

USGA Recommendations Regarding Hole Locations

The USGA frequently receives requests for guidelines with respect to selection of hole locations on the putting greens, **particularly during competitions.**

The USGA believes that many factors affect selection of hole locations. The first and most important is good judgment in deciding what will give fair results. Do not be tricky in locating holes.

Following are specific points:

(1) Study the design of the hole as the architect intended it to be played. Know the length of the shot to the green and how it may be affected by the probably conditions for the day — that is, wind and other weather elements, condition of the turf from which the shot will be played, and holding quality of the green.

(2) There must be enough putting green surface between the hole and the front and the sides of the green to accommodate the required shot. For example, if the hole requires a long iron or wood shot to the green, the hole should be located deeper in the green and further from its sides than should be the case if the hole requires a short pitch shot.

In any case, it is recommended that generally the hole be located at least five paces from any edge of the green. If a bunker is close to the edge, or if the ground slopes away from the edge, the distance should be greater, especially if the shot is more than a pitch.

Consideration should be given to fair opportunity for recovery after a reasonably good shot that just misses the green.

(3) An area two to three feet in radius around the hole should be as nearly level as possible and of uniform grade. In no case should holes be located in tricky places, or on sharp slopes where a ball can gather speed. A player above the hole should be able to stop the ball at the hole.

(4) Consider the condition of nearby turf, especially taking care to avoid old hole plugs which have not completely healed.

(5) Holes should be cut as nearly on the vertical as possible, not plumb with the contour of the green.

(6) There should be a balanced selection of hole locations for the entire course with respect to left, right, central, front and back positions. For example, avoid too many left positions with resulting premium on drawn or hooked shots.

(7) For a competition played over several days, the course should be kept in balance daily as to degree of difficulty. In a stroke competition, the first hole of the first round is as important as the last hole of the last round, and so the course should not be set up appreciably more difficult for any round — balanced treatment is the aim. An old concept of making the course progressively harder round after round is fallacious. One form of balanced daily treatment is to select six quite difficult hole locations, six which are moderately difficult, and six which are relatively easy.

(8) During practice days before a competition, locate holes in areas not to be used during the competition and which will not result in areas to be used being impaired by foot traffic.

(9) Anticipate the players' traffic patterns. Locate holes for early rounds so that good hole locations for later rounds will not be spoiled by players leaving the green.

(10) In match play, a hole location may, if necessary, be

changed during a round provided the players in each match play with the hole in the same location.

In stroke play, rule 33-2b requires that all competitors in a single round play with each hole cut in the same position, but see Exception to that Rule.

When 36 holes are played in one day, it is not customary for hole locations to be changed between rounds, but there is no Rule to prohibit changing them. If they are changed, all players should be informed.

(11) The greenkeeper who cuts the holes should make sure that the Rules of Golf are observed, especially the requirements that the hole-liner not exceed $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches in outer diameter and that it be sunk at least one inch below the putting green surface.

The USGA® Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) Procedure

ESC is the downward adjustment for handicap purposes, of unusually high scores on individual holes which, if included in the 18-hole score, would be abnormally high in relation to the player's general ability. Each player is responsible for adjusting his score in accordance with the formula below before it is returned for handicap purposes.

On completion of each round, adjust your actual score as follows for USGA Handicap System purposes:

Course Handicap / Limitation on Hole Score Plus or scratch:

Limit of one over par on any hole.

1 through 18:

Limit of two over par on number of holes equal to handicap.

Limit of one over par on balance of holes.

19 through 36:

Limit of three over par on as many holes as the handicap exceeds 18 strokes. Limit of two over par on balance of holes.

37 through 54:

Limit of four over par on as many holes as the handicap exceeds 36 strokes. Limit of three over par on balance of holes.

For example, a player with a USGA Handicap Index of 21.8 who has a Course Handicap of 23 at a course with a relatively high Slope Rating would be allowed a maximum score of three over par on five holes and a maximum score of two over par on each of the remaining 13 holes. A player with a Course Handicap of 12 would be allowed a maximum of two over par on 12 holes and a maximum of one over par on each of the remaining six holes.

If a player starts but fails to complete a hole, he shall, for handicap purposes only, record a score for the hole in accordance with the above formula. There is no limit on the number of incompleting holes in a round provided incompleting is not for the purpose of controlling the handicap. A player should not discontinue play on a hole where there is a reasonable chance that he will play the hole in fewer strokes than the score allowed by ESC.

New golfers who have not established USGA Handicap Indexes should assume the USGA maximums of 36.4 for men and 40.4 for women - converted to the Course Handicap.

(continued on page 15)

Example of application of ESC for a golfer with a course handicap of 23:

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Par	4	3	4	4	4	5	4	3	5	5
Score	5	5	4	6	5	8	6	8	7	9
Over Par	1	2	0	2	1	③	2	⑤	2	④
ESC Adjustment								-2		-1

TOTAL

Hole	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	—
Par	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	4	71
Score	11	3	7	6	4	4	7	5	110
Over Par	⑦	0	③	2	0	1	③	1	—
ESC Adjustment	-4						-1		102

A player with a course handicap of 23 strokes must adjust downward any hole score in excess of three over par. He is allowed a maximum of five hole scores of three over par; beyond that, the maximum allowable score for any hole is two over par. On the scorecard above, he has six scores of three over par or more. Accordingly, he must reduce to three over par the scores on the holes on which he scored more than three over par, and he must reduce to two over the par the score on one of the holes on which he scored three over par. The 17th was selected arbitrarily to be lowered two over par. ESC is not related to the allocation of handicap strokes to the holes of a course.

For additional information on the USGA Handicap System, refer to the *USGA Handicap System and Golf Committee Manual*.

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