

# USE OF PICK-UP HOLE SCORES AND "NO CARD" FOR HANDICAPS

USGA Position  
Stated on  
"Stroke  
Controls"

What are the guide lines for estimated scores on pick-up holes and for recording "no-card" in a player's handicap history?

Bothersome questions have arisen as a result of some players abusing USGA regulations on these points. Abuse apparently was a means for the player to reduce scores in order to keep the handicap relatively low and thus to be eligible for certain events.

The USGA Golf Handicap System provides as follows (Section 4-3, or 15-3 in "The Conduct of Women's Golf"):

"Scores that include some conceded putts are acceptable.

"For occasional holes, not exceeding two per round, where a player has picked up without concession, the handicapper or the player shall record scores (for handicap purpose only) as follows:

- a. Two over par if the player's handicap is 18 or less.
- b. Three over par if the player's handicap is 19 or more.

"When pick-up holes exceed two per round, the score shall be returned and entered in the player's scoring record as "No Card" (or "N.C.") so that the handicap will still be based on the best 10 of the last 25 rounds player."

A decision bearing on these points and on reasons why so-called "stroke controls" are not embodied in the USGA System has been issued by the Handicap Procedure Committee to Mrs. H. F. Wohlers, of the Women's Southern California Golf Association, San Diego, in part as follows:

USGA Handicap Decision 62-12  
References:

- Men—Section 1-1a-, 4-1, 4-3, 7-1, 8-2c  
WOMEN—Section 12-1a, 15-1, 15-3,  
18-1, 19-2c

The use of "N.C." in the scoring record is without a doubt the most unpopular procedure ever introduced in this section,

said Mrs. Wohlers. For "pick-up" holes, players have generally adopted the habit of picking up on two holes of a round as a means of "stroke controls". In most cases, the player picks up after reaching the green in order to avoid the high score for the hole in favor of the lesser "X".

On the subject of "N.C.'s", because of problems relative to our section, club committees have found it necessary to establish as a condition of play in best-ball events, "Pick up whenever your ball is out of contention". Under this condition, it is possible for a player to record a score as her ball could be in contention on all 18 holes; however, it is quite improbable. These best-ball events are increasing in popularity.

The following questions have been asked of me and I would appreciate your views (the answers are the USGA's):

**STROKE CONTROLS: Why USGA System Does Not Employ.**

**PICK-UP HOLES: Why Rounds with Pick-up Holes Used in Computations**

**Q. 1: Why Does the USGA condemn "stroke controls", then allow players to pick up on two holes and adjust their scores?**

**A. 1: The USGA Handicap System does not employ "stroke controls" because of other balancing features. "Stroke controls" are not needed in a system under which handicaps are computed from the lowest 10 of the last 25 scores. The lowest 10 scores in most cases would not contain individual hole scores which would be subject to stroke controls. In other words, a player's better scores would in most cases be void of "bad holes". Also, the use of stroke controls creates more work for the handicap committee. This would be a burden, especially in small, modestly-equipped clubs. A national system of handicapping must be relatively simple to operate.**

The USGA Handicap System provides for the return of rounds which include no more than two pick-up holes (Section 15-3 of "The Conduct of Women's Golf") to prevent loss of 18-hole scores which give a fairly accurate picture, for handicap purposes, of a player's ability. When pick-up holes exceed two in a round that benefit is lost, but the score should be

returned and entered in the player's record as "No Card" (or "N. C.") so that the handicap will still be based on the best 10 of the last 25 rounds played.

**PICK-UP HOLES: When Permissible to Employ Provision**

**Q. 2:** Are you allowed to pick up only when in trouble?

**A. 2:** There is no restriction on when a player may pick up in match play. It would be difficult to define when a player is justified in picking up, insofar as handicapping principles are concerned. Almost all players pick up on occasion because of a lost ball or some other difficulty; it is for occasions such as this that the pick-up provision is intended.

When players employ the pick-up provision for the purpose of adjusting their scores, and thereby adjusting their handicaps, they are not entitled to USGA handicaps. This would apply to a player who, upon reaching the green, determines that she will be able to return a lower score if she picks up on the hole, and does so only for that reason.

**CONCEDED PUTTS, SCORES WITH: Must be Accepted by Handicapper**

**Q. 3:** Section 15-3 states: "Scores that include some conceded putts are acceptable." Does this mean that the Handicap Chairman decides if the score is acceptable?

**A. 3:** The Handicap Committee is required to accept for handicapping purposes scores which include some conceded putts.

**PICK-UP HOLES: Provision is Exception to Rule Requiring that Scores Be Made Under Rules of Golf**

**Q. 4:** If acceptable scores "must be made for 18-hole rounds under the Rules of Golf" as provided in Section 15-1, how can you accept scores which include pick-up holes?

**A. 4:** When a player picks up on one or two holes, but plays out the rest of the holes, the provision requiring the return of such scores (for handicapping purposes only) is exception to the basic rule requiring that all scores be made under the Rules of Golf. In match play, it is not contrary to the Rules to pick up.

**"NO CARD" SCORES: When Permissible to Prohibit Return**

**Q. 5:** If it is necessary to record an "N. C." for a round of golf in which you have picked up on most of the holes and there isn't a semblance of a game, why isn't it necessary to record every "practice round" or every time you go on the practice tee? This probably improves your game more than anything else.

**A. 5:** It would be unusual for a player to pick up on most of the holes during a

round unless she were in a four-ball competition such as the one you describe. In such unusual circumstances, the Handicap Committee would be justified in refusing to accept "N. C." scores on that particular day.

"N. C." scores are included in a player's record because, when the provision is not taken advantage of, such scores help to give a fairly accurate picture of a player's ability. Possibility of improvement of the player's game does not enter into the question.

**RAISE IN HANDICAP: Not to be Limited if Earned**

**Q. 6:** Section 19-2c says: "An increase shall not be granted because a player is temporarily off her game . . ." Would a player with a 7 handicap one month be entitled to a 3-stroke raise the next month? How do you determine when a player is off her game? To what degree must she be off her game?

**A. 6:** Section 19-2c refers only to automatic increases. It does not mean that a player who earns a higher handicap because of her recent scoring record would not be entitled to any higher handicap earned.

**RAISE IN HANDICAP: Limiting to Certain Number of Strokes Prohibited SCORES ACCEPTABLE: (1) Limiting to those made in Competition Prohibited (2) Limiting to those made on Courses Rated by Local Association Prohibited**

**Q. 7:** A suggestion has been made that there should be a limit on the number of strokes a player may be raised in one month and no limit on the number of cuts. It has also been suggested that we had less trouble, better balanced handicaps and more incentive to improve our games when we used only the scores made in competition and on courses rated by our own rating committee.

**A. 7:** Limiting the number of strokes a player's handicap may be raised during any period would defeat the purpose of the handicap system—to provide equitable handicaps to everyone based on present scoring ability.

It would be misleading and impractical to use only scores made in competition in handicap computations. Such procedure would make it impossible for players who do not play competitively to obtain a handicap; it would be contrary to the USGA's belief that as much scoring information as reasonably possible should be used in computations. See Section 18-1.

It would also be contrary to the belief above to use only scores made on courses rated by a single Committee, and to disregard scores on courses rated by other competent committees.