



New Zealand Golf

Handicap System Review

Author: Phil Aickin, December 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following findings are a result of a thorough handicap system review carried out by New Zealand Golf throughout the first half of 2013. The review process included consultation with the R&A, Golf Australia and the USGA however principally has been driven by a substantial survey process providing our Golf Clubs and their members the opportunity to contribute. In total 244 Golf Clubs and 9,774 members completed the online survey that formed part of this review process.

The wealth of information and comments received showed significant support for our current system but there was a consistency in some aspects which have influenced some of the changes presented in this report.

Our playing culture is for all cards to be entered for handicap purposes which include match play and nine hole score cards. Both have been contentious issues and a compromise may exist.

Our clubs identified that the same people appear to win events and that controlling manipulation is very difficult. We can alleviate the pressure that club staff and handicappers feel in this situation and start using the tournament score section of the handicap formula which we haven't been doing to date.

This USGA system provides handicap committees with the responsibility of making sure that each player has a handicap index reflecting potential ability. This is a modification of the handicap index; however this functionality is not currently available through our DotGolf system and addressing this will be another handy tool for keeping the equitable play we seek.

The portability advantages of golf thanks to the slope number need to be at the forefront of education. We need more information and articles on our website to explain handicapping and our recommendations.

We are fortunate to have volunteer course raters but for the system to work at its best we need more training and calibration seminars.

The overall impression from the review is we are providing a good system but with some refinement could be better providing a fairer platform for equitable competition. To achieve that the recommendations are:

1. A system that reacts faster to exceptional scores
2. The ability for Clubs to modify handicaps if they believe it to be necessary
3. The ability for Clubs to identify competition play separately to casual golf
4. More flexibility around the return of match play cards for handicapping
5. The ability to have a nine hole and 18 hole handicap for those that have limited time
6. Accurate course ratings, requiring more training and a search for quality raters
7. Better education around the slope rating and how it is portable
8. Education in regard to an "inactive season"

INTRODUCTION

As we acknowledged in the press release announcing this review, the purpose of the national handicap system is to make the game more enjoyable by enabling players of differing abilities to compete on an equitable basis.

It is always important in regard to this subject to recognise that there is no perfect system and that for well over a century the handicap system has been the most common debate in clubhouses. As mentioned in the introduction to the CONGU method of handicapping, ***“It is recognized that handicapping, due to the nature of the game of golf with its varying playing conditions, is not an exact operation”***

Golf continues to be the largest participation and membership sport in New Zealand and the handicap system affects close to 115,000 members so it is important that this review process is thorough.

Through the survey we were seeking a clear indication of any issues that players and golf clubs currently perceive or experience with the current system.

Whilst the survey has provided important information, we have consulted with the R & A, the USGA and kept up to date with developments in Australia to assist with what would be the best for our New Zealand golfing culture.

This report includes the complete summary of each survey. For your interest I also attach the 138 comments received from our Golf Clubs, which makes interesting reading. I have used some of these within this paper to justify the findings.

The survey reveals the wide ranging and differing views of our membership as illustrated below.

I have handicapped over four systems over 30 year period, current one is by far the best, most equitable and comes nearest to coping with the widest variations in weather/course conditions. It rates a player against the target course, not the player health or attitude or mental approach for that day. Don't change it, it works despite the squeals from low handicappers who blame the system for their inability to compete against bogey players.

(Representative, Middlemarch)

If it is not broken why try to fix it. Best system we have ever had. Please don't follow Australia it was a cock up last time

(Club Handicapper, Port Chalmers)

Under the current system it is too easy for a player to manipulate their handicaps. They can see what is dropping off and what they need to post to keep their handicap the same. Also a lot of players use winter conditions for their handicap to go out.

(Representative, Tai Tapu)

.....This system does not work. We must cut peoples hdcp when they play well and if it takes them months to get back out so be it. THIS SYSTEM HAS RUINED COMP GOLF AND YOU NEED TO FIX IT.

(Representative, Templeton)

REVIEW PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

Two surveys were prepared and posted on www.surveymonkey.com. A meeting with an R&A representative in February, regular contact with the USGA and keeping informed about the changes and introduction of the new Golf Australia system have all been part of the process.

Every golf club was given the opportunity to complete a survey where we were seeking information relating to the status of their handicap committee, competitions, the return of score cards for handicapping and various questions relating to issues such as equitable stroke control and course rating. We contacted each club through a direct email requesting they complete the survey and in total 244 golf clubs replied. Whilst this only equated to 62% of our clubs, they represented 78% of the 3.176 million score cards entered for handicapping in 2012.

The member survey was on www.golf.co.nz for over a month, where 9,774 golfers completed a similar survey. Questions relating to ability, format of play and their thoughts on the current handicap system were sought. The results have been very helpful in making decisions for a better system.

In each survey we allowed for comments which varied from a few words to a comprehensive essay on handicapping. This proved to be just as revealing as the hard statistical information provided in the summary of each survey.

The statistics and comments combined support the changes and improvements in the handicap system that this paper recommends. A full copy of each survey, the questions and the statistical results is included in the appendix to this paper.

CONSULTATION WITH THE USGA

I have kept the USGA's Scott Hovde, Manager Course Rating and Handicap Education, informed of our review and have raised a number of questions with him.

Revision dates. We currently revise every two weeks. With computerization, some think we should have instant changes. What are your thoughts?

