

# HANDICAPS ANALYZED FOR CHAPMAN FOURSOMES

By

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The Chapman style of foursome play has become increasingly popular, especially on a mixed basis. Under this form of play, both partners drive from each tee, both play a second shot with each other's drive and then select the ball which will be used to complete the play of each hole on an alternate-stroke basis.

In recent years, I have had opportunities to study at least five different methods of handicapping Chapman foursomes and to compete under at least three of them. Due to the popularity of this form of play, a review of the various methods, with some comments and criticisms, seems in order.

To simplify matters, I am going to letter each system A, B, C, D, E and F. For comparison, the same handicaps for partners, 10 and 45, will be used as examples under each system.

**System A:** Partners are allowed a handicap equal to 50 per cent of their combined individual handicaps.

Example: 10 plus 45 equals 55. 55 divided by 2 equals 27.5, or a foursome handicap of 28.

This is the same as the handicap allowance recommended by the USGA for alternate-drives, alternate-strokes foursome play. When both partners drive and play second shots, the 50 per cent allowance tends to favor a partnership of one good player with a rather poor player. Such a partnership seems to have a good chance of scoring below the theoretical average of their combined abilities, more so than a partnership of two fairly equal players. Also, a pair of low-handicap players has an advantage over a pair of poor players because the former can be expected to have a selection between two good alternatives, while the latter may have to choose between the lesser of two evils.

**System B:** Partners are allowed a handicap equal to 50 per cent of their

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combined individual handicaps, except that when the difference between the two handicaps is more than 15 strokes, the poorer player's handicap is automatically reduced to a figure 15 strokes higher than his partner's handicap before the 50 per cent factor is applied.

Example: Reduce 45 to 25 (10 plus 15). 10 plus 25 equals 35. 50 per cent of 35 is 17.5, or a foursome handicap of 18.

In attempting to correct inequities in System A, this creates other inequities. It limits the maximum foursome handicap when a low-handicap player competes with a much poorer player; a 10-handicap player receives the same foursome handicap of 18, whether he plays with a 25-handicap partner or a 50-handicap partner. Also, the automatic reduction of the higher handicap is the same whether the lower-handicap partner is of good, medium or indifferent ability, and I doubt if a 25-handicap player can offset the poorer play of a 50-handicap partner to the same extent as a scratch player can offset the poorer play of a 25-handicap partner. Furthermore, a good player

receives a larger percentage of the combined handicaps when he plays with another good player than when he plays with a much poorer player.

**System C:** Partners are allowed a handicap equal to 50 per cent of their combined individual handicaps, except that when the difference between the two handicaps is more than 15 strokes, the poorer player's handicap is automatically reduced to a figure that is but 15 strokes higher than his partner's handicap before the 50 per cent factor is applied and then the resulting handicap is increased by 25 per cent of the number of strokes the higher handicap was reduced.

**Example:** Step 1 — Reduce 45 to 25 (10 plus 15). 10 plus 25 equals 35. 50 per cent of 35 is 17.5, or 18. Step 2 — 45 minus 25 leaves 20. 25 per cent of 20 is 5. Step 3 — 18 plus 5 equals a foursome handicap of 23.

This is called the Hodgson-Nye System. It is a refined version of System B and it partly corrects some of the latter's faults, so that the criticisms of that system apply but in a lesser degree. While it is more complicated, the computations are handled by a chart.

**System D:** Partners are allowed a handicap equal to a varying percentage of their combined handicaps ranging from 35 per cent for combined totals of 0 through 5, to 50 per cent for the maximum allowable combined total of 80. (The maximum individual handicap allowed is 40, the minimum 0). For each succeeding higher combined total over the 5 level, the percentage allowance is increased two-tenths of one per cent (0.2 per cent). The computation of different percentage allowances is handled by a chart. To illustrate, a combined total of 6 is given 35.2 per cent, 7 is given 35.4 per cent, 8 is given 35.6 per cent, and so on up the ladder.

**Example:** Reduce 45 to 40, 10 plus 40 equals 50. 44 per cent (per chart) of 50 gives a foursome handicap of 22.

This is the latest revision of the method devised by Richard D. Chapman, of Pinehurst, N. C. It corrects the fault of the decreasing percentage allowance as the handicap spread increases, with the result that the better the playing ability of the two partners, the lower the allowed percentage of their combined

handicaps. Conversely, as the combined abilities of the partners worsen, the larger the percentage of their combined handicaps becomes. This is a correction in the right direction, but experience indicates the correction has gone too far and does not give a partnership of two poor players enough of a percentage allowance.

