

World Handicapping System

Part 3 – Handicap Index

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

Welcome to the third instalment of this series of communications. OK...now it starts to get interesting (honest!) In part 3 we are going to be looking at the Handicap Index, what is it, what does it really represent and how do you get one?

OK let's start by revisiting our definitions...

Handicap Index - *The measurement of a player's potential ability on a course of standard playing difficulty, calculated by taking the best 8 of their previous 20 rounds. It is transferrable to take to any golf course around the world.*

Right folks....note the use of the phrase "standard playing difficulty"...this phrase is key to your fundamental understanding of the Handicap Index.

Your Handicap Index is NOT a measure of how well you play golf at Brett Vale (or any other course).. The scores that you shoot on any given course are "normalised", taking into account the Course and Slope rating of the course that you are playing, to arrive at a score that is equivalent to the WHS's idea of a "standard playing difficulty" course.

As such, everybody the world over, will have a handicap index that is reflective of their ability around the same standard of course. A player with a 10 handicap index at Brett Vale will be of the same standard as a player with a 10 handicap index who plays all his golf from the back tees at Augusta.

Currently, under the CONGU system, your handicap is calculated based on your scores relative to the Standard Scratch of the course (or Competition Scratch, if different)...this relative difference is known as the "nett score differential".

Under the WHS, the "score differential" that goes into your handicapping record is your gross score (adjusted to reduce the effect of bad holes) measured against the Course Rating, and then adjusted so that it reflects your ability round a course of a slope rating of 113. I don't know why 113 was chosen...its not even half way between the lowest (55) and highest (155) possible slope ratings.

The formula for calculating a SCORE DIFFERENTIAL is...

SCORE DIFFERENTIAL = (ADJUSTED GROSS SCORE – COURSE RATING) * (113/SLOPE RATING)

As an example...

You shoot a gross 86 off the white tees at Brett Vale (Par 70, Course Rating 68.7, Slope Index 124). Your score that would go in your handicap record is... $(86 - 68.7) * (113/124) = 15.8$

Let's say you shoot an 89 at Ipswich (Par 71, CR=71.5, Slope = 138)

The calculation is $(89 - 71.5) * (113/138) = 14.3$.

So, although the gross score at Ipswich is worse, when compared to both Par and Course Rating, because the course rating and slope rating is higher at Ipswich, it results in a lower score when standardised to a course with a slope of 113.

This baselining of everyone's index to a "standard difficulty" course is what makes your Handicap Index portable to any course in the world. When you visit another course, you will use the reverse process to convert your handicap index into a "course handicap" that reflects your ability round that course. i.e. it gives you the appropriate number of shots to play the course, based on the Slope rating of the course. We will talk about Course Handicaps in edition 4.

Each time you play a qualifying round, a new score differential gets added to your record and your Handicap Index gets recalculated, averaging the best 8 of your last 20 scores (assuming you have 20 scores in your record).

So...how do you go about getting a Handicap Index?

Well, to be honest, the procedure is pretty much as it is today. The requirement is that a golfer who wishes to gain a handicap index who has no prior playing record, goes out, plays, and submits scores for 54 holes of golf. Now this can be 3 x 18 hole rounds or 6 x 9 hole rounds, or a combination thereof to make up the 54 holes. To save confusion we will just talk about the 3 x 18 hole scenarios.

For the purposes of initial allocation of handicap index, a bad score at any hole is adjusted downwards to PAR + 5 strokes. So effectively a maximum score of 8 on a par 3, 9 on a par 4 etc.

The best of these adjusted three scores, relative to the Course Rating and adjusted to represent a score round a standard difficulty course is used to determine the initial Handicap Index. The formula is remarkably simple...it is simply the lowest score differential of the three scores minus 2 strokes.

Now previously you will have noticed that a player's handicap index was supposed to be based on the average of the best 8 of the last 20 scores. How does this work for a new golfer who doesn't have 20 scores?

Well...here is a table that shows how the calculation progresses from 3 cards, up until the point when 20 cards have been submitted. Once a player has 20 cards in their record they are considered to have a "full playing record" and the "best 8 from the last 20" becomes the effective calculation.

Number of Score Differentials in Record	Basis For Calculation	Number of Score Differentials in Record	Basis For Calculation
3	Lowest score, minus 2 strokes	12 - 14	Average of Lowest 4 scores
4	Lowest score, minus 1 stroke	15 - 16	Average of Lowest 5 scores
5	Lowest score	17 - 18	Average of Lowest 6 scores
6	Average of Lowest 2 scored, minus 1 stroke	19	Average of Lowest 7 scores
7 - 8	Average of Lowest 2 scores	20	Average of Lowest 8 scores

9 – 11	Average of Lowest 3 scores		
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So you can see that, as time goes by more and more scores are taken into account in the calculation, until 20 scores are reached. When a player submits his 21st score then the oldest score (i.e. his 1st one) drops off and is no longer part of the calculation basis...even if it was one of the best scores, it no longer counts towards a players index.

We will examine perhaps a more detailed look at how an index might change at a later date, there are a couple of anomalies where it is perfectly possible for you to shoot a good score, better than your current index, but still see your handicap index rise. Likewise, it is possible for it to go down even if you shoot a bad score. But that is for another day.

But I have already got a valid handicap?

OK...many of you are sat there thinking...well I've already got a handicap, surely, I'm not going to have to start from scratch and resubmit cards, am I? And the answer is of course...no you are not.

The WHS will at some time in the next couple of months look at your playing records (all held in the Central Database of Handicaps managed by England Golf) and historical scores and, using the same methodology as described in the table above, will calculate a Handicap Index for you, ready to use on November 2nd.

I believe that the WHS will look back up to 2 years into your playing record to get as close to 20 scores or more as possible so your handicap is as accurate as it possibly can be.

OK, hopefully that sheds some useful light on your Handicap Index, what it is and how it is calculated and how it refers to your ability round a "standard course". Next time out we will look at how you use your handicap index to determine the number of shots you get when you play any course.

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