



SUBJECT – Further advice and clarification regarding the regulations and guidelines set out in the GA Memo dated 22 July 2009

USGA Course Rating System in Australia – Course Set-up Regulations & Guidelines relating to:

- ◆ *Quantity of Ratings to be Assessed for Each Course & Rating Titles*
- ◆ *Placement of Daily Tee Markers*
- ◆ *Placement of Permanent Plates*

Q&A for Clubs re USGA Course Rating System Memo (GA; 22 July 2009)

When will our course/s be rated under the USGA Course Rating System?

The implementation timeline is as follows:

- Approximately 500 personnel to be trained throughout Australia commencing June 2009. This training structure has already seen the USGA conduct National Course Rating Accreditation seminars in Australia in June.
- September 2009, begin widespread rating of courses with an initial concentration on new and changed courses.
- By the end of 2010, we expect that all metropolitan courses will have been rated.
- By the end of 2011, we expect that all Australian courses will have been rated.

Once our new ratings have been assessed, when do we start to use them?

Once your State Association has approved a women's or men's USGA scratch rating for a course, those ratings will immediately replace your old AWCR or AMCR. The State Association will amend the record of the AWCR and AMCR on Golf Link accordingly. (Bogey Ratings and Slope Ratings are not scheduled to come into effect until the start of 2012.)

Why is GA choosing this time to overhaul the positioning of permanent plates and daily tee markers on a national scale?

The Board of GA has launched a significant move forward by adopting the USGA Course Rating System, and it is further resolved to identify any factors which serve as impediments to the proper and consistent functioning of handicapping in Australia. In short, we need to take the opportunity that is presented by visiting and re-rating every course in the country to re-shape any practices that compromise the capacity of a handicap system to calculate meaningful handicaps. The recent review of our existing handicap and course rating systems identified a number of current practices that are relevant to this concern.

Will all clubs/facilities need to amend the positioning of their permanent plates and daily tee markers?

No. Many clubs/facilities already operate within the framework of the new regulations and guidelines. Many others will only need to make slight changes.

If a club is not in a position to move the permanent tee markers prior to the course being re-rated, temporary markers may be used until such time that the permanent markers can be moved.

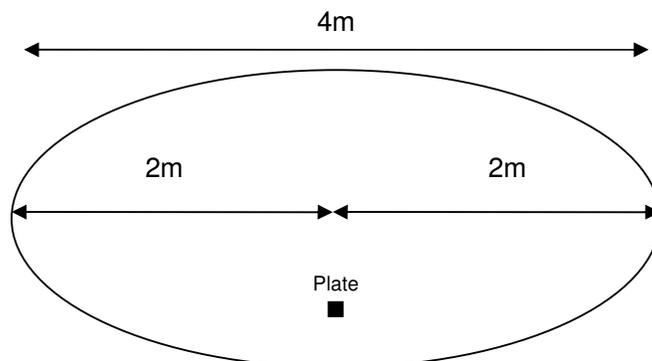
The regulation set out in the GA memo stipulates that “at no time should a permanent plate be less than three metres from the centre-point of the front of a teeing area or less than five metres from the centre-point of the rear of a teeing area. If plates are situated otherwise, the plates will NOT be used as the starting point for measuring purposes. The starting point for measuring purposes will be the point that is five metres from the centre-point of the rear of a teeing area (or, for forward tee plates, the point that is three metres from the centre-point of the front of the teeing area).” (The memo also provides diagrams to help to demonstrate this regulation.) We have some permanent plates that lie outside the designated measuring limits; do we need to move them?

GA strongly recommends that you move these plates.

We have some small tee pads that are shorter than 8 metres in length. Where should we position our permanent plates and where will the starting point for measuring be?

The starting point for measuring purposes will be the mid-point between the centre-point of the rear of the teeing area and the centre-point of the front of the teeing area. The permanent plates should be positioned at this point (see below example). However, GA recommends that the length of these tee pads be increased to allow for adequate tee marker placement.