Copies of the Chapman chart are available by writing to Mr. Chapman in Pinehurst, N. C.

**System E:** Partners are allowed a handicap equal to 50 per cent of their combined individual handicaps, except that when the difference between the two handicaps is more than 5 strokes, 5 is deducted from the difference and the result is applied as a percentage to reduce the average of the two handicaps.

**Example:** Step 1 — 10 plus 45 equals 55. 50 per cent of 55 is 27.5. Step 2 — 45 minus 10 equals 35. 35 minus 5 equals 30, or 30 per cent. Step 3 — 30 per cent of 27.5 is 8.25. Step 4 — 27.5 minus 8.25 is 19.25, or a foursome handicap of 19.

This is the original Pinehurst System, according to Richard S. Tufts, of Pinehurst, N. C. It was originated some years ago by Charlton L. Becker. Mr. Tufts says that it "has given successful results right along." However, it seems to have faults common to the previously discussed systems, and it requires a substantial amount of paper work which cannot be handled by a chart because the chart would be too unwieldy.

**General Comments:** The main aim of each system seems to be to penalize — if that is the proper word — a partnership of two players with individual handicaps quite far apart. The feeling must exist that such a combination has a distinct advantage over two players of fairly equal ability. To my way of thinking, these penalties have either missed the boat or have created additional inequities.

An equitable handicap system should have the following aims:

1. Any combination of two players, regardless of their individual handicaps, should have an even chance of producing a net score equivalent to that of any other two partners.

2. Any advantage a combination of two low-handicap players have over the rest of the field should be leveled out by re-

ducing the allowed percentage of their combined individual handicaps.

3. Any advantage the low-and-high handicap combinations have should be leveled out by a similar reduction in the percentage allowances.

4. Any reduction in the percentage allowances should be aimed solely at the low-handicap players, and the extent of the reduction should not depend on the spread between the handicaps of the two partners.

5. The percentage reduction should be more for the low-handicap player than for a medium-handicap player.

6. If the mechanics of attaining the above aims are at all complicated, the system should have a ready-made chart so that handicaps for foursome play can be assigned easily and quickly on the first tee.

I have considered several ways of accomplishing all of the above aims, and the following seems to do it best:

**System F:** Partners are allowed a handicap equal to 50 per cent of their combined individual handicaps, except that when the individual handicap of either partner is 15 or less, their foursome handicap shall be determined by applying the total of their combined handicaps to the chart developed by Richard D. Chapman and referred to under System D. The maximum allowable individual handicap shall be 50 and the minimum plus 3.

Example: 10 plus 45 equals 55. 45 per cent (per chart) of 55 is 24.75, or a foursome handicap of 25. (This is more than allowed under the Chapman System (System D), because under the latter, the higher handicap (45) had to be reduced to the maximum of 40 before the combined total was applied to the chart.)

Under my suggested system, the percentage allowance is reduced only when one partner has a handicap of 15 or less and the reduction is greater for a player near the scratch level than for one near the 15 level. Also, the percentage gradually increases as the handicap of the poorer partner increases, and when neither partner has a handicap of 15 or less, they are allowed the full 50 per cent of their combined handicaps in foursomes play.

While this system is untried and still in the realm of theory, I firmly believe it will produce more equitable results than any of the systems discussed above. Should any club have the nerve to try it, I would greatly appreciate a full report on the results, every criticism as well as compliment.

## Scores to Be Used for Handicaps

Handicap Decision 59-2

References: Men: Sect. 4-2

Women: Sect. 14-2

**Q:** A member had his handicap computed from his last 25 scores, 15 made during 1958 and 10 during 1957. As of April 1, 1959, which is the start of our handicap season, should the scores made in 1957 be dropped and the member penalized until he has made 10 scores in 1959 or should the 1957 scores be dropped gradually as the member posts his 1959 scores? Under the USGA Golf Handicap System for Men, Section 4-2, the plural of the word "years" and "seasons" is used.

Question by: Ray Lawrenson  
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**A:** Section 4-2 of USGA Golf Handicap System for Men (Section 14-2 of The Conduct of Women's Golf) states: "Scores must have been made during the current and the last previous playing seasons or years." The plural of the words "seasons" and "years" is used to embrace both "current" and "last previous." The intent is to include only scores made during "the current playing season or (calendar) year" and during "the last previous playing season or (calendar) year." The word "calendar" will be added to future printings of our handicap booklet.

As your "current playing season" commenced on April 1, 1959, the player's handicap at that time should be based only on scores made in 1958, which is the "last previous playing season or calendar year," and the table in Section 6-2b(1) should be used.