USGA REPLY. We are in the process of evaluating the same thing. There are still some clubs in the US that don't use computers but mail in scoring sheets, but that is probably down to 1% or so. Canada is currently revising on an instant basis, but in reality they have told me that it is very inconsistent, as many clubs only transmit once or twice a month, and updating isn't done on an "instant" basis across the board. The other thing we consider with revisions is that a single score isn't likely to change an Index much, so revising after each score won't drastically improve accuracy...plus with an instant revision, players would then assume their Index is accurate and up-to-date every time they play golf. When in reality a score posted away may not make it back to the player's home club right away, so they would not be playing to a up-to-date Index. Another disadvantage is that incorrectly posted information (scores, ratings, etc.) would instantly change the Index before the Handicap Committee has a chance to review and fix...so a player may have a few days of playing to an incorrect Index.

Tournament scores. This is a part of the system that we have not been using, but may lower the handicap indices of those that continually return exceptional scores in competition. Can you provide information supporting the rationale behind Tournament scores?

USGA REPLY. The purpose of the automatic reduction for exceptional T-score procedure was to take some of the responsibility away from the clubs in terms of having to review and monitor all competitions and then make a subjective decision on an adjustment. It is definitely not a perfect procedure, but it does identify players who have scores that are highly unlikely relative to their Index. We assume clubs are looking at individuals identified by this procedure and determining if the adjustment is warranted, and whether further action need to take place. Only about 5% of players in the US are reduced by this procedure, so there shouldn't be a large number needing to be reviewed at a given time. So in essence it gives a club some (automatic) protections, but also a way to identify players that they can review, so it really can't hurt to implement the procedure as it can always be reviewed by the club to determine if something needs to be done. It can also take away the subjective nature of an adjustment, so the club can just point to the procedure instead of having to come up with an adjustment that may come across as "personal". Hard to argue that something is unfair when it is spelled out in the System, as opposed to an arbitrary adjustment by a committee.

Match Play cards. We expect every card to be returned, whether in a club match play competition, a 4 ball best ball competition, or an interclub match. Have we been too pedantic?

USGA REPLY. This is also a point of discussion here at the USGA. We know there are certain rounds/formats that probably don't give us "good data", but our general thought is the more scores the better. If a player plays well in a match, their handicap should be reduced accordingly. The team events is where it starts to get sticky, as it is much easier for a player to manipulate when they have a partner. Our culture here in the US (especially at private clubs) is for many players to play primarily match play, whether one on one, or in a 4-ball. If we didn't accept match play cards, some players would never have a score to post and their handicap wouldn't ever change. Since a handicap is used for both stroke and match play (including team events), using match play scores makes sense. If a player is purposely manipulating, knowing that they are "covered" by a partner on a hole, or will lose a hole in a match (so an even higher score doesn't hurt them), we would assume the club (committee) would address that issue.

Casual cards for handicapping? We ask every player to submit a score for handicapping even if a casual round, as long as the principles of the game have been followed. Our culture also accepts that this is the case as per our survey results. However, as with match play cards, have we been too pedantic?

USGA REPLY. We do require a score to be posted as long as they follow the “principles” of the ROG (assuming proper procedures are used for holes not played by the ROG). Again, it goes to our belief that the more scores we get the better. Casual rounds can often be the better rounds by a player (lack of pressure?) and not accepting them may give them an inflated handicap. A casual round that is significantly worse than expected or a deliberate attempt to increase a handicap should be addressed by the club (committee).

9 Hole score cards? We now provide 9 hole handicaps to our members, but we only allow a 9 hole handicap or 18, you can't have both. There is reluctance to enter 9 hole cards for the 18 hole handicapper, therefore in your opinion would be best to allow players to have both?

USGA REPLY. There is definitely an issue when a player has both a 9 and 18 hole handicap, as the 9 hole handicap will be lower than ½ of the 18 hole handicap. A player with a 12.0 Index can easily have a 5.0 or better 9-hole Index (as their best 9's are used instead of overall 18's). If a player plays a fair number of 9-hole rounds, but wants an 18 hole handicap, then not posting the 9-hole rounds would give them an inaccurate handicap. If an 18-hole handicapper only plays a few 9-hole rounds in a year, they are likely not going to impact their handicap much (and may not even count if twenty 18-hole rounds are posted between the 9's), but we still want them to be posted. If a player routinely plays both 18-hole and 9-hole rounds, having both handicaps may very well give a more accurate handicap for the specific round they are playing. Using the example above, it is not uncommon for a player to be able to play like a 5.0 for 9-holes, but as a 12.0 for 18-holes, as putting together a good 18-hole score is more difficult than putting together a good 9-hole score.

Whilst we have been using the USGA handicap system for 13 years, we have not been using it to full capacity, which is contributing to some of the negativity currently. The two main areas that we are not making use of are:

1) Exceptional Tournament scores

A tournament score is a score made in a competition organized and conducted by a committee in charge of the competition. The competition must identify a winner(s) based on a stipulated round(s), and must be played under the principles of the Rules of Golf.

The committee (preferably the Handicap Committee, in consultation with the committee in charge of the competition) must determine in advance if these conditions are met, and announce in advance whether the score must be identified by the letter "T" when posted. Routine events such as regular play days normally are not to be designated as T-scores because they are not significant in the traditions, schedules, formats, and membership of the club.

The formula provides for reductions quickly when exceptional scores are returned.

- 2) The USGA system allows for the modification of handicap indices, however we can only make a change due to disability or freeze a handicap due to manipulation.

