



SLOPE SYSTEM WORKING WELL



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The U.S.G.A. Slope Handicap System has settled into place and, well into its second year of operation, appears to be having the effects it was designed to produce. Using the M.P.G.A. Four-Ball and the M.G.A. Senior Four-Ball as examples, we have seen that the great advantage formerly held by players from longer, more difficult courses has been reduced. Different players from different courses have found their way into the winners circle. In general the system has been made more equitable, giving each player that tees it up in a handicap event a more reasonable chance of success, which is good for the game of golf. We at M.G.A. have tried our hardest to make using the slope system as easy as possible. We have sent information packets to all our member clubs and spoken to various groups around the state to answer any questions people have had. We have also published a booklet of all the Slope Handicap conversion charts for every course in Minnesota; thereby eliminating the need to hunt for the chart at the course you are playing.

In addition to our efforts, the players in Minnesota have embraced the system. They made the effort to understand and work with the changes. They weren't afraid to ask questions and suggest constructive changes, and really made the transition smoothly and positively. In doing so they have helped pave the way for the slope system to go national in the very near future.

This is not to say there have been no problems along the way. As with any rating system, Slope can lead to some misunderstandings. As superintendents you are probably most aware of how members can get caught up in the numbers game and

equate high course ratings and slope ratings with the quality of golf courses. Questions of comparison come up all the time. "Why is our course rated at 120 and this other place rated at 125?" Our greens are so much faster than their's, I can't believe our slope is lower!" "We have so many more bunkers than course X, why is our slope lower?"

The answer to these questions is that the Slope Rating of a golf course is not a statement on the quality of conditions or the number of bunkers nor is it a handy means of comparing two golf courses with each other. The Slope Rating is a statement of how difficult a golf course is for an average player (about 18-20 handicap). A course need not have a high course rating to have a high slope. The converse is also true. There are strict yardage ratios for the average player of both sexes which go a long way toward determining the final numbers. One or two strategically placed bunkers can account for higher ratings than half a dozen bunkers that don't come into play as often. Two or three well placed trees can cause more trouble than a completely lined fairway that is 60 yards wide. Speed and contour combine to create difficulties on putting surfaces that an excess of one alone will not.

As a further example of the futility of comparing courses through ratings and slopes alone, look at two famous courses in New York. Winged Foot, dubbed by many as the hardest of the U.S. Open Courses, has a lower slope rating than Westchester Country Club which is usually the scene of some of the best scoring on the tour. This is because many of the problems encountered by scratch players and professionals are out of reach for the bogey player at Winged Foot. Those deadly Tillinast bunkers are too far away for 20 handicappers off the tee, and the greens can't be reached in 2 shots so a player is usually chipping to the well bunkered greens. It all goes to show that the slope system is not a means for judging the quality of conditions or the amount of fun you will have playing a golf course. It is rather the best means yet devised for equalizing and improving the handicap system. In the long run we think it will make our game more enjoyable for everyone.