

How the Handicap System Was Changed

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The revised USGA Golf Handicap System for Men combines for the first time in a unified system the ideas of the two principal schools of thought in golf handicapping.

One school believes that handicaps should be based on a relatively small percentage of a player's better scores, taken from a large number of scores made over a considerable period of time. Handicaps so computed have become known as "Basic Handicaps" and are designed to indicate a player's inherent ability to play golf.

The other school believes that handicaps should be based on a larger percentage of a smaller number of recent scores, so that a player's handicap will indicate the prevalent or at-the-moment state of his game. Such handicaps have become known as "Current Handicaps" and tend to fluctuate more frequently than Basic Handicaps.

Until this year, the USGA has recommended only Basic Handicaps. However, it became evident that for a handicap system to become truly national, it must include methods of computing both Basic Handicaps and Current Handicaps.

That portion of the revised system dealing with Current Handicaps is based almost completely on the current ability handicap system originated and developed by Thomas G. McMahon and the Chicago District Golf Association, as that was far and away the most popular of the current-type systems.

In order to combine the two types of handicaps into a unified system, it became necessary to make a few changes in our former recommendations for Basic Handicaps. These changes actually have improved Basic handicapping, because they have corrected the few faults that were evident in our former methods.

The booklet explaining the revised system has been distributed to all Member Clubs, and additional copies are available at "Golf House" at 25 cents a copy.

Basic Handicaps continue to be computed from the total of the lowest 10 of a player's last 50 scores. When a player has posted fewer than 50 scores, his handicap is computed from a figure equal to 10 times the average of the lowest 20 per cent of all his available scores. When using this method, frequent handicap revisions are not necessary; the inherent ability of an individual to play the game does not change to any great degree except over an extended period of time, such as a year or more.

Current Handicaps are computed from the lowest 10 of a player's last 15 scores, the same method as used under the Chicago District Golf Association system. When a player has posted fewer than 15 scores, his handicap is computed from a figure equal to 10 times the average of all his posted scores, after eliminating the five highest. This method calls for more frequent handicap revisions, as the purpose of Current Handicapping is to follow the ups and downs of a player's game. Revisions every two weeks are recommended.

Use of both Basic and Current Handicaps in the same event must not be permitted, as the results would be inequitable. The total of the lowest 10 of a player's last 15 scores, in practically every instance, will be higher than the total of the lowest 10 of his last 50 scores, thereby giving him a Current Handicap higher than his Basic Handicap.

The 10-score totals obtained under either the Basic or the Current Handicap computation method are applied to the new USGA Handicap Differential Chart to determine the player's handicap. The

Handicap Differential Chart is radically different from either the former USGA chart or the Chicago District Golf Association chart, but the results are not too dissimilar. The new chart is called a "Differential Chart" because handicaps are determined from the *difference* between the total of the player's lowest 10 scores and a figure equal to 10 times the official rating of the course on which the scores are made. In this way, one set of figures is used for all course ratings and the need of a multi-columned chart covering ten or twelve different course ratings is eliminated.

Current Handicaps produced under these computation methods are one stroke higher than they would have been under the old Chicago District Golf Association system, but the handicaps at various levels will have the same relationships to each other as before, so the results produced by the new handicaps will be unchanged.

Basic Handicaps, on the other hand, will be somewhat lower under the new system than under the old USGA system, the reductions being larger at the higher-handicap levels than at the lower levels. For the most part, however, these reductions will be noticeable only in stroke-play events. Reductions in handicaps for stroke play have been made to correct the apparent over-handicapping of the higher-handicapped players who, in the past, have made net scores much lower than any scratch or low-handicapped player could hope to make.

In order to keep these lower handicaps at the same approximate levels for singles match play as those used so satisfactorily under the old USGA system, the higher-handicapped player is now granted the full difference between the handicaps of the two players as produced under the new chart, instead of being granted but 85 per cent of the difference produced under the old chart. This shift from 85 per cent of the difference to 100 per cent of the difference not only permits us to maintain approximately the same singles-match-play handicap levels while

reducing stroke play handicaps but it also makes handicap allowances for singles match play the same for both Basic and Current Handicaps, the Chicago District Golf Association having always granted the full difference in Current Handicaps in this type of play.

Handicap allowances in four-ball stroke play and match play under the revised system are different from those granted under either our old Basic system or the Chicago Current system. A change was necessary because the allowances under the two former systems were so far apart that proponents of either system could not have been expected to go from one extreme to the other. The new allowances are about halfway between the two extremes. In four-ball stroke play, each player is allowed 85 per cent of his individual handicap under the new system, as against 75 per cent under the old USGA system and 100 per cent under the Chicago system. In four-ball match play, the lowest-handicapped player plays from scratch, while the other players receive 85 per cent of the difference between their handicaps and that of the low man, as against 66 2/3 per cent of the difference under the old USGA system and 100 per cent of the difference under the Chicago system.

Use of the new 1953 USGA Golf Handicap System for Men may mean that some clubs and associations will have to alter their past methods and practices. However, all are urged to cooperate and give the new system a fair trial in the interests of uniform, nation-wide handicapping. Comments and criticisms of the new system will be welcomed by the USGA Handicap Committee. If sufficient evidence is furnished to prove that any of our recommendations are faulty, we will give our full attention to correcting the faults. In the meantime, let us all make 1953 the year in which the first real step towards true national handicapping is taken, so that in the not-too-distant future all golfers throughout the country will be handicapping under one, and only one, universal handicap system.