Example:



What is the actual problem that GA is trying to address in relation to permanent plates and tee markers?

The recent review has identified that a significant proportion of clubs either;

- Do not have ratings to reflect some of the course set-up options they commonly use (such as pushing the daily tee markers well forward to create a 'short course' when the 'short course' hasn't been rated by the State Association); or,
- Have regularly situated tee markers in positions that have little significance to a rated course.

Without a concrete regulation to provide guidance, this is understandable.

(Moving forward, it is also critical to many clubs/facilities that they explore ways in which they may be able to extract increased flexibility from their courses so as to enhance the experience of the golfer. GA has resolved to play a leadership role in this regard.)

Why is it important for tee markers to be positioned close to the permanent plates?

Your State Association will visit your course and assess all factors on each hole which need to be considered in providing a course rating under the USGA system. This assessment is based on there being a specific starting point on each hole (which is precisely indicated by the permanent plates). This specific starting point is critical to the rating process because it is what the hole measurement AND the evaluation of obstacles in the measured landing zones are tied to. If the tee markers are moved too far away from the permanent plates on enough holes, the course being played becomes materially different to the course that is rated.

But this won't actually affect a player's handicap will it?

Yes. A course rating system is the mechanism which places a relative value on the score a player has on any given day or golf course. Without a course rating system, there would be no meaningful way to evaluate how good or bad a player's score is compared to a score returned from a different set of tees or at a different course. As a result, if a score is evaluated against an inappropriate course rating, the player's handicap will be distorted. (If the course rating is two strokes out, the player's handicap will end up becoming two strokes out.)

Does that mean that if we move our daily tee markers too far away from the permanent plates, our course rating becomes too different from the course we are actually playing?

That's right. You are effectively playing a different course to the one that has been rated for you.

If we move our daily tee markers too far away from the permanent plates, will we be able to use the scores returned on that day for handicapping?

No. Scores must not be handicapped when the length of the course played varies from the actual measured length of the rated course by more than 100 metres for an 18-hole round. Note – For a round of less than 18 holes, a pro rata length must be calculated; eg for a 9-hole round, the distance is 50 metres.

What if we keep the overall length of our course the same, but move some tee markers forward, and some backwards?

In order to maintain the playing characteristics of the course, the movable tee markers used to designate the Teeing Ground should not be placed more than 20 metres in front or 20 metres behind the relevant set of Permanent Plates. Handicap Conditions do not prevail when the tee markers, under normal circumstances, are placed outside the above area on more than three holes for rounds of 14-18 holes, or on more than two holes for rounds of 9-13 holes.

Whilst this guideline must generally be adhered with, clubs/facilities do have some flexibility in this regard. Where course maintenance or some other similar short-term temporary factor is in play, it may be desirable to operate beyond this guideline – scores returned will be acceptable for handicapping so long as the overall distance of the course falls within the acceptable regulation. (NB Your State Association may consider your circumstances such that scores returned must not be used for handicapping purposes.)

When will the new regulations and guidelines take effect?

The new regulations and guidelines regarding the positioning of tee markers will take effect at your golf course as soon as your State Association has approved your new course rating.

We have four permanent cyclical plates on each tee (and on each tee we set the daily tee markers exactly in line with one of the cyclical plates); all of our cyclical courses (which are 18 holes) are exactly the same overall distance. Will we be given a separate rating for each of our cyclical course options?

No. The purpose of cyclical plates is to have each set of tees represent a course option which is of exactly the same difficulty, so it would defeat the purpose to have a separate rating for each course. However, it should be noted that the key consideration with cyclical plates is not the overall distance, but the overall difficulty. Whilst in most cases, the difficulty will not alter at a given facility if the overall distance is the same, it may be necessary for your State Association to work with you in the re-positioning of some permanent cyclical plates.

