



# 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 Under the slope system, the golfer's traditional handicap has been replaced by a USGA handicap index (a decimal number).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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