

RE-HANDICAP YOUR COURSE

USGA Tells Clubs to Give Strokes on Par-4 Holes First

IN THE report of the Executive committee of the USGA at its January 5 meeting, cognizance is taken for the first time of the widely varying systems under which U. S. clubs allocate handicap strokes. The Rules of Golf committee takes the matter in hand by recommending that the difficulty of a hole, rather than its length, be the governing factor in arranging the stroke order. Says the committee:

"Proper handicapping is a matter of general interest with respect to which uniform practices are desirable. Accordingly, the following recommendation is made: namely, in allocating handicap strokes in their proper order to the 18 holes of a golf course, the first stroke should be taken on the hole where it is most likely to be of use to the one receiving it.

"The theory of this system is that on a long par-5 hole the high handicap player is more likely than in the play of a par-4 hole to lose the hole by two or more strokes, in which case his handicap stroke is of no use. On the short holes he is more apt than in the case of a par-4 hole to win without his handicap, and so again lose the benefit of his stroke. The same consideration should apply, as far as possible, in allocating strokes to the remaining holes.

"Two further factors which may prevent the complete application of the foregoing recommendation should be taken into account:

"They should be so allocated as to in all probability be usable by the player receiving the handicap. To illustrate by an extreme case—it would be of no assistance ordinarily to a competitor to receive his first handicap stroke on the eighteenth hole.

"It is desirable to allocate the first stroke to the first nine, the second stroke to the second nine, and continue alternating in this manner until the order of

taking strokes is established for the full 18 holes."

Par-4 Holes Get First Strokes

The only interpretation that can be made of the above recommendation—so called by the USGA because handicapping procedure is outside the Rules of Golf—is that hereafter the USGA believes strokes should be first allocated to the par-4 holes of a course. The recommendation does not indicate whether par-3 holes or par-5 holes rank next, but since in either case one competitor would give the other 13 strokes on a par-70 layout and 11 strokes on a par-72 layout before anything but a par-4 hole would figure in the picture, it is probably not important. Few handicap matches find competitors so unevenly paired off.

Fully 90 percent of the courses of the country have up to now arranged their handicap strokes strictly on the basis of distance. The longest hole is stroke 1, the next longest stroke 2 and so on down to the shortest hole, which rates stroke 18. Generally, odd strokes are on the first nine, even strokes on the second. In the past few years some clubs have recognized that a 500-yard hole without hazards of any sort is easier for all classes of golfers than is a tightly trapped 410-yard hole, and have accordingly modified the handicap order so that a shorter, tougher hole ranks ahead of a longer, easier one, but rarely has a club gone as far as the USGA suggests and put strokes on all the 4-par holes before giving a single one to the par-5's.

It is still too early to say just what repercussions will sound in the golfing world as the result of this rather radical reform in handicapping methods, but you can bet there will be plenty of moans from the class-A golfers. For many years these sharpshooters have insisted that they rarely stand a chance in handicap events, even

though some smart statisticians have published table after table to prove that the great bulk of club prizes in handicap events are gathered in by the 10-stroke-and-under men. Now that the obvious advantage on the par-5 holes has been taken from these men, be prepared for a parade of wails.

Other howls are due from club handicapping committees, who will find themselves perfectly agreeable to the change recommended by the USGA but without the slightest idea of how to go about making the switch. "Which par-4 should be stroke 1" is a subject for debate that can very well carry a committee session into the small hours of the morning.

An Easy Way to Allot Strokes

Actually, there is no particular need for these handicap committees to work themselves into a lather over this thing. The USGA recommendation plainly states that the first stroke should be awarded neither on the easiest hole (where the poorer golfer stands the best chance of winning) or on the hardest hole (where the poorer golfer stands the best chance of losing), but rather on the hole most nearly average in difficulty. If this principle applies when comparing par-5 holes with 4's, and 3's with 4's, then it also applies when comparing one par-4 hole with another, and the work of allocating the holes of a course in proper sequence becomes simply a little problem in arithmetic, as follows:

Collect a couple of hundred score cards from your members, games actually shot in the regular course of play. Determine the total strokes these players needed to negotiate the first hole. Do the same thing with each of the remaining 17 holes. When you are done (and it's a good day's work by the way) your results will come out something like this table, which is assumed to be based on 200 rounds:

Hole	Par	Strokes	Hole	Par	Strokes
1	4	1084	10	4	1044
2	4	1132	11	4	1156
3	3	812	12	3	840
4	5	1312	13	4	1208
5	4	1167	14	3	872
6	3	797	15	5	1356
7	4	1216	16	4	989
8	4	1109	17	4	1148
9	4	1170	18	4	1167

From here in, everything is easy. Consider first only the par-4 holes, since

these are to get the first handicap strokes. On the first nine they rank in difficulty as follows, the most difficult (because the most strokes were taken on it) being listed first: 7th—1216 strokes, 9th—1170, 5th—1167, 2nd—1132, 8th—1109, and 1st—1084. The USGA says pick the average of these, and get it as near the start of the match as practical, so your handicap No. 1 will go to the 2nd hole, which stands mid-way in difficulty among the par-4's of the first nine, and is early in the round. Handicap No. 3 (remember the even strokes are to be given to the second nine) should be awarded to the 5th hole, No. 5 to the 8th, No. 7 to the 9th, No. 9 to the 1st, and No. 11 to the 7th. The same system should be followed on the second nine, allocating strokes 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 to the proper holes.

The degree of difficulty of the par-5's and the par-3's are equally apparent in the table and the same general method of ranking should be followed with them as with the par-4 holes. The USGA does not specify whether the 5's should rank above the 3's or vice-versa, but past custom would suggest that the former is advisable, with the 5-par of the first 9 receiving handicap stroke 13 and the 5-par of the second 9 stroke 14, and the four par-3 holes getting strokes 15, 16, 17 and 18.

USGA Sets Dates for Tourney Qualifying Rounds

SECTIONAL qualifying rounds for the USGA Open championship will be played May 13 and for the Amateur championship August 20. Rounds will be at 36 holes medal play. In each instance the number of qualifying centers will be the same as for last year's rounds—22 for the Open and 24 for the Amateur. Location of the qualifying points will be announced later.

The Open is scheduled June 6-8 at Oakmont CC, Oakmont, Pa. (near Pittsburgh); the Amateur, Sept. 9-14 at The Country Club, Cleveland. Entries for the Open will close April 24 and for the Amateur August 7 at the office of the USGA, 110 East 42nd St., New York, N. Y.

THE BOOKS and records of a club are not simply places to store information; they are a fertile source from which vital information may be drawn for use in planning the future operations and policies of the organization.