Getting these cyclical positions right, and consulting with your State Association, will be much more important moving forward than it has been in the past. Currently in Australia it is the rounded course rating that is used when processing daily scores for handicapping purposes (eg 69.8 rounds to 70), so there is a far greater margin for error. Under the USGA Handicap System, it is the course rating to one decimal point that will be used. As a result, in the previous example it is not 70 that would be used to calculate the handicap differential for a score, but 69.8.

GA strongly endorses the use of permanent cyclical plates and commends those clubs/facilities who use such a practice.

We have four permanent cyclical plates on each tee (and on each tee we set the daily tee markers exactly in line with one of the cyclical plates); all of our cyclical courses (which are 18 holes) are exactly the same overall distance. How do we determine the starting point for rating and measuring each hole?

In preparation for when you will be visited by the course raters from your State Association, you will need to place a marker at the average point of the four permanent cyclical plates. (Note – It is possible that this point may be in the rough (this is the only circumstance whereby a State Association will consider a starting point for a hole to be in the rough).) This will be the starting point on each hole for rating and measuring purposes.

Note – This point is not obtained by finding the mid-point between the two markers which are the furthest apart. For example, if there are three cyclical plates quite close on a forward tee pad, and one cyclical plate 20 metres away on a rear tee pad, the average starting point will be much closer to the forward three plates than it will be to the rear plate.

We have four permanent cyclical plates (and on each tee we set the daily tee markers exactly in line with one of the cyclical plates); all of our cyclical courses (which are 18 holes) are exactly the same overall distance. What do we do if one of our sets of cyclical plates (say for 'Cyclical Course C') uses positions on some tees that are approximately 20 metres from the plates for our other cyclical tee options?

It should be noted that the key consideration with cyclical plates is not the overall distance, but the overall difficulty. Whilst in most cases, the difficulty for a given facility will not alter if the overall distance is the same, it may be necessary for your State Association to work with you in the re-positioning of some permanent cyclical plates.

Getting these cyclical positions right, and consulting with your State Association, will be much more important moving forward than it has been in the past. Currently in Australia it is the rounded course rating that is used when processing daily scores for handicapping purposes (eg 69.8 rounds to 70), so there is a far greater margin for error. Under the USGA Handicap System, it is the course rating to one decimal point that will be used. As a result, in the previous example it is not 70 that would be used to calculate the handicap differential for a score, but 69.8.

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Some days our course is really wet and slow, and on other days it is really dry and fast. Are we able to position our daily tee markers to allow for this?

Firstly, the new system requires that the course rating be assessed based on an average of the conditions that a course commonly experiences. This is a step forward from the existing Australian system which assessed ratings at one extreme (ie ideal conditions). This means the new system will be less prone to experience the distorting effect of extreme conditions.

Secondly, lots of run can be as harmful as it can be helpful. It can result in shots running into the trees or rough that otherwise would have stayed on the fairway. Additionally, hard conditions make it more challenging to get an approach shot to hold a green. These factors tend to have a balancing effect in the course rating process.

Thirdly, the new regulation allows daily tee markers to be moved up to 100 metres (in total over an 18-hole course) from the permanent plates to help compensate for increased or decreased run. Whilst not all clubs have tee pads that allow for much (or any) movement of daily markers, clubs that do have this flexibility should consider this when positioning their permanent plates.

We only have one course rating for men, and one course rating for women; are we able to have more?

Yes. (Note – Whilst not all clubs have tee pads that allow for much (or any) movement of daily markers, clubs that do have this flexibility should have more than one rating (and set of permanent plates) for each gender.)

Moving forward, it is critical to many clubs/facilities that they explore ways in which they may be able to extract increased flexibility from their courses so as to enhance the experience of the golfer. GA and State Associations will actively encourage clubs/facilities to take advantage of the tee options that their courses provide.

The new regulation says that we can have as many as three men's ratings and two women's ratings. Must we have this many?

No. This is up to the club/facility. Additionally, your State Association may determine that you don't need this many, so it may assess a lesser number. The purpose of this regulation is to improve the integrity of handicapping in Australia. We are not intending to assess ratings that will never be used, just for the sake of having a standard number of ratings at each course/facility.

