



RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE 'HANDICAPPING' IN AUSTRALIA
***(NOTE – THIS IS ONE OF THE PAPERS THAT WERE PRESENTED TO THE
GA BOARD BY THE GA H&CR COMMITTEE TO HELP INFORM ITS
CONSIDERATIONS RE THE USGA HANDICAP SYSTEM)***

BACKGROUND

The Golf Australia Board requested the Handicapping & Course Rating Committee (H&CR) to review international handicapping and course rating systems with a view to improving or replacing the existing Australian handicapping and course rating systems.

METHODOLOGY

To undertake the tasks the H&CR Committee was divided into two groups and additional support was gained by inviting other knowledgeable representatives from throughout Australia to participate. GA Board Members John Buckley and Ian Read were ex-officio to both Review Groups.

Each of the review groups prepared a preliminary report which was presented to a combined meeting of the review groups. Following extensive consideration, draft reports were prepared and presented to the H&CR Committee for its consideration and then recommendation to the GA Board.

AGREED PURPOSE OF A HANDICAPPING SYSTEM FOR AUSTRALIAN GOLFERS

- To provide a system that may be administered and applied uniformly and efficiently throughout Australia.
- To encourage participation in social and competitive golf amongst males and females of all ages, and foster golf as a game for life.
- To enable as many golfers as possible (males and females, amateurs and professionals, club members and non club members) throughout Australia to obtain and maintain a fair handicap.
- To make the game of golf more inclusive and enjoyable by enabling golfers of all abilities to compete against each other on as equitable a basis as possible.
- To produce fair handicaps which reflect golfers' ability based on better performances and which may be applied validly and reliably from course to course and from different sets of tees on the same course.

THE FOLLOWING POINTS WERE PARAMOUNT IN HANDICAPPING CONSIDERATIONS AND IN ARRIVING AT THE RESULTING RECOMMENDATION:

- GA needs a unified system (i.e. which uses uniform principles and methodologies), one that is available to and aimed at being equitable for all golfers both women and men.
- The vast majority of women golfers reject the CCR component of the current Australian handicapping methodology.
- Sophisticated statistical daily rating models should produce largely 'accurate' ratings for competitions with large fields. Problems with small fields are likely unavoidable.
- Recognition there is an increasing number of traditional club golfers who play other than organised competition golf; therefore we need to provide the opportunity for golfers to maintain a handicap, whether they play competition golf or social golf.
- The Australian Handicapping Systems (CCR) experience difficulties when dealing with small fields and are reliant on only dealing with competition golf scores.
- Use of non-competition rounds and people playing from a range of different tees while playing together either socially or in competition, should be encouraged and will enable golfers to maintain a more current handicap. However, if the existing Australian Handicapping Systems are retained, this will increase the proportion of handicap rounds to get caught-up in the small-field issues.

- The current Australian systems are now unique and are only being used in Australia.
- The handicap system should provide portability i.e. the opportunity to play on any course on an equitable basis. i.e. handicaps should reflect the difficulty of the course for both the "scratch" and "bogey" golfer.
- To establish a handicap that reflects a players' ability, all attested rounds of golf, other than match play (i.e. Stroke, Par and Stableford) should be recorded (i.e. not only competition rounds).
- Research shows that the average player only plays to his/her potential once in four to five rounds therefore not all rounds need or should count towards a handicap when the handicap is meant to reflect a player's "better performances".
- Acceptance that the philosophy and structure of a handicapping system should concentrate on those who wish to play within the rules and not the miniscule percentage who will attempt to manipulate.
- Realisation that handicapping is not an exact science and there will never be a perfect system.
- Any recommended change/s should be; consistent with the above agreed purposes of a handicapping system for Australian golfers, have been developed as a result of significant financial and research input, and be consistent with major international methodologies.
- Australian golfers need to believe the handicapping system is fair.
- The current Australian systems are made up of a series of inherent statistical anomalies (e.g. AWCR, AMCR, CCR, Four-ball) and perceptively benefit the lower marker at the expense of the average golfer.
- Slope is the most widely-used handicap methodology in the world. It is used throughout Europe, and in much of the Americas, Asia, and New Zealand. NB. Whilst The R&A doesn't have a handicap system, GA has continued to provide it with updates to ensure it has been comfortable with developments in the GA review process.
- The cost of implementing change to both the course rating and handicapping systems will be distributed over a number of years and in the case of handicapping there will be little cost until all course ratings are finished in 2011.
- Current costs associated with continuing to develop, modify and maintain a unique Australian handicap system suggest this would be the least cost-effective strategy moving forward and will provide an outcome that least satisfies the agreed purpose.
- There is a clear perception and consensus amongst golfers that it is more difficult for the average player to play to their regular standard on a hard course than it is for the better player to do so. The same applies to playing at away courses. The USGA System best addresses these characteristics.
- New Zealand having previously used the current Australian handicapping system and found it unsatisfactory has successfully adopted a variant of the USGA Handicapping System similar to that proposed for Australia.

If Golf Australia is to look after the country's golfers and continue to move forward in the landscape of our rapidly-evolving world, we must now have powerful reasons for operating unique processes when international standards exist. To do otherwise should, and will be seen by Australian golfers, particularly those in administrative positions, to be dedicating valuable financial and human resources to the task of 're-inventing the wheel', and will likely have prudential ramifications.

The USGA Handicap System is an international code that when coupled with the new course rating system provides the best fit for our future handicapping needs. It features the greater checks and balances that go with an international system. It is also internationally endorsed and adopted and has global reach. Continued development of its regulations and resources is materially benefited by the considerable financial muscle of the USGA and the input of many countries which will include Australia.

THE GOLF AUSTRALIA HANDICAPPING & COURSE RATING COMMITTEE HAS RECOMMENDED TO THE BOARD THE ADOPTION OF THE USGA HANDICAP SYSTEM TO REPLACE THE EXISTING AUSTRALIAN HANDICAPPING SYSTEMS. (NB. THERE WAS ONE OF SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE WITH A DISSENTING VIEW)