Section 8-4c Handicap Index Adjustment by Handicap Committee

The Handicap Committee has the responsibility of making certain that each player has a Handicap Index reflecting potential ability. Under the following circumstances, it will be necessary for the Handicap Committee to adjust the player's Handicap Index. However, the following list is not all-inclusive, and a Handicap Committee has the ultimate authority to adjust a Handicap Index under any circumstance that it feels necessary to do so. Before an adjustment becomes effective, the Handicap Committee must give the player an opportunity to explain the circumstances surrounding the proposed adjustment, either in writing or by appearing before the committee. When an adjustment does become effective, it must be identified with the letter M, reflecting that the Handicap Committee has modified the Handicap Index (e.g., 4.9M). (i) Improving Faster Than the System Can React

GOLF AUSTRALIA (GA) SYSTEM

The GA hybrid system has been reviewed and the major differences between our current system and the Golf Australia system are:

1. We use the best 10 of the most recent 20 cards, Australia use 8.
2. We multiply the average of the best 10 by 96%, Australia multiply the average of their best 8 by 93%
3. They have an anchor in place which restricts a player increasing their handicap by more than 4 strokes beyond their best handicap in the previous 12 month period.
4. GA update handicaps immediately
5. They will have Daily Course Ratings (yet to be implemented)
6. GA handicap players on competition cards, plus any casual round whereby the player has nominated prior to starting the round that it is to count for handicap purposes (yet to be implemented)

Why did GA make the adjustment in 1 & 2?

- 1) When analysing the old incremental change system there was a feeling that it favoured the lower handicap player
- 2) When the same scores were used to analyse the effect of the USGA system there was a belief that it favoured the higher handicap player. GA did not use the tournament score function in running this analysis so this is perhaps not a surprise. That resulted in a reduction to both the number of counting cards and the potential adjustment. i.e. Best 8 of the last 20 and 93%.

We often hear and it is again a regular comment in the survey that our handicaps are too low to compete fairly in Australia. If we remain as with points 1 & 2 above, then our handicaps will naturally be a little higher than the Australians and may alleviate this perception or reality.

There is little support for a live system with daily changes to handicap indexes. There was only one comment supporting this from our Golf Clubs and confirms that the fortnightly rollover is what we should be using.

GA have developed for a January 2014 implementation a way of reducing a players handicap for exceptional scores. This followed consultation with golf club managers. Unlike the USGA tournament score reduction it is not intended to be an automatic reduction but more an option for club's to adopt. They use a table to make what they refer to as a 'Bonus' adjustment. Each has its merits. The GA reduction requires a club handicapper/manager to make an arbitrary decision so treatment of players may differ whereas the USGA tournament score reduction is automatic.

In the final analysis of our surveys, it is evident that our clubs and members would not be in favour of the different components that the Golf Australia system includes.

The handicap system as it is works well for our members, who have become used to the roll over dates and handicap changes.

(Member of the Handicap Committee, Waipawa)

Like all systems it operates well when the users cooperate, but sadly there will always be those who try and use the system to their benefit. The fortnightly rollover system works well for Clubs running tournaments and checking handicaps ahead of time. DO NOT CHANGE THIS FOR A LIVE SYSTEM which would be easily manipulated and make for extra work for Clubs.

(Representative, Ashburton)

At this stage there is little support from our membership for the use of an anchor. 26% of golf clubs thought this would be a good addition with nearly 50% not in favour. In the member survey 33% for and 39% against.

GA has introduced an anchor to counter the seasonal conditions that occur in some of their regions. There is some confusion that it has been introduced to control the very small percentage of players that manipulate their handicap. But in reality it was to stop the significant outward movement that occurred for the general player when the winter months arrived. The way we control that in NZ is to educate our course superintendents to shorten the course where and if possible and to also consider an inactive season.

It is my belief that the recommended changes will alleviate the need for such an addition, but we should continue to monitor how it is working in Australia.

Prior to our current system we did have a calculation that was used to provide daily course ratings. The proposed Golf Australia format is much more exact and uses sound theories and millions of rounds returned to date to compute a daily rating. The issue that we had previously was the daily rating was determined by the quality of the field which may also exist with the Australian situation. Like our neighbours we have courses affected by coastal breezes which usually pick up during the day, which can still cause anomalies when a round is played early morning yet the conditions are far different in the afternoon. Once again, we should monitor how this is received in Australia and focus on more regular training for our current rating teams.

There are three parts to the GA system for which we have little support, competition cards only, an anchor and daily course ratings.

There has been much research by GA around the introduction of Daily Scratch Ratings (DSR). They have researched this with a very qualified team and it has a lot of merit. However, they do acknowledge that firstly there is no rating system that is 100% accurate. Just like there is no Handicap system that is perfect. They also acknowledge that the US golf culture, as with our own, whereby we put cards in every time we play, makes it a challenging proposition to run accurate DSR's. Due to our culture and the support to retain the one rating as we have now I believe we should follow the lead of the USGA and monitor this introduction in to the GA

system, rather than look for a change. The recommendations made to date should not be too difficult for DotGolf to change, however, to introduce DSR and the very complex formulas that are involved will require both time and money.

THE R&A and HANDICAPPING

The R&A are very much in the embryotic stages of a handicap system with nothing in the near future available. They are very interested in the Golf Australia system, but also realize that the USGA system is the most universal and a good place for them to start in regard to any concept. They may be very interested in any changes that we make especially as we are trying to improve the system.

NEW ZEALAND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

The survey allowed us to gather information relating to our members playing statistics that very much supports the retention of this system with some minor changes.

Q.3 Member survey. We asked each member what best describes the format they usually play.

- 30% Enter the scramble and play a 4BBB match
- 26% Play single stableford competitions
- 26% Play stroke play
- 12% Play predominantly match play (interclub/pennants/club match play comps)
- 6% are a casual golfer not interested in competing

Q.4 Member survey. Do you think that off your current handicap index you can compete fairly against any other golfer with a handicap index, regardless of whether they are on scratch or 36? Based on the below 3 of every 4 members feel they can currently compete equitably.

- 13% Strongly agreed
- 61% agree
- 20% disagree
- 5% strongly disagree

When considering the above and then focusing on how our Golf Clubs run their competitions (Q.7 Club survey) we find:

- 46% of clubs only have one division
- 28% of clubs have two divisions
- 26% of clubs have more than two divisions

Some of the 46% may be because they are a small club and the numbers dictate the one division.

