

WHY NO STROKE CONTROL IN USGA HANDICAPS

BY

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In our numerous discussions of the new USGA Handicap System, both with individuals and at meetings of handicap chairmen, the question of stroke control invariably arises.

Stroke control is a plan designed to eliminate from handicap computations excessive strokes taken by a golfer on any one hole which have no relation to, or give no indication of, his average or normal playing ability. Such ridiculously high hole scores can be brought about by such things as hitting several balls out of bounds, attempting to play from what amounts to an unplayable lie, carelessness, gambling on shots where there is little likelihood of success, indifferent play.

There are several different names for and methods of obtaining stroke control, but they all have the same basic aim—namely, to reduce an excessively high hole score to a more representative figure, usually a specified number of strokes over par, before the player's score for the round is reported for handicap purposes. The strokes-over-par limit may be the same for all players, or it may be on a sliding scale with the higher-handicapped players having a higher over-par limit than the lower-handicapped players.

No USGA handicap system has ever included a strokes-per-hole control. The USGA does not at present believe such a control either necessary or practical, and its reasons are:

1. A USGA Handicap is based on the 10 best of a player's last 25 scores. Most scores containing excessive strokes on one or more holes will fall among the player's highest or worst 15 scores and therefore will not be used in computing his handicap.

2. A player's USGA Handicap is not equal to the full difference between the average of his 10 best scores and the course rating of the course on which the scores are made. The USGA Handicap

WORDS OF WISDOM

Charles Evans, Jr., of Chicago, former Open and Amateur Champion, once took eight putts on a green during a qualifying round for the Amateur Championship. Reflecting back to that day in 1921 he says:

"There is a wide margin of distinction between the grimness and determination necessary to win in competition and sheer meaningless anger, which is productive of nothing but subsequent misery. The latter is not only blinding, but one of the most positive elements of defeat.

"We should strive for absolute control of our emotions on a golf course. Never should we be unduly elated at a successful shot and, most certainly, not depressed or angered over a bad one. Calmness, self-control and concentration are three valuable requirements in golf. Cultivate them!"

Differential Chart reduces this difference so that a higher-scoring player is given a handicap equal to but 80% of the difference between the average of his best 10 scores and the 10-best-score average of a lower-scoring player. While this control is intended mainly to balance the greater improvement potential of a high-scoring player, it also tends to compensate for any handicap increase a high-scoring player might receive because a few extra high hole scores are retained in his 10 best totals—it being generally conceded that a high scoring player will have more high hole scores than a low-scoring player.

3. Erratic scoring brought about by infrequent play may cause more high hole scores than usual. When a golfer has fewer than 25 scores posted, the USGA system bases his handicap on a lower percentage of his better scores than the 40% (best 10 of last 25) otherwise used; this somewhat offsets his greater-than-average number of high hole scores.

4. A strokes-per-hole control will reduce the handicaps of poorer golfers more than those of better golfers because the former are not as consistent in their day-to-day play. So if a stroke control plan is added to the other controls mentioned above, it might well reduce the

poorer player's handicap to too low a level.

5. A strokes-per-hole control could reduce the handicaps of many erratic but thoroughly honest golfers to too low a level to permit them to compete equitably in stroke play events. While it is granted that more golf is probably played at match play than at stroke play, the latter type of competition cannot be overlooked in designing a handicap system.

6. A stroke control is not automatic in its adjustments and it must be applied to each individual's score every time he plays 18 holes. Therefore, the control must be operated either by the club handicapper and his committee—a monumental and tedious task, especially at the larger clubs—or by each individual golfer. Most clubs and associations now or formerly using a stroke control plan have left the work in the hands of each individual player. This leaves the results subject to human error, carelessness, indifference, and other human failures. Close observation at a far-western club using a stroke control plan recently disclosed that only about 25% of the members took the time or made the effort to adjust their scores before turning them in. The USGA is of the opinion that if a control, or any other feature, is to become a part of a national handicap system, it should be expected to operate close to 100% efficiently.

7. Even if a strokes-per-hole control could be operated satisfactorily, there is as yet no evidence to show the percentage of players who, as a result of the stroke adjustments, receive a handicap reduction of one, two or more strokes larger than the general average. Therefore, it is quite possible the adjustment control may saddle all golfers with a bothersome procedure which might be helpful for but a very small minority.

8. Many of the arguments in favor of stroke control are based on the actions of a few chisellers who make it a habit of taking an excessive number of strokes on one or more holes per round "for the handicapper." Fortunately for golf, persons of this type are few. Actually they cannot be legislated against because, if they so desire, they can "beat" any handicap system or set of controls. Even if it were possible to devise rules efficient enough to keep handicaps of such people

ALL IN THE STATE OF MIND

If you think you're beaten, you are.
If you think you dare not, you don't.
If you'd like to win, but think you can't,
It's almost a cinch you won't.
If you think you'll lose, you're lost,
For out in the world you find
Success begins with a fellow's will;
It's all in the state of mind.

Full many a race is lost
Ere ever a step is run.
And many a coward fails
Ere ever his work's begun.
Think big, and your deeds will grow;
Think small, and you'll fall behind;
Think that you can, and you will.
It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you're outclassed, you are;
You've got to think high to rise,
You've got to be sure of yourself before
You can ever win a prize.
Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger or faster man,
But soon or late the man who wins
Is the fellow who thinks he can.

Walter D. Wintle

at proper levels, it undoubtedly would work to the disadvantage of the honest golfers who represent an overwhelming majority of all players. The chiseler is easily spotted and should be dealt with solely by local committees.

9. Finally, it is the desire of the USGA to make its Handicap System as simple as possible to operate by the greatest possible number of clubs and associations, whether large or small; and to make it as easy as possible for every player in the country to understand. To accomplish this end, practically all the controls embodied in the USGA handicap system are automatic in operation. The only control that is non-automatic, and requires operation by an individual, is the one available to handicappers of arbitrarily reducing the handicaps of players who do not, or will not, turn in all their scores.

As can be seen, the USGA does not approve of any form of stroke control which reduces, for handicap purposes, a player's score on any one hole to a specified number of strokes over par, nor will it sanction the use of a stroke control plan as part of the USGA Handicap System.

A handicap should in time reflect the player's ability, for better or for worse, without major surgery.