

## Key Changes

By Jim Cowan, NCGA Director of Handicapping and Course Rating

- 1. Darkness . . . and then light.**

Normal score posting will continue until December 31. Then all will go dark as tens of millions of existing scores in the U.S. are uploaded to the new GHIN platforms. A few days and a quick reboot later, the WHS commences.
- 2. The math will be slightly different.**

Presently a handicap is based on the upper half of a golfer's score . . . 96% of the best 10 differentials of 20 most recent rounds, to be exact. Under the WHS, it will be 100% of the *best eight of 20*. Eight is thought to be more responsive to a real good score . . . less responsive to a poor one.
- 3. Handicaps will be updated nightly.**

No more revisions on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> days of the month. Every time a score is posted prior to midnight, an update will be issued the following morning.
- 4. The maximum Handicap Index is going up . . . way up.**

Today, the maximum Handicap Index a man can carry is 36.4 . . . a woman, 40.4. Under the WHS, a Handicap Index will be calculated up to 54.0 for both genders.
- 5. It takes fewer scores to obtain a handicap.**

A brand new golfer can hit the ground running and be issued a Handicap Index after posting scores for as few as 54 holes.
- 6. Equitable Stroke Control has changed . . . in name and in practice.**

For score posting purposes only, the Maximum Hole Score will be a *net double bogey*. That is a gross double bogey, plus any handicap strokes the golfer is entitled to on that hole based upon the ranking of the stroke holes. A 25-handicapper's max hole score, for example, will be a gross quadruple bogey on the seven top ranked holes / a gross triple bogey for the remaining holes.
- 7. "Caps" will be in place to prevent wild upticks in a handicap.**

A "soft cap" will slow the rate at which a handicap increases once a golfer climbs 3.0 strokes above their low watermark of the past twelve months. A "hard cap" will prevent a handicap from increasing more than 5.0 strokes within a year. Of course, if there are exceptional circumstances (i.e., illness, physical setback, etc.), the club can intervene.
- 8. An automatic reduction will kick in with the posting of an exceptional score.**

To my disappointment, a T-score reduction process will *not* be a part of the WHS. Much of the world simply does not have an appetite for such a concept. Instead, whenever a golfer records a differential at least 7.0 strokes lower than their Handicap Index for *any* round of golf, an automatic 1.0 stroke reduction will be applied (2.0 reduction for any round at least -10.0). Identifying and posting T-scores will remain a priority for clubs as we anticipate the development of new and enhanced diagnostic tools from GHIN that will assist clubs in identifying "problem" golfers and suggest the proper level for their handicap.
- 9. One club calls the shots.**

Golfers who maintain a membership at two or more clubs will be asked to designate one as their "home club." This home club will assume responsibility for managing their handicap.
- 10. There is a feature that factors in weather and course condition variables.**

The automated Playing Conditions Calculation (PCC) will analyze daily scores to determine if conditions of play differed significantly from "normal" to an extent that scoring was impacted. If so, all differentials for the day will be uniformly adjusted upwards or downwards. The calculation is performed each evening just before handicaps are updated, providing yet another incentive to *post a score by midnight on the day of play*. If a golfer delays posting, the score will inherit any PCC adjustment, but it will not have been a part of the process that led to the decision to adjust.
- 11. The recommendation for the ranking of the stroke holes (known as Stroke Index) has changed.**

Match play is out . . . stroke play is in. Specifically, holes should be ranked according to their raw difficulty versus par, with the top-rated holes spread throughout each nine. NCGA Course Rating data can assist in the process.
- 12. Par is relevant.**

Par, the *correct par*, is a factor within the WHS. We see this in the Maximum Hole Score procedure (net double bogey) and we will forcefully see this in the composition of Course Handicap tables. Gone will be the days where a Course Handicap is nearly identical from all tees at a course. Instead, the difference between the Course Rating and par will be factored into the tables. If the Course Rating is above par, the difference will be added to the Course Handicap. If below par, the difference will be subtracted. Where once a Course Handicap was a 12 from the Blue and White tees, and an 11 from Gold, look for, perhaps, a 13, 11 and 8 next year. Of course, this requires calling things like they are. That straightaway par-5 that measures 510 from the Blue tees, 485 from White and 450 from Gold (440/415/380 for women), is *not* a par-5 for men from Gold . . . and it doesn't matter that those that play the Gold tees do not hit the ball very far. Par remains the standard for a Scratch golfer, not the golfers who frequent that tee.
- 13. Handicap Certification is back.**

Each club is required to have a representative complete intensive education (online) on the WHS prior to next summer. No completed training, no handicaps for that club.