two Women's Scales in 1924

In 1924, the USGA published two yardage scales for women's par. One was that adopted by the Women's Western Golf Association and approved by the Women's Eastern Golf Association. The other was that adopted by the Ladies' Golf Union of Great Britain. They were uniform in fixing the maximum for a par 3 hole at 175 yards. The United States Association's maximum for a par 4 hole was 325 yards and the British 350 yards. The United States maximum for a par 5 hole was 450 yards and the British 500 yards. The United States also provided

pars of 6 for holes up to 575 yards and 7 for holes more than 576 yards.

The following year, 1925, the Women's Western Golf Association and the Women's Southern Golf Association adopted a revised yardage scale "on account of the improvement of women's golf," and this, too, was published by the USGA. It raised the maximum for par 3 holes to 190 yards, for par 4 holes to 350 yards and for par 5 to 500 yards.

The Lengthening Game

In 1934, the United States Golf Association adopted a yardage scale for par for women and incorporated both the men's and women's scales in the appendix to its Rules of Golf booklet.

The men's scale retained the maximum set in 1917 of 250 yards for par 3 holes and 445 yards for par 4 holes, but it set a maximum of 600 yards for a par 5 hole and established as a par 6 any hole of 601 or more yards.

Men's measurements now are 250 yards and under for par 3s, up to 470 for par 4s and anything over 471 yards is a par 5. There are no provisions for par 6 holes.

In 1934 the women's scale increased all the maximums that had been published in 1925. The maximum for a par 3 was set at 200 yards, and for a par 4 at 375 yards; a par 5 had no maximum. A maximum of 550 yards was fixed for a women's par 5 hole the following year, 1935, and all holes 551 yards or longer were par 6.

Women's Scale Revised

In 1939 the women's scale was revised again, the maximums for par 3 holes being increased to 210 yards and for par 4 to 400 yards. It has not since been revised.

Women's par measurements now are: par 3, up to 210 yards; par 4, up to 400 yards; par 5 up to 575 yards; par 6, anything over 576.