In Q.6 of the Club survey we asked what the average stableford score was that won their weekly scramble.

- 6% less than 36 points
- 46% 36-39 points
- 47% 40-43 points
- 2% more than 44 points



As an average I wonder if 93% of the winning score being between 36-43 points is a reasonable expectation. Through a few changes we can certainly lower this average. Other survey questions provided us with important answers relating to the type of format played, the return of match play cards, the introduction of an anchor, course ratings, equitable stroke control, 9 hole cards for handicapping and the handicap committee. The full results are in the attached papers.

We rely on club's to assist us in maintaining the integrity of the system. They are expected to have a handicap committee or at the least a peer review process, but preferable the former. It was a disappointing statistic to find that only one Club in four has a formal handicap committee.

CORE NEW ZEALAND ISSUES IDENTIFIED

In assessing all information the following are the main issues that were raised or identified as a result of the survey:

1. Handicap indices are not changing fast enough when exceptional scores are returned

A regular comment made by golf club representatives was the suggestion of competition cards only for handicapping. Some mentioned the best five of the last 10 or 20 cards to be used, so that handicaps would change quicker.

Golfers do not get cut enough for returning good rounds; 40 plus points. There should be at least .3 for every shot under there handicap. People playing 4 or 5 times a week can play well in a few tournaments and still stay on same handicaps.

(General Manager, Templeton)

By using the best 10 of the last 20 cards entered it does seem that it can take too long for a handicap to fall into line with a players current form - whether it be waxing or waning. This can also be affected by summer or winter conditions. If a player is only entering one card per week then it can actually take some months for any significant change in index, by which time a different season has arrived. For example we commonly see high handicappers scoring extraordinarily well in the summer months only to be (rightly) slashed, however then struggling during the winter. It is an inexact science, however perhaps there might be some merit in at least doing some sort of study on the idea. Thanks

(Match Committee Chairman, Charteris Bay)

There is no perfect handicap system unfortunately golf relies on the integrity of the player. In a large club such as ours managing issues around potential farming of handicaps could be all consuming. I believe that competition cards may hold the key to real handicap indicators.

(General Manager, North Shore)

2. The same players are winning and there is not enough ability to modify handicaps when necessary

The handicap system provides a handicap committee with the empowerment to make adjustments to a player's handicap under certain situations. It is currently not an easy process to make these changes.

The club still needs the ability to manually adjust a person's handicap whereby they feel a players ability or form would justify doing so. Presently this option is not available to a club.

(General Manager, Titirangi)

The system is not responsive to improving golfers. In my experience their skill level improves more rapidly than the handicapping system can accommodate and they end up playing off too high a handicap for too long a time. Exceptional scores should bring about quick reductions in handicaps but their influence is watered down by the averaging process which effectively makes each score only a tenth as effective

(Representative, Riverton)

- 3. There is a dislike for match play cards being entered, based on the erratic assessment of the 'most likely score' concept. There was also regular mention of how different the approach can be to playing match play**

I feel that the entry of match play cards should not be mandatory, as often the scores entered for holes conceded before the ball is holed are not always done to the level prescribed in the manuals and advisory notes – sometimes they are entered as the maximum allowed for the hole, sometimes adding 2 shots to the number of strokes taken to the point of concession, even if the putt is a very short one.

(Club handicapper, Mahunga)

Match play cards could be optional – match play is affected when gimmes apply and also at the end of matches when scores are assessed or players lose interest.....some players putt out rather than going straight to the next hole losing the match play strategy of forcing putts at the end of the game.

(Member of the Handicap Committee, Lincoln)

It is widely felt that match play cards should not be included in handicap indices calculation due to the nature of the game (playing the player not specifically the course) and also the amount of estimating or guessing a score on a hole when it has been conceded (any putt can be made or missed - so it is only a guess!)

(Club handicapper, Tahuna)

- 4. There was little support for the return of 9 hole score cards for those with an 18 hole handicap**
Statistically this was the part of the handicap system that had the least support. In regard to 9 hole score cards being returned:

23% of members believed all 9 hole score cards should be entered

8% of members believed some 9 hole cards should be entered

9 Hole cards for 18 hole handicaps - would like to see this deleted from the system. Our Club runs Twilight Golf (9 holes) where the average stableford score would be higher than normally expected had the same player competed over 18 holes. Therefore, we see these cards as adversely affecting members handicaps, especially when 2 abnormally good scores are added together thus making a rather false score.

(Member of the Handicap Committee, Rangiora)

At our club we have had many negative comments regarding the system which requires 18 hole players to submit 9 hole cards for handicapping. This occurs during summer Twilight and Business League. It has a negative impact on our players as our back and front nine are deemed to have different degrees of difficulty

(Club Manager, Hastings)

- 5. Players showed a lack of understanding in regard to how the slope number works, with many using that to compare their course with others.**

The co-relation between Slope & Course Rating can be confusing and appear wrong. I.E. Our Blue Slope is 118, CR 70 Par 71 & Black Slope is 116, CR 71.4 Par 70

(Director of Golf, Sherwood Park)

The system depends on the correct assessment of the difficulty of one's golf course. This assessment needs much tuning! (When it becomes common knowledge that players from a particular club are 99% sure to win at any competition outside of their own course, something is wrong)

(Club Handicapper , Waikaka)

I am of the opinion that the slope rating system needs overhauling. Too many courses are rated far more difficult than they play and others too easy. Perhaps the criteria applied to assessing the slope rating needs changing.

