

Things to know about the new WORLD HANDICAP SYSTEM (WHS)

By Ryan Herrington



Ever thought about establishing a golf handicap? The method has just changed to help golfers simplify the system that will let them better chart their game and create more fun in game day competition.

The USGA and R&A have launched the 2020 World Handicap System that will consolidate the half dozen handicap calculations previously used around the world into a single, portable Index.



However, the formula to calculate a Handicap Index remains average-based. Steve Edmondson, USGA director of handicap and course rating, says the difference between a player's WHS Index and USGA Index will be typically within one- or two-tenths of a point.

Fewer scores will be used to calculate your Index. Under the old USGA system, 10 of your past 20 rounds contributed to your Handicap Index. With the WHS, that number falls to eight of your past 20. The reduction, Edmondson says, allows for greater responsiveness to good scores and rewards more consistent play.

Those accustomed to getting a new Index the first and 15th of each month, take note. That rhythm changes under the WHS with a new Index calculated daily (or at least any day after a golfer posts a new score). This is meant to create a more responsive handicap and keeps players from having to wait up to two weeks for new scores to have an impact.

The WHS also has a maximum, (Equitable Stroke Control - ESC) to cap the score on any hole, but it uses net double bogey as the universal standard. This provides consistency in its application and is a nod to handicap systems used in other parts of the world, particularly those that use Stableford scoring, where net double bogey is the equivalent of zero points.

Modern technology has helped with the addition of a "playing conditions calculation" (PCC) that adjusts how your score impacts your Index depending on the average of all scores posted at that course that day. Say 20 mile-per-hour winds cause you to shoot in the high 80s when you normally post 78s and 79s. The WHS algorithm accounts for this to keep the score from negatively affecting your Index, particularly if all scores that day were high.

Note that course-handicap values from tee to tee will vary more under the new system. Golfers playing forward tees will get fewer strokes than before, and those playing back tees will get more. This might affect matches in which you're playing from one tee and your opponent is playing from another. It's possible you'll receive or have to give more strokes than in the past. But if you're playing the same tees, the difference in the shots you're giving/getting from an opponent should be minimal.

Think you don't play enough to establish a handicap? You just need to complete 54 holes to qualify. Not good enough? The maximum Handicap Index has been raised to 54, so it works for golfers of all skills. USGA studies show golfers with handicaps make better connections inside the golf community and play more rounds. And isn't that what we all want?

If you don't already belong to a golf club, contact your local Allied Golf Association about getting a handicap. Expect to pay about \$50 to join your local association, which covers the handicap and other benefits such as competitions, green-fee discounts and more.