Moving forward though, it is critical to many clubs/facilities that they explore ways in which they may be able to extract increased flexibility from their courses so as to enhance the experience of the golfer. GA and State Associations will actively encourage clubs/facilities to take advantage of the tee options that their courses provide.

What if we need more than three men's ratings and two women's ratings?

If your State Association considers that you need more than this, it will provide the appropriate number at no charge.

What if we want more ratings than the State Association considers is warranted?

In the event of a club/facility desiring an additional rating which is not considered warranted by the State Association, the committee of a club/facility may still have this rating assessed upon payment of a fee. There will be a separate fee for each additional rating. Golf Australia recommends that State Associations charge a fee of \$500 per additional rating (with the club/facility to also cover all reasonable expenses associated with providing additional ratings).

Is GA looking to standardise the names that clubs/facilities assign to their different course ratings?

Yes. These are as follows:

- Championship Men's
- Intermediate Men's
- Standard Men's
- Championship Women's
- Intermediate Women's
- Standard Women's

Can we use our red permanent plates for a men's rating as well as a women's rating?

Yes. In fact if your red permanent plates are more than 100 metres shorter (over 18 holes) than your next shortest set of permanent plates, GA strongly recommends that a men's course rating be assessed for the red permanent plates. Moving forward, it is critical that golf clubs/facilities provide more enjoyable options for high-handicap players, players who hit the ball short distances, and beginners.

Does this mean that the men at our club could be allowed to start using the women's tees?

There are teeing areas that are commonly used by women and there are teeing areas that are commonly used by men, but there are no exclusive rights to teeing areas. Moving forward, it is critical that clubs/facilities extract increased flexibility from their courses so as to enhance the experience of the golfer. This should result in red tees being used by men, with particular consideration being given to; high-handicap men, groups who don't hit the ball very far, and beginners.

What colours should we paint our permanent plates and how many sets of permanent plates should we have?

Each course must have at least three different sets of permanent plates on each hole unless the State Association considers proper handicapping can be achieved with a lesser quantity. If three sets of permanent plates are used, the following colours are strongly recommended:

- Blue
- White
- Red

A recommended fourth colour option is Black. A recommended fifth colour option is Yellow.

Is GA considering implementing a strict regulation regarding the colours of permanent plates?

Yes. Clubs/facilities should be mindful of this when making decisions about permanent plate colours.

We currently only have one women's course rating. Can we get a women's rating done for our white permanent plates?

Yes. In many cases this will provide much greater flexibility for women players.

Some of our white permanent plates could be regularly used by women players but others would never be used (for example a 200 metre par 3 which is also too short to play as a par 4). Does that mean we shouldn't get a women's rating assessed for our white permanent plates?

These regulations have been formulated both to improve the integrity of handicapping in Australia and to provide greater flexibility for golfers. We have no wish to provide ratings which will never be used simply for the sake of having a greater number of ratings. As a result, what you may want to do in your case is to create a new course which on some holes utilises the existing red permanent plates and on other holes utilises the existing white permanent plates.

To clearly indicate the new rated course, the respective existing permanent plates will be utilised but will have a new neutral colour added. Where an existing white permanent plate is being used in the new course, half of it will remain white, and the other half will be painted black (for example); and where an existing red permanent plate is being used in the new course, half of it will remain red and the other half will be painted black (for example).

We would like to provide a forward course option for women golfers (or for junior groups, beginner groups, or groups who don't hit the ball very far) but our red permanent plates are as far forward as our prepared teeing area allows. May we install new permanent plates on the fairway?

Yes.

What should we be considering when positioning a new set of permanent plates?

You should be considering the following:

- Options that will be used and that will be enjoyable to; high-handicap players, beginners, juniors, and players who don't hit the ball very far.
- Options that will be used and that will be challenging to elite players.
- The impact that soft or firm conditions may have on where you want to position your daily tee markers.

