



MEDIA RELEASE
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GOLF AUSTRALIA TO PURSUE USGA HANDICAP SYSTEM

The Board of Golf Australia has resolved to open discussions with the United States Golf Association about adopting the USGA Handicap System in Australia.

This decision was made immediately following a State Forum at which each State Association expressed the view that the USGA Handicap System provides the best way forward for Australian golf.

Since Golf Australia's formation in 2006, a unified handicapping system for men and women has been one of the new organisation's key objectives. The USGA Handicap System will not only deliver a series of notable improvements to Australian handicapping, it will also finally realise this goal.

Golf Australia Chairman Anne Lenagan explained the challenge which Golf Australia has been debating for the past three years:

"Right from the outset, we knew we were going to have to commit money either to making overdue amendments to our current systems or on implementing a new system.

"We weighed up continuing to invest in our unique method against implementing a system that's widely in place around the world, and the arguments just kept coming down in favour of the USGA System.

"Once the system is in place, the significant ongoing research and development costs will be borne by the USGA. We won't have to worry about re-inventing the wheel; we can dedicate those resources to working with the State Associations on developing other components of the game instead.

"It is important to note that we're not there just yet. We still need to work a few things through with the USGA however given the significance of this and the degree of discussion it has generated, Golf Australia felt it was important to provide a clear update for the golfing community.

"Does Golf Australia want to adopt the USGA Handicap System? The answer is absolutely yes. Does Golf Australia want to make a few minor modifications to the system to have it better reflect the typical characteristics of Australian golf? Yes. Have other countries been able to secure similar modifications? Yes.

"Now we've decided exactly what we want, we can have the discussions with the USGA. We don't anticipate these discussions turning up any significant issues, but there's still an endpoint to be reached.

"I'd like to add that this is something we're really excited about. We've spent the last three years having a dialogue with not just State Associations, golf clubs and individual golfers, but also Golf Management Australia, Golf Link, the media, and any other party that's shown a desire to have a discussion or express a view on the direction of handicapping in Australia.

"However, the time has come to make a choice and we're delighted with where we're heading."

Golf Australia CEO Stephen Pitt, explained the three major differences that Australian golfers will experience with the new handicap system:

“Firstly, even if each course has an accurate Course Rating, non-expert players naturally require higher handicaps at difficult courses than they require at easier courses. This fact creates a fundamental problem with respect to the ‘portability’ of handicaps. The ‘Slope’ System provides a solution to this problem. A golfer using the USGA ‘Slope’ System converts their Handicap Index to a Course Handicap that is higher on more difficult courses, and lower on easier courses. For example, a player may play off 16 on an easy course and 21 on a difficult course.

“Secondly, the USGA Handicap Index is calculated from a rolling sample of the player’s previous 20 scores. The calculation process involves averaging the best 10 of these 20 scores. The floating sample process is better-g geared to producing a more contemporary handicap and one that better indicates a player’s potential than is achieved by the incremental adjustment method currently used in the Australian systems. Currently in Australia (where an outward increase can only occur in increments of 0.1), outward corrections take place at a rate that is far too slow and can be unfair on the player who has one ‘lucky’ round.

“And thirdly, the USGA system doesn’t have a daily rating component. We know that the difficulty of a specific golf course may vary due to changes in weather, climate, and course set-up. The problem has always been in arriving at a system which enjoys golf community-wide confidence and that will reliably produce ratings that are reflective of the actual difficulty of a golf course.

“By its nature, there will always be unavoidable problems associated with using a statistical method to measure course difficulty. And our experience and continued feedback on CCR over a long period of time is that the benefits are unfortunately outweighed by the drawbacks. At the end of the day, the average golfer is still prone to lack faith in the concept of the daily course rating being determined by the performance of the field.

“And that doesn’t even touch on the small-field issue. For too long, women’s fields and country fields have been playing the role of the sacrificial lamb, and we just don’t think that’s an acceptable outcome.”

Golf Australia will provide updates on developments once discussions with the USGA are complete.

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About Golf Australia

Golf Australia is the national sporting organisation for golf in Australia and the governing body for amateur golf.

Our goal is to raise the level of interest and participation in the game from grassroots golfers through to the elite levels, spectators, volunteers and associated industry bodies. Key responsibilities incorporate managing national tournaments and championships including the Australian Opens as well as rules and handicapping. Working with government, business and the community, Golf Australia ensures the value of golf is understood and supported in all policy and business decisions.

Golf is a game for life where participation contributes to a healthy Australian community.

For more information on Golf Australia visit www.golfaustralia.org.au