

NEW COURSE RATING SYSTEM AN AID IN HANDICAPPING

By

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Joe picked up his ball after holing out on the 16th green, and remarked with disgust to his friend Frank:

"That's the fourth time you've beaten me even though I've played well. Something is wrong—why do we have the same handicap?"

Joe was dead right. Something indeed was very wrong. Let's try to find out what it was, and whether anything could be done about it.

Each man played to a 14 handicap, but Joe came from a district in which the course raters were liberal-minded. His home course was rated at 73, and the best 10 of his last 25 scores averaged 89, giving him a USGA handicap of 14. Frank came from a neighboring district in which the course raters were severe; although his home course was comparable to Joe's, the course rating was 70. Frank's best 10 of his last 25 scores averaged 86 and he also received a 14 handicap.

The trouble is clearly apparent—all golf courses must have course ratings based on the same set of values, or else handicaps will not be in line.

The USGA Handicap System has been functioning well since its adoption, but district golf associations have been aware for some time that course ratings established by their own course rating committees might be quite different from the course ratings set up in neighboring districts by other course rating committees, whose interpretation of values might be at variance. Consequently, the USGA last year appointed a special committee to study this problem and try to refine the USGA Course Rating System so as to promote further uniformity and equity in ratings throughout the country. The committee was headed by William O. Blaney of Boston, then Chairman of the Handicap Procedure Committee, whose vast experience and wide knowledge of the subject made him uniquely qualified to coordinate and to evaluate all the facts which had to be assembled. His committee



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consisted of men from various sections who had experience as well as sound theory in all phases of handicapping.

Simplicity Necessary

The first point was obvious. The system had to be simple and yet thorough, so it was necessary to establish a preliminary yardstick so that all course rating committees would start with the same basis.

For some time two schools of thought had existed. The Massachusetts Golf Association had sponsored the idea of the theoretical scratch golfer against whose performance all courses were to be rated. The Chicago District Golf Association had developed the fractional par method of rating courses based on actual perform-

ances recorded for individual holes. Both methods had certain merit, so now those two ideas have been blended together in the new USGA Course Rating System.

The principal change is that there is a new starting point based purely on the yardage of a hole. Length valuations were established for drives, second shots and shots to greens—all based on the concept of the present-day scratch golfer. From this was developed a Yardage Rating Chart which took into consideration adjusted values for the so-called "easy par" hole as well as the "hard par" holes.

As a starting point, each hole is consequently assigned a preliminary yardage rating in fractional figures, based on .05-of-a-stroke step-ups. Of course, measurements must be accurate so that these ratings are a true reflection of the distances involved. This is STEP 1.

Rating Factors

Next, since all golf holes present different playing problems, a standard of values had to be set up. What was the reasonable width of a fairway, clear of all obstacles and hazards, at the point where the ideal drive would land? How wide should a green be for a fair target shot of 200 yards—150 yards—100 yards? What about slopes—character of rough—number of traps—dog-legs—proximity of out of bounds—texture of turf—"short" playing holes—"long" playing holes—smoothness of putting surfaces, etc.?

So the committee, after examining records and consulting golf course architects, set up a standard of values for all these RATING FACTORS. Adjustments for these factors in .05-of-a-stroke over and under the standards are then applied to the original yardage rating for each hole. The result is called the HOLE RATING. This is STEP 2.

Now, after the 18 HOLE RATINGS are totalled, another element must be considered. Some courses are wide open and permit a golfer to "let out," whereas others are tight and compel him to play more cautiously and perhaps "steer" his shot. Some courses are splendidly conditioned and lies are excellent, whereas others are not well kept and frequently give poor lies. Still others have many out of bounds close to the playing area or an unusual number of water hazards or ex-

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ceptionally heavy rough, while some courses have few penalty areas and light rough.

To allow for these variations, a final overall adjustment is made to the total of the 18 hole ratings, and this produces the COURSE RATING. Since this figure is almost always fractional, the course rating is then rounded out to nearest whole number. This is STEP 3.

