

# WORLD HANDICAP SYSTEM

Here is a simplified view of the major changes brought by the World Handicap System and what is covered in the Rules of Handicapping.

The Rules of Handicapping has Five Sections:

- I. Fundamentals of Handicapping (Rule 1)
- II. Scores for Handicap Purposes (Rules 2-4)
- III. Handicap Calculation and Updating a Handicap Index (Rules 5-6)
- IV. Administration of a Handicap Index (Rule 7)
- V. Appendices
  - A. Rights & Responsibilities
  - B. Player's Scoring Record
  - C. Handicap Allowances
  - D. Handicap Review
  - E. Stroke Index Allocation
  - F. Establishing Par
  - G. The Golf Course, Course Rating and Slope Rating

## 1. Course Rating and Slope Rating

**Old:** The USGA Course Rating System is the foundation of the USGA Handicap System and allows each player's Handicap Index to be transported from one course to another.

**New:** The USGA Course Rating System will be referred to as "The Course Rating System" and will join "The Rules of Handicapping" to form the World Handicap System.

**Why it matters:** The Course Rating System will be implemented by National Associations and allow a player's Handicap Index to be portable from course to course and country to country. This will provide an accurate and consistent measure of the difficulty of a golf course by ensuring that playing length and obstacle factors are evaluated the same way worldwide. Our governing association is the Maryland State Golf Association

## 2. Number of Scores Required to Obtain a Handicap Index

**Old:** A Handicap Index is issued to a player after five 18-hole scores are submitted and a revision takes place.

**New:** A Handicap Index will be issued to a player after three 18-hole scores are submitted and a revision takes place. Scores can be made up of any combination of 9-hole and 18-hole scores.

**Why it matters:** Lowers the barrier to entry for establishing a Handicap Index. Thus, enabling as many golfers as possible the opportunity to establish and maintain a Handicap Index.

### **3. Basis of Handicap Index Calculation**

**Old:** When a score is submitted, it is converted to a Handicap Differential based on the Course Rating and Slope Rating of the tees that were played. Uses average of 10 best differentials out of most recent 20, and the result is multiplied by .96.

**New:** When a score is submitted, it will be converted to a Score Differential based on the Course Rating and Slope Rating of the tees that were played. In addition, a Playing Conditions Calculation will be included to account for any abnormal course or weather conditions.

The Handicap Index calculation uses the average of the 8 best Score Differentials out of the most recent 20 – with safeguards added to prevent extreme upward movement (see #4) and automatically reduce a Handicap Index if an exceptional score is posted (see #5).

**Why it matters:** An 8 of 20 system will allow for greater responsiveness to good scores and eliminate the need for a bonus for excellence. Safeguards add integrity to the system and support Handicap Committees.

### **4. Limit on Upward Movement of a Handicap Index (Cap)**

**Old:** There is no restriction on the upward movement of a Handicap Index built into the calculation.

**New:** A “Soft Cap” and “Hard Cap” will be included within the Handicap Index calculation. The Soft Cap will slow upward movement by 50% if a 3.0 stroke increase takes place within a year. The Hard Cap will prevent upward movement beyond 5.0 strokes.

**Why it matters:** There’s no limit on the amount by which a player’s Handicap Index can decrease, but the Soft Cap and Hard Cap will ensure that a temporary loss of form doesn’t cause a player’s Handicap Index to increase to a level inconsistent with their demonstrated ability.

### **5. Exceptional Score Reduction (ESR)**

**Old:** When a player submits two or more Tournament Scores (T-scores) within a 12-month period that are at least 3.0 strokes better than their Handicap Index, they are eligible for an automatic Handicap Index reduction.

**New:** When a player submits a score that produces a Score Differential of 7.0 strokes or more below their Handicap Index, they will be subject to an Exceptional Score Reduction.

If the Score Differential is 7.0 to 9.9 strokes better, a -1.0 reduction will take place. If the Score Differential is 10.0+ strokes better, a -2.0 adjustment will take place.

**Why it matters:** By considering all scores, a player’s Handicap Index will be more responsive to exceptional performances in competitive and recreational play. The adjustment is straight-forward and applied automatically.

## **6. Playing Conditions Calculation (PCC)**

**Old:** There is no calculation or adjustment to account for abnormal course or weather conditions.

**New:** When abnormal course or weather conditions cause scores to be unusually high or low on a given day, a “Playing Conditions Calculation” (PCC) will adjust Score Differentials to better reflect a player’s actual performance.