Will our State Association provide guidance regarding the positioning of a new set of permanent plates, or the re-positioning of an existing set of permanent plates?

Yes. You may also wish to consult a golf course architect.

When will we start to use the USGA Handicap System?

All Australian golf courses will need to have USGA Scratch and Bogey Ratings assessed before the USGA Handicap System can become fully operational in Australia. All course ratings are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011.

Do all components of the USGA Handicap System need to be implemented at the one time?

No. GA has actually scheduled for implementation in early 2010 a couple of those components of the USGA Handicap System that are not reliant on the completion of the Course Rating roll-out. Any such incremental changes will only be done in a cost-effective manner and with a view to allowing Australian golfers to begin to experience the benefits of the USGA Handicap System.

Who do we contact if we need to clarify anything regarding any of the above matters?

Your State Association or GA.

Added 18 Jan 2010

A course has permanent tee markers only 1 metre from the back of each tee pad. The tee pads are generally around 15 metres in length and on average the whole of the teeing pads is used for daily markers. Where will the team measure and subsequently rate from?

The team will measure and rate from the 5 metre point from the centre back of the tee. The club should then be instructed that due to the new regulations outlining the requirement to keep the playing length of the course within 100 metres of the measured and rated length, the daily tee placements will not be able to be moved forward any considerable amount from the measurement point. This is due to the requirement to counteract the forward daily markers by moving other selected daily markers backward.

The backward daily markers can only be moved behind the 5 metre mark from the centre back of the tee pad a minimal distance due to the requirement of a 2 club lengths area behind the daily markers (cannot be moved backward at all for tee pads with hedges etc).

It is strongly recommended that clubs set their permanent plates (or plan to set their permanent plates) in such a position that reflects the average placement of the movable tee markers over time. When a single tee pad is designated for one set of tees, placement of the permanent plate at a point opposite the middle of the teeing area is appropriate. This maximises the ability of the club to use the entire teeing area and gives the best chance of reflecting an average of movable marker placement over time.

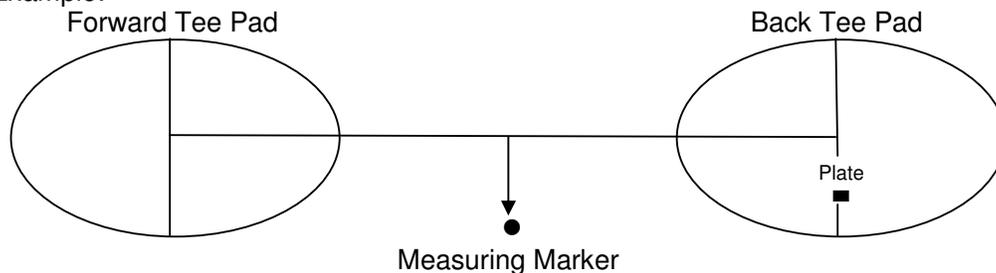
If a club is planning to move their permanent tee markers at a time following the rating team's attendance, temporary markers can be used.

Added 28 May 2010

Our club uses multiple tee pads on some holes hole for our daily markers. The daily tee markers are spread between the tee pads equally over time. Where will these holes be measured from?

The starting point for measuring purposes will be the mid-point between the centres of the tee pads. The permanent plate does not need to be moved to this position however an additional permanent marker will need to be placed at the measuring point for future reference.

Example:



If there is no marker installed (or to be installed), rating teams will measure and rate from the permanent plate and inform the club of the restrictions regarding the playing length of the course being within 100 metres of the measured length.

Our club has permanent white and blue plates side by side that utilise multiple tee pads. The white daily markers alternate equally between the middle and forward tee pads and the blue daily markers alternate equally between the middle and rear tee pads. Where are these tee placements measured from?

The starting point for measuring purposes for the white tee will be the mid-point between the centres of the middle and forward tee pads. The starting point for measuring purposes for the blue tee will be the mid-point between the centres of the middle and rear tee pads.

Example:

