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OPTION FOR CONSIDERATION – A SINGLE AUSTRALIAN COURSE RATING SYSTEM

(20/11/2006) – To abandon the daily CCR and introduce a rolling AWCR/AMCR which is updated weekly and is determined by scores from the previous two-month period.

This option for consideration has been prepared following investigation of the USGA, European, and UK course rating models. It also follows discussions with each women's and men's state association regarding the operation of the existing Australian systems which involved providing them the opportunity to be involved in this review as they wished. The review finally involved consideration of major Australian papers compiled on the subject of handicapping and course rating, and views expressed over an extended period of time by Committee members, individuals, clubs, district associations, and state associations.

It is worth remembering that in course rating, as with most things, perception is a significant consideration. There is no point in a system being fair if people don't believe it to be so. As a result, there will always be the need to balance perfect theory against practical simplicity.

Existing Australian Women's and Men's Systems

This review has identified the following significant issues surrounding the operation of the existing systems:

- There are two distinct daily rating systems operating in Australia. The WCCR/MCCR system operates for large fields and the AMCR/AWCR system operates for small fields.
- The capacity of the existing AMCR/AWCR systems to provide an accurate, relevant, and contemporary assessment of the difficulty of a golf course.

DAILY RATING SYSTEM

Outline of Concerns

Points to note here are:

- We are operating two distinct systems – a variable statistical rating for large fields, and a set rating for small fields. This is clearly not uniform and needs attention.
- The original designers of the CCR system were aware of this issue however it was assumed that a solution would eventually be identified. This hasn't happened.
- We need to be mindful that we are operating a system for all golfers, not just city golfers, or not just large-field golfers.
- Even within a single club there can be small-field days and large-field days – this leads to two course rating systems operating even on an intra-club level.
- Even amongst large fields, there is the constant suggestion that the composition of a field on any given day will influence the CCR and hence that the CCR is not necessarily a true indicator of the difficulty of the course. For example there is the perception that a midweek veterans field will typically generate a higher CCR than a weekend competition field. This is the problem of the biased data set.
- In significantly large fields there is the opportunity to generate both a morning CCR and an afternoon CCR to account for changes in conditions throughout the day. This opportunity does not exist for large fields that are only moderately large. Hence another tier is added to the structure and yet again the CCR in practice is not necessarily a true indication of the difficulty of the course.

- The average golfer is still prone to struggle with the concept that their handicap is calculated against the course rating and not against par. This problem is probably exacerbated by the fact that a player in a large field will never know what the CCR is when they are playing – the only concrete figure they CAN play against is par.

OPTION FOR COMPONENT OF NEW COURSE RATING SYSTEM (provided for comment) – To abandon the daily rating component of the Course Rating System and handicap all players against the ‘permanent’ course rating (NB this would be consistent with the USGA Course Rating System which also has no daily rating component).

Advantages of this proposal:

- Creates the opportunity for all golfers to be handicapped in the same manner and eliminates the multi-tier existing structure.
- Creates an additional degree of transparency as the player knows throughout their round exactly what score they need in order to play to their handicap. This will make it much easier for the average golfer to come to grips with the concept that playing to par is different to playing to their handicap. It has been suggested this could make it easier for a ‘burglar’ to play above their handicap – in reality though the existing system gives the manipulator enough of an idea of what the CCR could be if their intent is to go out 0.1.
- Most handicap golfers play with the intent of breaking their handicap. We should ideally allow them to know what score they need to do this. The current system only allows them to guess.

Disadvantages of this proposal:

- There would be no weighting of a score achieved in difficult conditions against a score achieved in less difficult conditions. (NB The USGA system operates without a daily rating component – the USGA system is in operation as close to us as New Zealand.) As it is though, the existing system doesn’t do this perfectly in any case due to the biased data set problem and the problems that can be caused by fields which are ‘large’ by definition but not significantly large.

PERMANENT RATING SYSTEM

Outline of Concerns

Points to note here are:

- This system is reliant on the subjective judgement of a series of difficulty factors. It is difficult to achieve consistency between different rating teams in this respect, and also across state boundaries.
- The assessment value placed on the potential effect of each individual difficulty factor is purely an artificial construct. No-one can legitimately assess the effect a specific bunker or mound will have on the actual difficulty of a hole when all other factors on the hole are taken into account.
- The existing systems do not take account of the typical strength of prevailing winds (unless the severe weather allowance of the men’s system applies) – this would be difficult to place an effective value on in any case.
- The existing systems do not take into account the effect on the length rating of hilly terrain on a golf course, or of grass types and textures.
- Existing ratings can be rendered meaningless as a result of changes in climatic conditions – eg hard fairways caused by drought, sparser fairways caused by drought, heavy fairways caused by rain. It is also difficult to place a specific effective value on each of such changes.

Points to bear in mind:

- The intent of a course rating is to make an assessment of how difficult a golf course is.
- This has always been done by constructing systems to effectively guess how difficult a course will be found by a specific category of golfer as it was impracticable to judge how all golfers would find a course – even though a course is played by ALL types of golfers.
- In Australia we now have a computerised facility with nationwide accessibility that was simply not available to administrators when the existing course rating systems were being devised.