(Club Handicapper, Pegasus)

6. Whilst nearly 60% of Clubs believe their course rating is in line with other Clubs in their District, there is a need for more training for our volunteer course raters

The accuracy and consistency in course rating is vital and the mention of course and slope ratings and their confusion is regular in the survey. I have been responsible for the training of our raters for the last decade and have concluded that we need to train and support these volunteers more.

7. There are score cards being returned for handicapping during seasons when the playing conditions are not truly reflective of the way the course was assessed which severely affects handicaps

Earlier this year we provided approval for four clubs in the Hawkes Bay to have an "inactive season" meaning score cards could not be returned for handicapping. We need to educate clubs that this is an option in extreme conditions.

We do have very dry summer conditions and very wet winter conditions, which causes a great variance in handicaps but this is the same for all members and all clubs in our area. A lot of people don't like their handicaps going out so far in the winter but it is the same for everyone. This means we do get some exceptional scores when we come into the summer season with winter handicaps but again, it's the same for everyone.

(Club handicapper, Tairua)

8. There is a lack of information on our website in regard to handicapping

In reviewing the USGA website you can find a mass of information in regard to handicapping which we should include on our site.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

As the national body we need to provide the most equitable playing environment possible. We have a golf culture that accepts the requirement to provide as much information as possible, so that playing abilities are fairly represented by handicap indices. We have the evidence that that should be maintained.

Our survey results show a significant support for our current system, but having considered the statistics and core issues as well as the GA system we believe the following solutions and recommendations are considered and we request DotGolf to trial two options. The first is the recommended changes to our current system and the second a test of the GA system.

1) A system that reacts faster to exceptional scores

By triggering the tournament score calculations within the formula, this will be achieved. The main reason why this has not been part of handicap indices calculations is that it is not easy to explain so we will need to educate members and have an example on our website. I have also had discussions with the Hong Kong Golf Association who have used the USGA system, including the tournament score calculation, for some years. They believe the tournament score calculation helps to address those golfers that seem to win regularly through controlling their handicap index. I have included an example of how the exceptional tournament score concept works. For national consistency we will need to be very clear on what events meet the requirement of being tagged as 'tournament scores'. The GA option is not automatic and a simple table exists to make a bonus reduction so the same is achieved. The reduction occurs by inserting eight artificial scores which become part of the latest 20 scores.

2) The ability for Clubs to modify handicaps if they believe it to be necessary

This requires some development within the current DotGolf system but empowers the Club to make changes without having to gain NZG approval. It is also authorized within the USGA system. If players are improving faster than the handicap formula allows then it is appropriate for the clubs handicap committee to make a change. I have discussed this option with Colin Trim, Golf Operations Manager at North Shore Golf Club, and he believes it would be an excellent tool for him to be able to tweak handicaps when there is enough proof that players have been manipulating their handicap.

3) The ability for Clubs to identify competition play separately to casual golf

Clubs tag the important events to accept tournament scores. This can happen immediately and we would provide a recommendation of the events that would qualify. Any formal competition where a winner is declared should qualify and within some clubs their Saturday scramble may be competitive enough to be identified for tournament score calculations. The GA system is based on competition cards only something we don't recommend however we are adding importance to tournament scores by using the tournament score function.

4) More flexibility around the return of match play cards for handicapping

We provide a recommendation to Clubs advising that some matches are exempt from the return of handicap cards.

Originally we did not want to sit on the fence with our approach to match play cards therefore we have taken a firm position that every match play card must be entered. Having corresponded with the USGA on this topic, they have been surprised with this approach, but are having a closer look at this requirement as

per their reply recently. We have agreed that the more information the better, but a list of events where it is not compulsory for match play cards to be returned may look like this:

- All international, interdistrict and interclub match play competition
- All national and provincial match play championships
- Club match play championship

Our survey confirms that 61% of members are happy for match play cards to be entered which is significant support. Adding a few exclusions may increase this further.

5) The ability to have a nine hole and 18 hole handicap for those that have limited time

To date we have a policy of one or the other, but the most negative response within the survey was to do with nine hole score cards returned for the 18 hole handicapper.

It is evident that a high percentage of our members play 18 hole golf and don't play the shorter version. However, we should not discourage nine hole golf as an option for the future based on time restraints which are growing. It is therefore important to include nine hole scores for handicap purposes, but the best way to address this would be to allow a player to have both handicaps. If they enter twilight events or elect to play nine holes, then their scores become part of that scoring record.

If a player is using the play of 9 holes to prepare and sharpen their game for a major 18 hole event, then they would be subject to a modification of their 18 hole handicap.

6) Accurate course ratings, requiring more training and a search for quality raters

We know the system relies on accuracy and consistency within the course rating procedure. This is the best system available and used by 64 countries worldwide. There is enough support to continue with the one course rating, but we need more regular training and younger volunteers.

DotGolf now have close to 50 million rounds in their system and we are currently able to view a course variance chart based on scores returned relative to the course rating. Whilst it is not possible to determine a fair course rating from this data, we should consider how we can use this further to identify course rating anomalies.

7) Better education around the slope rating and how it is portable

This is certainly an area that we can improve. Through our website and direct emails to Clubs we have enough resource that we can provide.

8) Education in regard to an "inactive" season

It was evident this year due to our extreme summer that winning scores were exceptional. We need to educate and inform our clubs that declaring an inactive season, where golf is played yet cards aren't entered for handicapping is an option. This also applies in the very wet winters. We could provide a guide for District consistency.

