



NCGA Position on Acceptable Rounds for Handicap Purposes

The NCGA is licensed by the United States Golf Association to use the USGA Handicap System to provide official handicap indexes for our members. As such, we adhere to the procedures set forth in the USGA Handicap System Manual for the posting of scores.

The USGA has issued [the attached memorandum](#) in response to the many inquiries which have recently been received concerning the acceptability of scores for rounds played with non-conforming clubs or balls.

The position of the NCGA is fully in support of the USGA policies.

If you should have questions or require any further clarification, please contact the NCGA Handicapping Department at 831/625-4653 or via e-mail at handicap@ncga.org.

THE USGA HANDICAP SYSTEM AND THE RULES OF GOLF

The USGA has received many inquiries regarding whether rounds played with equipment that does not conform to the Rules of Golf are acceptable for handicap purposes.

The USGA's long-standing policy according to the USGA Handicap System is that scores made using non-conforming clubs or balls are *not* acceptable for handicap purposes.*

The USGA recognizes that it is a player's choice whether or not he adheres to the Rules of Golf. While the USGA cannot ensure that all players use only conforming equipment, the integrity of the USGA Handicap System relies on a single set of Rules and uniform equipment standards to predict accurately a player's potential ability and designate an appropriate USGA Handicap Index.

It should be noted that over time the USGA Handicap System has allowed a few exceptions that promote the inclusion of some scores that are not played strictly according to Rules of Golf. These exceptions represent an effort to make it easier to obtain scoring data needed for formulating an accurate USGA Handicap Index.

Preferred Lies and Winter Rules

The use of preferred lies or winter rules is not endorsed nor interpreted under the Rules of Golf. But a local rule denoting the existence of such a practice is included in the Rules of Golf for the benefit of local Committees faced with adverse course conditions. Scores made under preferred lies or winter rules will be posted for handicap purposes unless a club's Handicap Committee determines that conditions are so poor that such scores should not be posted.

Conceded Putts and Incomplete Holes

In stroke play, a player is required under Rule 3-2 to hole out at every hole. However, in some special forms of stroke play (see Rules 31-32) there are instances where holing out is not a requirement. When a player fails to hole out, in either stroke play or match play, the Handicap System requires data that is reflective of what transpired that will help in predicting potential ability. Section 4-1 of the USGA Handicap System Manual states: "If a player starts but does not complete a hole or is conceded a stroke, he shall record for handicap purposes the score he most likely would have made. The most likely score consists of the number of strokes already taken, plus, in his best judgment, the number of strokes that the player would need to complete the hole from that position more than half the time."

Mulligans

"Mulligans" are a relatively frequent occurrence on the golf course. But they are not recognized under the Rules of Golf.

The USGA Handicap System doesn't want to eliminate a round that has seventeen holes of valid scores if a "mulligan" was played on a single hole. So, for handicap purposes, the hole score made with the mulligan is tossed out and replaced with a hole score that is not considered out of the ordinary for the player, based on his Course Handicap. The player's score becomes par, plus any handicap strokes the player should receive, on the hole(s) in question. A player with a Course Handicap of eighteen receives a stroke on every hole, so that particular player's hole score would be par plus the one stroke, or a bogey.

Electronic Measuring Devices

Use of Electronic Distance Measuring Devices is contrary to the Rules, namely Rule 14-3 (Artificial Devices and Unusual Equipment).

A policy allowing the posting of scores for handicap purposes tied to use of these devices has been in place since 1994. At that time, the player really had no practical choice whether to use these devices since many golf carts had mounted versions that a player could not turn off. Over time, hand-held devices started to appear and players had a choice whether to use such a device or not. However, the USGA determined that it would be impractical for handicap purposes to differentiate between scores made with cart-mounted versus hand-held devices. Thus, scores made with both types of devices are acceptable for handicap purposes.

** The USGA provides a list of non-conforming driving clubs within the Equipment section of its web site at www.usga.org/press/list_of_clubs.html. The Association publishes twice annually a booklet of conforming golf balls. But a golf ball not included in that booklet is not necessarily a non-conforming ball.. All balls (including 'x-out' balls whose identification markings have been obscured) are assumed to be conforming unless they obviously fail the test for size (may not be less than 1.68 inches) or weight (shall not be greater than 1.62 ounces). Decision 5-1/4 from the Decisions on the Rules of Golf states: "In the absence of strong evidence to suggest that an 'x-out' ball does not conform to the Rules, it is permissible for such a ball to be used."*