

The Mystery of Handicaps Unveiled

A Series of Questions and Answers from EWGA

Q: What is a Handicap?

A: The USGA Handicap System™ was designed to make the game of golf more enjoyable by providing a method for golfers of differing abilities to compete on an equitable basis. As a measurement of a player's **potential ability**, it disregards high scores on blow-up rounds and is adjusted up or down as one's game changes. The system assumes that every player will try to make the best score at each hole in every round and post scores from every acceptable round for peer review. A **Handicap Index** (e.g. 27.4) is then computed and this **index** is used to determine the number of strokes a player receives depending on the length and difficulty of the course being played (the number of strokes is called the **Course Handicap**).

Q: If I'm not going to compete, why should I have a handicap?

A: It provides a reliable gauge for you to measure the success of your round – independent of your gross score – by allowing you to determine a target score for each course you play. For example, you'll know whether shooting 53 on the back nine at Porky Oliver is relatively better or worse than shooting 48 on the front nine at Delcastle. Additionally, it provides a standard scale to let you know when your game is changing, allowing you to rejoice or seek help from your teaching professional.

Q: OK, what does it take to have a handicap index?

A: EWGA's Golf Life Management System ("GLMS") makes getting a handicap easy. You must accumulate scores from a minimum of five eighteen-hole rounds played on courses that have been rated. Rated courses are issued two measurements – a Course Rating (e.g. 71.4); and a Course Slope (e.g. 118), which are printed on their scorecards. As a member, you are already registered in the GLMS, so you just post your scores following the instructions in the system. You **maintain** your handicap by posting all your scores from open play nights, events and tournaments.

Q: I've established my Index, now what do I do with it?

A: Your Index (a number taken to one decimal place, e.g. 37.2, 21.0, 3.2) is used to calculate your Course Handicap from the specific set of tees you elect to play.

Q: Then what's a Course Handicap?

A: Your Course Handicap is the number of strokes you may deduct from your gross score to arrive at your net score for a particular course. Net scores are a more realistic means of comparing scores with your playing partners because they take into account your golfing potential. You can also combine your Course Handicap with the Course Rating to determine your **Target Score** for the round.

Q: So how do I determine my Course Handicap?

A: There are several ways to do this. 1) Use the Course Handicap Table which is posted in a prominent location at most courses. Find your current handicap index on the chart, and then the Course Handicap for the set of tees you will play; or 2) Calculate it using the USGA's Course Handicap Calculator which may be found at http://www.usga.org/playing/handicaps/calculator/course_handicap_calculator.asp; 3) Do the math yourself. It's simple with a pocket calculator. Locate on the scorecard the Slope Rating for the set of tees you're playing. Multiply your Handicap Index by the Slope Rating, divide the result by 113 and round to the nearest whole number. $[\text{Index} \times \text{Slope}] / 113 = \text{Course Handicap}$.

Q: What's my Target Score?

A: Your Target Score is the sum of the Course Rating (also found on the scorecard) and your Course Handicap, rounded to the nearest whole number. *Statistics maintained by the USGA show that a player's average score is 2 – 4 strokes higher than her target score and that she only achieves her target score 25% of the time!*

Q: What if I have a 9-hole index instead of an 18-hole index?

A: Not a problem. Simply double your 9-hole index to arrive at the 18-hole equivalent. Conversely, a player with an 18-hole index can halve their index, rounded to the nearest tenth, and apply it to a 9-hole Course Handicap table as needed.