



# TURFGRASS MATTERS

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## Slope and Ratings--Know the Score

by

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Slope? Sure I know slope; when I go skiing I can choose the bunny slope, the black diamond slope or something in between. Ratings? Don't you mean what Siskel and Ebert used to do or are you referring to the "Bo Derek" kind of rating?

The United States Golf Association's rating is the evaluation of a course's playing difficulty or ease for a "scratch" or zero-handicap amateur golfer under "normal" conditions. The ratings are derived by using variables and formulas that a trained team of USGA raters obtains during a survey of the course.

Basing handicaps on course ratings alone puts lesser golfers at a distinct disadvantage when playing at more difficult venues because scores tend to rise more than the increase in ratings. For this reason the USGA implemented the slope handicap system in the 1980's, and all amateur golf associations authorized by the USGA now use it. Under the slope system, the golfer's traditional handicap has been replaced by a USGA handicap index (a decimal number). The slope system takes into account both the ways a "bogey" golfer plays the course and ten factors such as hazards, green speed, topography, etc.

The higher your handicap index, the greater the impact of "slope" will be. For instance, a golfer with an index of 19.8 plays a course with a 113 slope rating

would be entitled to 20 strokes. The same player playing a course with a slope rating of 88 would receive only 15 strokes, and if he played a more difficult course with a slope rating of 138, he would receive 24 strokes.

The basic goal of Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) is to eliminate exceptionally high hole scores. The USGA provides tables to show the maximum hole scores.

Course rating takes into account the yardage and other obstacles, and is usually a number around par, like 69.8. A course with a par of 72 and a rating of 72.1 would have a differential of 0.1, while a course with a par of 71 and a course rating of 72.1 would have a differential of 1.1. Therefore, according to course rating, the second course is the more difficult of the two.

Slope rating numbers translate to this: the higher the number, the more difficult the course. Nationally, the slope rating for a course of standard difficulty is 113, but many courses in the Mid-Atlantic have slopes in the high 130's and low 140's. The highest recognized slope rating is 155, which belong to Koolau Golf Course in Hawaii and International Golf Course in Bolton, Massachusetts.

The actual rating variables are as follows: Distance is the most influential element in the equation but distance

numbers alone is not used. Wind, roll, dogleg and elevation are the four factors that can affect the distance variable. Ten different obstacle factors are also used in the process; each rated according to their respective severity. They include:

Bunkers-greenside and fairway bunkers, depth of bunkers

Fairway-size of landing area, length of carry over rough to get to fairway

Recoverability and Rough-length of rough, severity of the green surrounds

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## Bullets from the Boardroom

MAAGCS Secretary - Mike Evans



Heartfelt thanks to Chris Ayers, CGCS, and Dean Graves, CGCS, for all of their efforts on behalf of MAAGCS superintendents during this summer's drought. Chris and Dean arranged a meeting with Governor Glendening's Drought Emergency Committee to voice the concerns of Maryland superintendents regarding the mandatory water restrictions. Thank you, gentlemen, for your tireless efforts!



The Board of Directors has approved the formation of a new committee, Government Relations, within the Board, beginning in the year 2000. The Government Relations Director will be responsible for effectively communicating with government officials on a variety of environmental issues relating to golf courses. The Government Relations Director will also keep the MAAGCS membership apprised of approved and pending legislation that may affect our golf course operations. The Government Relations position will be created without adding an additional seat on the Board, but by restructuring current responsibilities within the Board.



In an attempt to clearly delineate and define responsibilities to ensure peak performance, the Board of Directors will formulate written guidelines, or standard operating procedures, for each committee and officer's position on the Board of Directors. These guidelines, to be hammered out in November, will be in place for the new Board in the year 2000.



The Industrial Advisory Committee, consisting of Dave Cammarota (Egypt Farms), Lance Ernst (TESCO), and Harry Fridley (Green Meadows Turf Supply), and MAAGCS Past President Mike Gilmore, met with the Board of

Directors at the October meeting. The Board unanimously agreed to continue the Industrial Advisory Committee, which will remain under the chairmanship of the Past President, Messrs. Cammarota, Ernst, and Fridley have graciously volunteered to continue on the committee for the year 2000, after which time, the affiliate representatives to the committee will be determined by the Class F Committee serves as a liaison between the Class F membership and the Board of Directors.



The Board of Directors has approved the issuance of membership certificates beginning with the year 2000 membership renewals. A membership card will also be issued with the meeting schedule for the year on the back of the card.



The Board of Directors unanimously approved a \$500 donation to the "Friends of Curly" Benefit Golf Tournament to raise money for Preston Licklider, longtime superintendent at Winchester Country Club, who is suffering from a malignant brain tumor. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family, Preston.



At the Board's direction, Secretary Michael Evans sent a letter to GCSAA President David Fearis, CGCS, offering our Chapter's support of GCSAA's stance on recent advertising tactics by IGM. IGM mailed a solicitation to club officials throughout the country offering up to \$50,000 in new equipment to golf courses as an enticement to have IGM manage their golf course maintenance operations for three years. We are in lockstep with the GCSAA that this solicitation is offensive, misleading, and unethical.

### SLOPE

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Psychological---number of severe obstacles on given holes

Green Target---size of green, length of shot to green, firmness of the surface, blind approach

Green Surface---flat or contoured, speed of the green(s)

Water Hazards---forced carries, hazards near the green, proximity of hazards to landing area

Topography---downhill, uphill, sidehill stances, uphill or downhill shots to the green

Out-of Bounds/Extreme Rough---proximity of OB or extreme rough to landing areas or greens, forced carries and associated lengths for the carry

Trees---denseness, proximity to landing area, recoverability ease or difficulty

After being rated for the first time, a new course should be

re-rated every three years over a nine-year period. Mature established courses are routinely re-rated every ten years or any time significant revisions/renovations are made.

Slope ratings and course ratings for all courses in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, North Carolina, and South Carolina are available from Golfnet ([www.golfnet.com](http://www.golfnet.com) or 5272 River Road Bethesda, MD 20816).

A more detailed study of this topic will be offered in New Orleans at the GCSAA Golf Course Conference and Show in a seminar entitled "USGA Golf Course Rating System." This seminar will be conducted by Peter Dennis, Manager, Course Rating Service, and will be presented on Monday February 14, 2000.

The author would like to acknowledge Golfnet and the Washington Metropolitan Golf Association for their help researching this article.