NEXT STEPS

December	Post on the NZ Golf website and allow our Clubs and members to respond
January - February	Allow time for feedback and further trials
March	Board to finalise changes made to the system
April-May	All information on changes sent to Clubs
1 June 2014	Implementation of any changes

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EXPLANATION OF THE TOURNAMENT SCORE CALCULATIONS

The main change in calculating handicaps is in regards to Tournament scores. As touched on by the USGA it alleviates the Club Committee making a decision on an arbitrary adjustment. Below I explain how this works:

USE OF TOURNAMENT SCORES

A player firstly requires two or more eligible tournament scores. For the calculation to have an effect there must be two tournament scores where the player has played at least 3.0 better than their handicap index.

The tournament scores used to calculate any adjustment are either rounds within the last 12 months, or part of the 20 score history.

Scenario

A player has a Handicap index of 17.3. There are 3 tournament scores in their record from play at Manawatu Golf Club. An 82, 83 and 85. Course Rating 71.2, slope 123.

Using the normal handicap differential formula, these equate to:

Step One

$$82 - (82 - 71.2) \times 113/123 = 9.9$$

$$83 - (83 - 71.2) \times 113/123 = 10.8$$

$$85 - (85 - 71.2) \times 113/123 = 12.7$$

Step Two

The 2nd lowest tournament score is subtracted from the handicap index.

$$17.3 - 10.8 = 6.5$$

If this result is 3 or greater, then an adjustment of the handicap index occurs.

Step Three

Average the two lowest tournament scores

$$9.9 + 10.8 = 10.35$$

Step Four

Subtract that average from the handicap index.

$$17.3 - 10.35 = 6.95 \text{ (rounded up to 7)}$$

The result of 7 is then taken to the Handicap Reduction Table. The information is that we have 3 eligible tournament scores and the best two scores average 7.0 below their handicap. The table figure we find is 5.

$$17.3 - 5.0 = \text{a Handicap Index of } 12.3$$

GOLF AUSTRALIA BONUS REDUCTION METHOD

“Manual Bonus Reduction for Exceptional Net Score”?

Note: A club should only effect a Manual Bonus Reduction if it considers that the normal calculation process has not produced an appropriate reduction.

The objective of the new ‘*Manual Bonus Reduction for Exceptional Net Score*’ regulation is to cater for the following type of situation:

- A player has returned an exceptional net score.
- The club believes that there is not a large enough impact on the player’s handicap as a result of this score being processed through GOLF Link, and that the player’s underlying ability aligns with a lower handicap. In circumstances such as these, the Handicapping Authority at the club has the option of applying the table in the below regulation. There is NO need for the decision to be made by the club’s General Committee or Board of Directors.

Manual Bonus Reduction for Exceptional Net Score

(i) Essential points of the Manual Bonus Reduction regulation are as follows:

- Some golfers have inconsistent scoring patterns such that their underlying ability is not typically reflected in their handicap. As these players operate outside normal patterns, regular handicap system regulations do not always cater for them.
- These players will sometimes return Exceptional Net Scores that are reflective of their underlying ability but not of their handicap.
- It is GA’s position that a handicap system should not be designed around a small minority.
- A handicap system should not penalise such players by unfairly limiting their capacity to achieve handicap reductions.

(ii) Where such a player returns an Exceptional Net Score, their club should effect a Manual Bonus Reduction to their *GA Handicap*, unless there is clearly a good reason not to.

(iii) An “Exceptional Net Score” is considered to be a score that produces a *Differential* (ie the value that is featured in the ‘Played to’ column on www.golflink.com.au) which is 7 or more better than the *GA Handicap* current at the time the round is played (or in a case where rounds have been played but not processed, the value at which the *GA Handicap* will be calculated once all previous rounds have been processed).

(iv) Manual Bonus Reductions should not be effected in cases where the player’s club considers the Exceptional Net Score to be clearly not reflective of the player’s underlying ability, or where a Manual Bonus Reduction would see the player reduced to a *GA Handicap* that the player’s club considers would be clearly inappropriate for the player.

(v) A Manual Bonus Reduction should only be effected after the score itself has been processed through GOLF Link. The club should not effect a Manual Bonus Reduction if it considers that the normal calculation process has produced an appropriate reduction.

(vi) Any club of which the player is a member may make a decision on a Manual Bonus Reduction.

(vii) It is solely for the player’s club to determine whether or not to effect a Manual Bonus Reduction. It is solely for the player’s club to determine which official or committee is authorised to make decisions on Manual Bonus Reductions. The player’s club has absolute authority in this regard. Clubs are not required to refer such decisions to the club General Committee or Board of Directors.

(viii) GA considers that a player’s club will have an adequate feel of the player’s underlying ability in order to make an informed assessment as to whether or not a Manual Bonus Reduction would be inappropriate. A club should not effect a Manual Bonus Reduction on a player for whom it believes it does not have an adequate feel for their underlying ability.

(ix) The following table must be used when effecting Manual Bonus Reductions:

Number of Strokes the <i>Differential</i> (ie the value featured in the 'Played to' column on www.golflink.com.au) is Better than the <i>GA Handicap</i> in effect when the round was played	Number of strokes the new <i>GA Handicap</i> (after the Manual Bonus Reduction has been performed) will be lower than the <i>GA Handicap</i> in effect when the round was played
7-9	2
10-11	3
12-13	4
14 or more	5

Example:

- A player (with a *GA Handicap* of 17.4) returns a net score that produces a *Differential* of 7 (note: the *Differential* is the value that is featured in the 'Played to' column on www.golflink.com.au). This is 10 better than the player's *GA Handicap*.

- The club considers the normal calculation process to not have produced an appropriate reduction.

- The club considers that a Manual Bonus Reduction would be appropriate given its feel for the player's underlying ability.

- The player's *GA Handicap* is to be reduced so it will be 3 strokes less than the *GA Handicap* in effect when the round was played.

- The player's *GA Handicap* will be reduced to 14.4.