These three steps—yardage rating—hole rating—course rating—are the basis of the new USGA Course Rating System.

Rating Committee

Individual clubs should not do their own rating; this is the function of the rating committee of the district, sectional or state golf association. The members of this committee should be experienced low handicap golfers who, throughout the process of rating, must keep the image of the theoretical scratch golfer in mind. In the opinion of men who have had considerable experience with this complex subject, the new USGA Course Rating System should give each golf course a rating uniformly arrived at and equitably comparable to every other. Then, when the USGA Handicap System is applied (the use of the best 10 of the last 25 scores), the result should be a fair handicap for the golfer regardless of what district he comes from.

New System At Work

Let's get back to our two friends, Joe and Frank. How does the new USGA

Course Rating System affect them? Since the course raters who had set up 73 for Joe's home course had been too liberal, the new system changes the rating to 71. Therefore, Joe's average of 89 for the best 10 of his last 25 scores now gives him a 15 handicap. In Frank's case, the course raters had been too severe and the new course rating now moves from 70 to 71 (both courses being comparable, the ratings are alike). Frank's average of 86 for the best 10 of his last 25 scores now gives him a 13 handicap. From this point on, Joe receives two handicap strokes from Frank whenever and wherever they play, and the result will undoubtedly be more equitable.

The new USGA Course Rating System applies to women as well as men. The principles remain the same except for two points.

First, there are separate Yardage Rating Charts which reflect reasonable differences between the length of men's and women's shots.

For example: The men's Yardage Rating Chart at key points shows exactly 220 yards as the difference for one full stroke of rating, whereas the same key points in the women's Yardage Rating Chart shows exactly 185 yards as the difference for one full stroke of rating. Here is a comparison of these key points:

YARDAGE RATING CHART

Rating	Men	Women
3.00	155 - 165 yards	133 - 141 yards
3.50	256 - 265	218 - 225
4.00	375 - 385	318 - 326
4.50	476 - 485	403 - 410
5.00	595 - 605	503 - 511

The second difference between Course Rating for women and for men is in the category of Rating Factors. Here the recommended areas for approach shots for women is set up as 4.00 yards of green width for every 25 yards of distance, whereas the basis for men is 3.50 yards of green width area for every 25 yards of distance. Complete information is available in the new USGA booklets which have just been printed. *

Naturally, the task of measuring and rerating golf courses throughout the United States cannot be done overnight. Therefore the USGA has set a two-year period for district golf associations to undertake this program. Present course

ratings will be valid until each district golf association has completed the rerating of all courses within its jurisdiction or until the end of 1961, whichever is earlier.

*USGA GOLF HANDICAP SYSTEM FOR MEN with USGA Course Rating System, 48 page booklet, 25¢ each. Contains recommendations for computing USGA handicaps and for rating courses. Also available USGA Slide Rule Handicapper, 25 cents.

THE CONDUCT OF WOMEN'S GOLF with USGA Handicap System and Course Rating System, 64 page booklet, 35¢ each. Booklet also includes tournament procedures and suggestions for women's golf in clubs and associations.

LEAVING AN ADDRESS

Boy, if the phone should ring—
 If any one comes to call,
 Whisper that this is spring—
 To drop in again next fall;
 Say I have a date on a certain tee
 Where my friends, the sand traps,
 wait in glee,
 And tell him the doc has ordered me
 To keep my eye on the ball.

Boy, if they wish to know
 Where I shall haunt the scene,
 Tell them to leave and go
 Out by the ancient green;
 Tell them to look where the traps are
 deep
 And the sand flies up in a powdered
 sweep,
 And out of the depths loud curses
 creep
 To the flash of the niblick's sheen.

And then, if the boss should sigh
 Or for my presence seek,
 Tell him the truth—don't lie—
 Say that my will is weak;
 For what is a job to a brassie shot,
 That whistles away to an untrapped
 spot,
 To the thrill of a well-cut mashie shot
 Or the sweep of a burnished cleek?

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