

The new Worldwide Handicapping System (WHS)

Summary

Introduction:

You may or may not be aware that there will be a new handicapping system coming into force on the 2nd November 2020. This document attempts to set out the basics of the new system without going into a bewildering amount of the detail

In this document, I have tried to:

- Set out why the new system has been developed
- Explain some of the terminology
- Set out how it will work in practice

What is the WHS and why has it been created?

The main purpose of the new World Handicapping System (WHS) is threefold:

- With golf being centred around one standard set of rules, governed by the R&A and the United States Golf Association (USGA), it makes sense to unify the current 6 handicapping systems making for a more inclusive and equitable sport
- To give all members of golf clubs a handicap index which can be transported to other clubs worldwide
- To enable members to compete, or play recreationally and fairly regardless of where they play

The system has been developed over a number of years by the R&A and USGA in collaboration with the 6 handicapping authorities which operate throughout the world

The WHS will come into play on 2nd November 2020 in Great Britain and Ireland and will replace the current Council of National Golf Union (CONGU) handicapping system. It will be part of a system used by over 15 million golfers in 80 countries worldwide

Under the new system, all handicap will be calculated at a national level by England Golf. Golf clubs will continue to manage competitions and pass scores to England Golf

How does the WHS work?

At the outset of the new system, the new software will look at the last 20 scores submitted by all players who are a member of a golf club and calculate an average of the best 8 scores. The calculated figure will become the player's initial Handicap Index. If the player has played fewer than 20 scores in the last 2 years or so, the average will be based on a fewer number than 8 depending on the number of rounds played

Every time a player puts in an acceptable score either in a competition or in a social round, the computer will update the player's record and will automatically update his/her Handicap Index ready for the next game still based on the 8 best scores

WHS Key features:

Handicap Index:

Golfers will consider this to be the most important element of the WHS as, because it is calculated on a course of standard difficulty regardless of where they have played, it will enable a player to compete anywhere in the world on an equitable basis which cannot be achieved with the current system

Slope Rating:

Slope Rating is the number which indicates the relative playing difficulty of a course and varies between 55 and 155. The higher the slope rating, the more difficult the course, especially for the higher handicap players. The number 113 has been used as the standard Slope Rating for the calculation of the Handicap Index. Each tee on every course for both men and women is given an individual Slope Rating

Course Handicap:

Since your Handicap Index is based on a standard Slope Rating of 113, before you start your round, you must convert it into a Course Handicap by adjusting for the Slope Rating of the tees you are competing from. For example, on a difficult course your Course Handicap will be higher than if you were playing on an easier course. The Course Handicap will determine the number of strokes you will receive for any set of tees on a course

Do not worry, you do not have to work out your Course Handicap yourself. England Golf (EG) will provide Course and Rating tables for all golf clubs. These tables will be positioned in conspicuous locations around the club to make it simple for you to find prior to beginning your round. All you have to do is choose the tees you are playing from that day and cross reference your Handicap Index on the Course and Rating table to ascertain your Course Handicap. It really is as simple as that

Course Rating:

So that a Slope Rating can be calculated, every course throughout the world has been rated to measure its playing difficulty for both scratch and higher handicap players. The rating is done by trained groups who assess the challenges of each hole (including, length and obstacles) from each tee and estimate how many strokes both a scratch and handicap player would take on each hole

Once a final number is arrived at for both standards of golfer, they are combined and form the basis for the calculation of the Slope Rating

When working out whether you have played to your Course Handicap or not you would deduct the Course Rating (rather than Par) from your Gross Score

Playing Handicap:

There is one final detail which is used for competition purposes only and does not affect your handicap record and that is a Handicap Allowance required to arrive at your Playing Handicap

The Handicap Allowance is a statistical allowance that is implemented in order to maintain the integrity of the WHS when used in competition. It allows golfers to compete on a level playing field, regardless of their handicap index. For example, when playing in a single Stroke Play competition, you would only get 95% of your Course Handicap and in a better ball Stroke Play only 85%. Of course, you will not have to calculate your Playing Handicap, it will be done for you as part of the terms of competition

Playing Golf:

Acceptable Scores:

One of the myths of the new handicapping system is that you have to complete a card every time you play. This is simply not true. You can go out and play with friends and not worry about your handicap if that is what you want to do

You can of course submit a score any time you play, but there are certain rules if you want it to count for handicap. A score is acceptable for handicapping purposes if the round has been played anywhere in the world over 9 or 18 holes provided that it:

Is in an authorised form of play, for example:

- Organised competition
- General Play, provided the round is pre-registered in a way agreed by your club
- Is in the company of one other person
- Is played in accordance with the rules of golf
- On a course which has a current course and slope rating

If you put in a card at another course in England or abroad, you should submit it locally but also you must make sure that your home club is aware of it

Every golfer will still need to designate a 'Home' club. The role of the home club will be to ensure that each golfer's handicap index is managed in accordance with handicapping rules, which means that clubs will need to have a handicap committee. As is the case now, home clubs will review handicaps on an annual basis

Submission of scores:

If you are playing in a competition at your home course, a note of the terms of the competition will be posted on the board so you will know the full details of the competition, including format, tees and handicap allowance

Cards for both competitions and general play, having been verified by your playing partner, should ideally be submitted on the same day. This is all you have to do. The score will be entered on the computer and the software will work out how the score will affect your Handicap Index. If you started with fewer than 20 scores, your new score will be added until 20 is reached. Your Handicap Index will be updated automatically overnight as appropriate and you will be informed of any changes, ideally by email

Conclusion:

This document has endeavoured to summarise the new system without blinding the reader with too much science

If you wish to find out more, please talk to the Secretary of your home club or look at the England Golf Website (www.englandgolf.org) and click on the "Handicap and Rules" button. This section will take you through the new system step by step with various pretty pictures and helpful videos

BRB Carrick

22nd October 2020