Note: The reduction to the player's handicap should be achieved via the Handicap Adjustment function in GOLF Link








National Handicap System Review - Golf Club Members








1. The name of my Golf Club is?

	Response Count
	9,774
answered question	9,774
skipped question	0





2. My handicap index is currently?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Better than a 5.0 handicap 	5.3%	520
5.0 - 10.0 	16.2%	1,581
10.1 - 15.0 	25.0%	2,444
15.1 - 20.0 	25.6%	2,498
20.1 - 25.0 	15.8%	1,544
25.1 - 30.0 	7.7%	754
Greater than 30.0 	4.4%	433
answered question		9,774
skipped question		0





3. The following best describes the format I usually play the game under

		Response Percent	Response Count
Stroke play		26.0%	2,544
Match play (club match play competitions, club championships and Interclub pennants)		12.3%	1,199
Single stableford competitions		25.9%	2,528
I enter the club scramble and play an 'informal' match with my playing group		29.6%	2,893
I am a casual golfer and not interested in competitive golf		6.2%	610
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0





4. Do you think that off your current handicap index you can compete fairly against any other golfer with a handicap index, regardless of whether they are on scratch or 36?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree		13.2%	1,292
Agree		61.3%	5,995
Disagree		20.4%	1,991
Strongly disagree		5.1%	496
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0




5. Do you have a good understanding of the current handicap system?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		58.6%	5,732
Reasonable, but I could do with some education		32.1%	3,141
I have only a limited understanding		8.4%	823
I am confused		0.8%	78
	Other (please specify)		167
	answered question		9,774
	skipped question		0





6. All courses have been assessed under strict course rating guidelines to determine their course and slope ratings. The course and slope rating figures stay the same regardless of weather conditions. Do you think this is appropriate?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, as handicaps are calculated from the best 10 of 20 rounds this allows for seasonal changes		53.1%	5,186
No, they need to be adjusted daily based on the score cards returned on that day		13.2%	1,286
No, but if adjusted daily the adjustment must also take into account the greatly differing field strengths		3.5%	344
No, there should be three seasonal course ratings to reflect summer, spring/autumn and winter conditions		30.3%	2,958
	answered question		9,774
	skipped question		0





7. It is important the course and slope ratings are accurate as they provide the national uniformity required for accurate handicapping. Do you think your Club course and slope ratings are in line with other Clubs in your District?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		59.1%	5,780
No		22.4%	2,194
I don't know the system well enough to answer		18.4%	1,800
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0







8. In every handicap system there is a form of control in regard to maximum scores allowable per hole. This is referred to as Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) which is the downward adjustment of individual hole scores for handicap purposes in order to make handicaps more representative of a player's potential scoring ability. Currently high scores are reduced to the equivalent of a zero stableford points. If you think this is appropriate adjustment of ESC please select accordingly below, or identify the system you think may be better.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Retain equivalent zero stableford points		74.0%	7,232
Reduce the maximum allowable to one stableford point		16.1%	1,576
Introduce a maximum number based on the par of a hole		7.6%	741
Introduce a maximum number regardless of the hole par		2.3%	225
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0




9. The higher handicapper is more likely to have an exceptional score more often than the lower handicapper. This being the case, should we accept that no handicap system can always ensure an equitable situation in a field including both low and high handicappers, and encourage other options?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, we should always be competing in divisions		45.1%	4,409
No, an 'exceptional score' is only one score out of ten counting scores and the handicap calculations should reflect the overall playing ability and keep a player's handicap accurate		38.8%	3,790
No, players should compete on different percentages of their handicap for lower v higher handicappers, therefore one competition should work		5.9%	577
No, make changes to the handicap system to keep handicaps more uniform		10.2%	998
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0








10. The term 'burglar' is common in golf. An important aspect of the handicap system is the role of the Club Handicap Committee to ensure the integrity of a player's handicap and that it reflects their potential scoring ability. The Committee should review players' records, including examining competition results and in particular exceptional scores in competition rounds. Do you think this is happening adequately at your Club?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, the Handicap Committee ensures all scores are entered		16.3%	1,594
My Club has a system in place and has been able to reduce the abuse that occurs		7.6%	747
My Club has a system in place but it could be improved		10.5%	1,024
I am not aware of any player review occurring		54.7%	5,343
Player review does not happen at my Club		8.1%	794
There are no handicap manipulation issues at my Club		2.8%	272
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0




11. Do you think entering all score cards in all formats of the game, as we do now, is appropriate for our golfing culture? This includes match play cards, casual rounds and 9 hole scores by 18 hole handicap players

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		57.8%	5,645
No		33.7%	3,292
I don't have an opinion either way		8.6%	837
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0

12. To be answered by players who hold an 18 hole handicap index only. As above we currently MUST return ALL scores for handicap purposes. If this was to change, identify from the list below all situations when you believe a score card MUST be returned for handicap purposes.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Competitive stroke play rounds		90.0%	8,795
Competitive match play rounds (formal Club match play competition/Interclub pennants etc)		60.8%	5,939
Club scrambles		71.0%	6,944
Four ball best ball matches		45.7%	4,467
Casual rounds		53.8%	5,262
All 9 Hole rounds		23.3%	2,280
Some 9 Hole rounds		7.5%	736
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0



13. In some systems there is a limit, referred to as an anchor, which is a maximum number of strokes a player can go out during a 12 month period. Do you think this is a good idea?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		32.7%	3,199
No		38.9%	3,798
I don't have an opinion either way		28.4%	2,777
		answered question	9,774
		skipped question	0

14. This is your opportunity to add comments in regard to the handicap system. We welcome all feedback.

	Response Count
	4,230
answered question	4,230
skipped question	5,544

15. Would you like to go in the draw to win the Cleveland Classic Driver?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes 	94.4%	9,198
No 	5.6%	544
answered question		9,742
skipped question		32

16. Please provide an email address or contact number we can contact you on should you be the successful winner. The winner will be drawn at random from all entries and the winner announced on www.golf.co.nz. Good luck!