- Golf Link provides us the facility to not just guess at how a specific class of golfer will find a golf course, it can tell us how difficult the whole membership of a club finds a golf course over an extended period of time.
- Golf Link can provide us an accurate difficulty rating for a golf course based on what ALL players are actually doing.

OPTION FOR COMPONENT OF NEW COURSE RATING SYSTEM (provided for comment) – To abandon the existing method for determining the permanent rating of a golf course and instead perform this function by using net scores returned by ALL players over an extended period of time.

The 12.5% score from all rounds returned in the period would be used. A course rating would not be permitted to vary by more than 4 strokes above a figure that would be determined by the length of the course, or 8 strokes below this figure. (NB The formula for determining the length rating would be different for men and women. The task of arriving at this length formula would be presented to a statistician/mathematician.)

(Scores returned when “Tee-up Through the Green” applies will have two strokes added to them for handicapping purposes.)

A state association would be permitted to approve an extension or reduction of these parameters in special individual circumstances.

A facility using multiple teeing grounds should have a separate rating determined for each length course (eg one rating for the Blue Tee Course, a different rating for the White Tee Course, etc). Scores from all courses will be added to the same data set, but each will be weighted according to the respective course’s length rating.

Formula Option 1 – A CONGU-style weighting of scores returned by players in different handicap grades can be added to the process. This would have the likely effect of making the ultimate course rating figure more accurate, but would be more complicated and harder to administer for clubs not on Golf Link.

Formula Option 2 – Weight scores according to the competition type. For example, subtract 1 stroke from every player’s score in a stroke competition, and make every player’s score 1 worse in a par competition (NB Stableford scores would be left untouched – Stableford competitions are by far the most typical Australian competition type).

Advantages of this proposal:

- Creates a transparent rating. Clubs would no longer have the concern that their rating wasn’t accurately reflective of the actual difficulty of a course.
- Creates a Course Rating method that can be uniformly applied – ie removes the inconsistency factor inherent in a system reliant on a variety of rating teams all making subjective judgments.
- The course rating would be determined by ALL categories of player, not just the elite player. This is important from a transparency perspective as a golf course is played by ALL categories of player, not just the elite player.
- Removes any need to artificially assess the effect of wind strength or direction, or types of grass, or degrees of density of foliage, or the size and position of a bunker or lake or mound.
- The only genuine determinant of the cumulative effect of all difficulty factors is the actual scores of players, and this is what would be used.
- All of these factors would no longer be artificially assessed in isolation; the practical cumulative effect will be accurately indicated by an average 12.5% score over an extended period of time.
- Windy or wet days will not be ignored by having to perform a rating assuming a set of perfect conditions. If a course is subject to a variety of conditions, these will be absorbed into and borne out by the average 12.5% score over an extended period.
- Removes the administrative costs associated with training and maintaining expert course raters.
- Would provide a further incentive to clubs to join Golf Link, which is a specific desire of Golf Australia, and would be of genuine benefit to the entire industry.

Clubs not on Golf Link would have the following options:

- Join Golf Link.
- Operate the new system manually or via, for example, an Excel spreadsheet. This could be maintained by a club official or a specific district official.
- Be allocated the same rating (above or below the course's length rating) as a "like" club in the district which is on Golf Link.
- Continue to use the existing AWCR/AMCR.
- The new system would not be forced on non-Golf Link clubs, it would instead finally provide an option for members of small clubs to be handicapped in the same manner as members of large clubs.

FINAL QUESTIONS

This leaves the following twin issues:

- How large should the period of time be from which scores are used to determine the Course Rating?
- How often should the Course Rating be re-assessed?

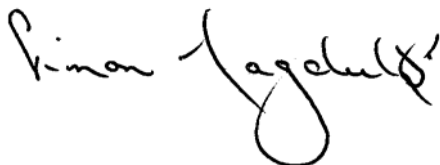
OPTION FOR COMPONENT OF NEW COURSE RATING SYSTEM (provided for comment):

- **Re-calculate a course's rating on a designated day each week (ie the rating of a course would be re-rated every single week).**
- **Use every score in the previous 2 months only (NB the 2-month period may be extended upon application by a club to its state association if special individual circumstances apply, eg very small membership, or course only open during a portion of the year).**
- **Once Golf Link calculates a new rating for a course, this new rating will be posted. There will then be a two-day lag before it comes into effect in order to allow a club time to access this information.**
- **Clubs will be strongly recommended to feature a noticeboard in a prominent position displaying the current rating of each of its rated courses (NB this includes a single course with multiple teeing grounds).**

Advantages of this proposal:

- Creates a transparent rating which takes into account any climatic changes.
- Is always absorbing scores returned under current conditions – as a result, the Course Rating in use will always be contemporary.

THIS WOULD BE A WORLD-FIRST SYSTEM. IT EFFECTIVELY COMBINES OUR EXISTING C.C.R. AND PERMANENT COURSE RATING SYSTEMS. WITHOUT GOLF LINK, IT WOULD BE MUCH HARDER TO PROVIDE THESE OPTIONS ON A NATIONAL SCALE.



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