

World Handicapping System

Part 2 – Course and Slope Rating

The World Handicapping System (WHS) will come into effect on Monday 2nd November 2020

Welcome to the second instalment of this series of communications. In part 2 we are going to be looking at the Course Rating (CR) and Slope Rating (SR), what are they and how are they calculated.

To be honest it is not crucial for you to know a lot of the detail around how CR and SR are calculated. As golfers you will hardly ever have to use CR in your daily golfing life. However, CR is pretty much the equivalent of Standard Scratch Score under the current CONGU system and I get many golfers asking me how SSS is calculated...so thought it would be useful to explain CR here, especially as CR feeds in to the Slope Rating which is a key part of the new WHS.

Slope Rating is a bit more relevant as it has a direct influence on how your scores are reflected in your handicap record and how many shots you get when playing from a particular set of tees.

So....what is Course Rating?

As per the definitions that were included in Part 1 of this series, the Course Rating is defined *as how many strokes a Scratch Player should take on any given course and it is used to calculate the difficulty of a golf course.*

That could not be simpler could it? It's an assessment of how many strokes a scratch golfer would take to play a golf course...so you can see how similar it is to the "Standard Scratch Score" that we are all familiar with today. It is effectively a determination of how hard a course is for a scratch golfer.

Unlike SSS though, the CR is expressed to one decimal place. When the WHS is launched Brett Vales white tees will have a CR of 68.7 (the current SSS is 69).

...and how does this rating get determined?

A team of assessors, usually appointed by the local County union, visit the course armed with various measuring instruments and a pencil and paper and undertake an evaluation of the playing difficulty, for a scratch golfer under "normal" course conditions, of each hole played from each set of tees.

The assessors will look at several factors for each hole...

The primary, most influential factor is the measured LENGTH of the hole, this will also take into account things such as how well the ball rolls on the fairway, elevation changes, dog-legs or forced lay-ups as well as the effect of the prevailing wind and altitude.

They will also look at the OBSTACLES on each hole and how they come into play, so they will look at fairway topography – contours, width and slope (especially in areas where a player might expect his ball to land when playing off the tee). How thick the rough is and how easy it is to recover from; the proximity of bunkers, penalty areas and trees...all these things are considered when assessing the difficulty of a hole. Additionally, the assessors will also consider psychological challenges such as

having to play a tee shot through a narrow funnel of trees or perhaps having OOB down the length of a hole (e.g. our 9th hole).

They will also assess green complexes....speed of greens, contours, run off areas, bunkering etc.

All these assessment factors will be used to come up with a final CR for the course, off a given set of tees for a scratch golfer.

...but I am not a Scratch Player...how is Course Rating relevant to me and my game?

Great question. One of the issues with the current CONGU system is that the Standard Scratch Score only gives a rating assessment for Scratch Golfers. The WHS goes further than this and introduces the concept of Bogey Rating. Going back to our definitions from Part 1 we see that the Bogey Rating *is the measure of the playing difficulty of a set of tees for a Bogey Golfer...* and that a Bogey Golfer is a player that *averages a handicap of around 20 for men and 24 for women.*

So, not only do the course assessors look at the difficulty of a golf course from the perspective of a scratch golfer, they also look at it from the eyes of golfers with lesser ability. This makes perfect sense to do so. The areas where a ball might land off the tee for a shorter hitting bogey golfer are going to be different to a scratch golfer....therefore the hazards that come into play will be different, the fairway may well be a different width, the wayward nature of a bogey golfer may bring trees into play that just don't come into the reckoning for a scratch player, a bogey golfer will often have longer approaches into greens etc. Essentially, the course will present a different challenge to the Bogey Golfer.

In Summary

So, assessors have walked the course and determined the course difficulty for both scratch and bogey golfers from each set of tees....the Course and Bogey Ratings are the numeric values that reflecting the playing difficulty.

Ideally, the system is meant to allow for all genders to be able to play off all tees....so each set of tees (White, Yellow and Red in our case) would be looked at and rated from the perspectives of both male and female golfers. This would allow players to play off any set of tees, using a handicap that was appropriate for them, off that set of tees.

However, whilst many local unions have done this and rated each set of tees for both genders, in many areas the ratings have been done along the "traditional" lines...i.e. White and Yellow tees being for Men and the Red tees for the Ladies. Sadly, Brett Vale has only been rated along the traditional lines. We do not have ratings for lady golfers playing the Yellow or White tees (or for men off the red tees!!!).

So...Slope Rating...what is that all about then?

Knowing the Course Rating & Bogey Rating established by the Course Rating teams allows the WHS to assess and rationalise the relationship between the two. From this, the difficulty of the course for all other levels of ability can be deduced. This is done by means of the Slope Rating

Firstly, we need to dispel one thing that seems to be developing into one of those golfing myths that will live with us for a long time...

Slope Rating is NOT an indication of the absolute difficulty of a golf course/particular set of tees.

The absolute difficulty of a course is defined by its Course and Bogey ratings.

Let us go back to our definitions from Part 1...

Slope Rating - *Is the number which indicates **the relative playing difficulty** of a course for Bogey Golfers, compared to Scratch Golfers. The combination of the Course Rating and the Bogey Rating is used to calculate the Slope Rating of a set of tees.*

So, Slope Rating is a measure of the relationship between the difficulty for a scratch golfer and the difficulty for a bogey golfer.

It is perfectly feasible for a course with a lower Course Rating (i.e. easier) to be relatively harder for a higher handicap than a lower handicap. Consider the table of 4 Suffolk Clubs below...

Course	Yardage	Par	Course Rating	Bogey Rating	Slope Rating
Brett Vale G.C.	5877	70	68.7	91.8	124
Diss G.C.	6202	69	69.7	92.1	121
Ipswich G.C.	6439	71	71.5	97.0	138
Rookery Park G.C.	6685	71	72.3	95.0	123

Brett Vale is by far the shortest of the four courses and has the lowest Course Rating but (except for Ipswich) the highest Slope Rating. This indicates that although it is the easiest of the four courses (both for scratch and bogey golfers) it represents more of a relative challenge for higher handicappers compared to scratch golfers than either Diss or Rookery Park.

Also consider Ipswich and Rookery Park...the latter is 250yds longer and has a higher Course Rating...but the Bogey Rating for Ipswich is so much higher resulting in a significantly higher Slope Rating. Ipswich is a much narrower, more undulating course which presents a greater challenge for a more wayward higher handicapper. A high handicapper's waywardness round the wider fairways of Rookery Park might not get the same "punishment" that it will at Ipswich.

Its all in the term "relative"...once you get your head round that then everything becomes a lot clearer when it comes to slope rating!!

Why is it called Slope Rating? Well, quite simply, if you plotted the Course and Bogey Ratings on a graph and drew a line between each courses CR and BR then each line will have a different gradient...or slope!!

A golf course with a "standard relative playing difficulty" has a slope rating of 113. This number is important going forward because it is used to normalise players scores when a Handicap Index is being calculated and it is also used in the calculation of how many shots a player gets when playing from a particular set of tees. Do not worry about that for now, we will deal with that in Parts 3 & 4 of this series of communications.

Part 3, coming sometime late next week will look in more detail at how Slope Rating is used when calculating the Handicap Index of a golfer getting a handicap for the first time.

Members who wish to ask questions about the WHS or anything they read here or elsewhere, may do so by submitting them to the following e-mail address: whsquestions@btinternet.com

We are all learning, and nobody has yet seen a full copy of the finalised Handicapping Rule book, so we may not be able to answer some questions at this moment in time. As soon as we can do so, we will answer all outstanding questions.