**Why it matters:** Provides a mechanism to adjust the Score Differential when playing conditions for the day are abnormal. PCC will also be used to identify if the Course Rating of a golf course needs to be reviewed by the local Authorized Golf Association.

## **7. Frequency of Handicap Index Updates**

**Old:** A Handicap Index is updated on the 1st and 15th of each month.

**New:** A player’s Handicap Index will update daily, provided that the player submitted a score the day before.

**Why it matters:** Provides players with a more responsive and up-to-date Handicap Index. This will also allow new golfers to establish their first Handicap Index more quickly.

## **8. Maximum Handicap Index**

**Old:** The maximum Handicap Index is 36.4 for men and 40.4 for women.

**New:** The maximum Handicap Index for all golfers will be 54.0.

**Why It Matters:** Many players without a Handicap Index believe they are “not good enough.” With a higher maximum Handicap Index, the WHS strives to make the game more welcoming to new players, while keeping the interest of aging players where their ability diminishes over time.

## **9. Importance and Determination of Par**

**Old:** Par has little significance because a Course Handicap represents the number of strokes a player receives in order to play down to the Course Rating of the tees being played – not Par.

**New:** Par will have an important role within the World Handicap System, requiring Par values to be more precise. The local Authorized Golf Association will determine Par based on yardage and effective playing length guidelines – while also considering how the hole was designed to be played.

**Why it matters:** The Course Handicap calculation will include a Course Rating minus Par adjustment, which will enable a Course Handicap to represent the number of strokes a player receives to play down to the Par of the tees being played.

Additionally, the maximum hole score for handicap purposes will be a “Net Double Bogey,” equal to Par + 2 + any handicap strokes the player receives. Also, when a player does not play a hole, “Net Par” must be recorded as their score for the hole. Net Par is equal to Par + any handicap strokes the player receives.

Both procedures benefit from more accurate Par values.

## **10. Course Handicap Calculation and Application**

**Old:**  $\text{Course Handicap} = \text{Handicap Index} \times (\text{Slope Rating} \div 113)$

**New:**  $\text{Course Handicap} = \text{Handicap Index} \times (\text{Slope Rating} \div 113) + (\text{Course Rating} - \text{Par})$

**Why it matters:** Beginning in 2020, Course Handicap values will change more from tee to tee, as they will represent the number of strokes needed to play to Par.

This new calculation will allow players to compete from different tees without any adjustment – unless a difference in Par exists.

Players will be able to determine their Target Scores (the score they’ll shoot if they play to their handicap) by simply adding their Course Handicap + Par.

## **11. Playing Handicap Calculation and Application**

**Old:** When a player’s Course Handicap is adjusted based on the application of a Handicap Allowance or other term(s) of a competition, it is still referred to as a Course Handicap.

**New:** Playing Handicap will be introduced and will represent the actual number of strokes a player gives or receives for the round being played. The Course Handicap and the Playing Handicap will typically be the same value. However, when Handicap Allowances are used or Par is different between tees, there is an adjustment to make the competition equitable.

**Why it matters:** There will be a clear distinction between two definitions, where both serve specific purposes. A Course Handicap will be used to adjust individual hole scores (Net Double Bogey and Net Par procedures). A Playing Handicap denotes the actual number of strokes given or received during a recreational or competitive round of golf.

## **12. Maximum Hole Score for Handicap Purposes (Net Double Bogey)**

**Old:** The maximum hole score for handicap purposes is based on a player’s Course Handicap and the Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) table.

**New:** The maximum hole score for each player will be limited to a Net Double Bogey, equal to Par + 2 + any handicap strokes received (based on the player's Course Handicap).

**Why it matters:** By factoring in Par and Stroke Index values under the Net Double Bogey procedure, adjusted hole scores will be more precise and reflective of each player's demonstrated ability.

### **13. Treatment of 9-Hole Scores**

**Old:** To submit a nine-hole score, a player must play 7 to 12 holes under the Rules of Golf. When 13 or more holes are played, the score submitted qualifies as an 18-hole score. A player can have a Handicap Index and/or a nine-hole Handicap Index (N).

**New:** To submit a nine-hole score, a player must play 7 to 13 holes under the Rules of Golf. When 14 or more holes are played, the score submitted qualifies as an 18-hole score. A nine-hole Handicap Index (N) will no longer exist.

**Why it matters:** Players around the world will now have a single Handicap Index, and there will no longer be a 9-hole Handicap Index (N).

The method for calculating a Handicap Index will be the same worldwide, and this applies whether a player submits all 9-hole scores, 18-hole scores, or a combination of both. The Handicap Index will be interchangeable for both 9-hole and 18-hole play.