	Response Count
	9,187
answered question	9,187
skipped question	587

NZ Golf Handicap System Review 2013 for Golf Clubs







1. The name of your Golf Club is?

	Response Count
	244
answered question	244
skipped question	0



2. My role at the Club is?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Club Handicapper	45.9%	112
Member of the Handicap Committee	11.1%	27
Club Professional	4.5%	11
Director of Golf	5.3%	13
Chairman of the Match Committee	8.6%	21
Golf Club Manager	32.0%	78
Other	21.7%	53
answered question		244
skipped question		0

3. Do you have a Handicap Committee that ensures all members are complying with the system and monitors peer review?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		26.6%	65
No, but we take action when necessary		56.6%	138
No		13.1%	32
No and we are unsure on how to deal with any such players		3.7%	9
answered question			244
skipped question			0

4. Are you aware of the powers of a Handicap Committee and the penalties or adjustments that can be made to a member's handicap index if required?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		75.0%	183
No		25.0%	61
answered question			244
skipped question			0




5. What percentage of your membership enters club scrambles or club competitions? We realise a large number of golfers are just happy to play casually, so in this question we are trying to understand how many are actually playing formally.

		Response Percent	Response Count
0-25%		17.2%	42
26-50%		36.9%	90
51-75%		31.6%	77
76% plus		14.3%	35
answered question			244
skipped question			0

6. What is the average stableford that wins your weekly scramble? Please consider the average rather than the most exceptional score returned.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 36 stableford points		5.7%	14
36-39 stableford points		46.3%	113
40-43 stableford points		46.3%	113
44 or more stableford points		1.6%	4
answered question			244
skipped question			0



7. Considering that you run separate competitions for the men and women in your Club, how many divisions do you have in your scramble competitions?

		Response Percent	Response Count
One division		45.9%	112
Two divisions		27.9%	68
More than two divisions		26.2%	64

If you have divisions, provide the handicap range for each 123




answered question	244
skipped question	0

8. In Club competitions do you apply the handicap allowance for players competing from different tees, or men and women from the same tees?




		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		70.5%	172
No		29.5%	72

answered question	244
skipped question	0





9. The handicap system operates on the premise that all players will try to make the best score they can on every hole played and that all acceptable scores must be returned for handicapping purposes. This means that if 13 or more holes are played the player must post an 18 hole score and if 7-12 holes are played, the (18 hole handicapped) player must post a 9 hole score. In 2010 the computerised handicap system (DotGolf) was upgraded to comply with the handicapping system rule to process 9 hole scores submitted by the player holding an 18 hole handicap index. Does your Club enter 9 hole cards for its 18 hole handicap members?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, we input all cards		72.5%	177
We enter some 9 hole cards		16.4%	40
We don't enter 9 hole cards		11.1%	27
answered question			244
skipped question			0




10. The handicap system requires all cards in all forms of play to be entered for handicap purposes. We are aware that one of the controversial issues is having to submit match play cards for handicapping. Do you enter match play cards?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, we enter all match play cards		88.5%	216
Sometimes we enter match play cards		10.2%	25
No, we don't enter any match play cards		1.2%	3
answered question			244
skipped question			0




11. In every handicap system there is a form of control in regard to maximum scores allowable per hole. This is referred to as Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) which is the downward adjustment of individual hole scores for handicap purposes in order to make handicaps more representative of a player's potential scoring ability. Currently high scores are reduced to the equivalent of zero stableford points. If you think this is the appropriate adjustment of ESC please select accordingly below, or identify the system you think may be better.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Retain equivalent zero stableford points		71.3%	174
Reduce the maximum allowable to one stableford point		25.0%	61
Introduce a maximum number based on the par of a hole		2.9%	7
Introduce a maximum number regardless of the hole par		0.8%	2
		answered question	244
		skipped question	0





12. Some handicap systems have a maximum that a player can increase their handicap by in a rolling 12 month period. This is referred to as an anchor. Do you think this would be a good change to our current system?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		25.8%	63
No		49.6%	121
I have no opinion		24.6%	60
		answered question	244
		skipped question	0




13. Every set of tees has a New Zealand course and slope rating which remains unchanged regardless of the time of year or changing weather conditions. Previous handicapping systems have permitted course rating adjustments based on the day's performance of the field, however seasonal ratings are not permitted under the current handicapping system. If you believe the current one rating is appropriate then indicate below, otherwise identify what you believe to be the best option.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Retain the current course and slope rating		54.9%	134
At the end of each day, adjust the course rating on a daily basis based on the day's performance of the field		10.7%	26
Have 3 seasonal course and slope ratings to reflect 1. summer, 2. spring & autumn and 3. winter conditions		34.4%	84
		answered question	244
		skipped question	0

14. Overall, how do you rate the current handicap system for providing equitable play?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Operates well		34.0%	83
Generally operates well but may need some minor adjustments		56.6%	138
Not working as effectively as it should and requires significant change		8.6%	21
Is entirely unsuitable for our requirements and needs to be replaced		0.8%	2
		answered question	244
		skipped question	0

15. How would you rate the education that NZ Golf has provided so that Clubs and their members understand the handicap system?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Very good		18.4%	45
Satisfactory		71.7%	175
Less than satisfactory		9.8%	24

If less than satisfactory please explain the areas you are uncertain about or find confusing 30

answered question	244
skipped question	0

16. This is your opportunity to add comments in regard to the handicap system. We welcome all feedback.

	Response Count
	139
answered question	139
skipped question	105