



Q&A – GA Handicap System; THE ANCHOR REGULATION

From time to time, GA will field questions about the Anchor regulation. GA has put together the following Q&A to assist Club officials and golfers in their understanding of the Anchor's intent and operation.

1. *I've heard that the Anchor was designed primarily to address those players who seek to manipulate their handicap. Is this correct?*

No. This is not what the Anchor regulation was designed to primarily address.

2. *Why was the Anchor introduced?*

- Under the old Australian incremental adjustment handicap system, the most a player's handicap could go out after a round was 0.1, irrespective of the score or level of handicap. So for high markers, downward movement could happen very quickly whilst outward movement would only be exceptionally slow (eg 40 rounds to get 4 strokes back). This resulted in high markers in particular playing off handicaps that were chronically too low. As a result, competition results under the old system displayed a clear bias towards low markers.
- The new averaging process introduced in April 2010 fundamentally changed this. It achieved quicker outward adjustments and slower downward adjustments.
- However, winning scores in competitions played under the new system had jumped to unprecedented levels – eg Stableford scores in the mid to high 40s had become common.
- In part this was because the new system enabled a player to get a completely new handicap every 20 rounds. Handicaps had therefore become highly susceptible to any loss of form as there was no longer a mechanism to factor long-term performance patterns into the calculation of the current handicap figure.
- This was not considered to be solely a high-marker issue. There were many reports of for example 5 or 6 markers sliding out to handicaps of 12-13 and then being embarrassed to return to form and record scores where they were playing to a handicap of 3 or 4 which resulted in Stableford scores of approximately 45 points.
- Winning scores were regularly at levels that were almost impossible for appropriately-handicapped players to achieve which caused widespread discontent in clubs.
- Clubs, State Associations, and GA all took the view that whilst the averaging methodology was generally seen as a genuine step forward, the changed competition result trends needed to be softened. (Note: In addition to the array of feedback received during 2010, GA conducted a national series of handicapping focus groups and forums in March 2011. These were attended by officials from more than 100 clubs.)
- Taking account of the feedback, GA worked on several reforms with a view to achieving a balance between the old incremental system and the initial version of the new averaging system.

The Anchor was one of the concepts suggested to GA during the March 2011 Focus Group sessions. Its intent is to ensure a player's handicap will be reflective of their underlying ability and that their handicap does not increase substantially due to a loss of form.

3. *Is a player's handicap meant to be reflective of their current form?*

Although the primary calculation performed by the handicap system in order to determine a handicap is to average a player's current form, the basic premise of any handicap system is that a handicap should be reflective of the player's underlying ability. That underlying ability is reflected by their better performances. Although any player may lose form, it is not in the interests of equity for a handicap to increase substantially due to such a loss of form.

4. *Did GA consider the likely impact the Anchor regulation would have on the willingness of players to play club golf?*

Yes, GA was particularly concerned with the following two trends that had emerged during the period there was no Anchor regulation in place:

- GA received many reports of golfers whose handicaps were in free-fall due to poor form and who had become so disheartened at the impact each bad round was having on their handicap that they were no longer playing.
- GA received many reports of golfers who were losing faith in the handicap system due to constant incidence of Stableford scores in the mid to high 40s. These golfers had become less inclined to play either in club competitions or to engage in key components of a club's internal culture (eg the culture of widespread side betting).

5. When GOLF Link re-calculates a player's handicap, what role is performed by their Anchor?

A player's Anchor point is the best exact handicap they have achieved during the 12-month period before their most recent round (and every time a player has a score processed through GOLF Link, GOLF Link will check to see if the player's Anchor needs to be updated). When their NEXT round is processed through GOLF Link, the handicap calculated for the player will not be permitted to be more than 4 strokes above their current Anchor point.

6. Do seasonal weather changes have an impact on the operation of the Anchor? What will be the impact of introducing an effective daily rating system (DSR)?

Statistics show that a wet, cold winter puts outward pressure on handicaps. The continuation of such conditions over a number of months will result in many more golfers being Anchored.

The addition to the GA Handicap System of an effective daily rating component will mean a golfer's scores are being handicapped against the true difficulty of the conditions they actually experienced for each specific round. This will mean much less outward movement in winter, and much less downward movement in summer. All of this will translate to far fewer club members being Anchored and to less volatile handicapping outcomes.

7. Did GA consider a shorter period of time than 12 months for the Anchor to apply to, or to allow higher markers to go out by more than low markers?

From a policy perspective, there are several considerations that are integral to addressing these issues:

- Clubs have expressed to GA the importance of ensuring the scores required to win handicap competitions (or to win balls) not be permitted to again reach unreasonable levels. To this end, clubs have expressed a desire that close focus be maintained on ensuring outward movement of handicaps be restricted.
- GA feels that in the ordinary course of events, it is very unlikely that a golfer's underlying ability will deteriorate by more than 4 strokes within a period of 12 months (although see Question 8). In almost every case, shifting form or changing course condition will be the root cause of any large deterioration in a player's 'Flag' scores.
- If the Anchor time period were changed to 6 months, golfers would be able to have their handicaps increase by 8 strokes within a period of less than 12 months. GA does not believe that clubs in the main are comfortable with the impact on winning scores that can be caused by this degree of outward handicap movement (although see Question 8).
- The key consideration in monitoring the movement in a player's handicap is their changed capacity to return a good net score. Therefore, the percentage by which their handicap has changed is only of minor significance. For example, if a 2-marker's handicap increases to 6, it will enable the player to score an extra 4 points. Similarly, if a 30-marker's handicap increases to 34, it will also enable the player to score an extra 4 points. So whilst it is correct that one player's handicap has increased by 200% and the other's by only 13%, the number of additional Stableford points they can score is the same in both cases.

8. If a player is Anchored, are there circumstances in which the Club Committee should consider making a special 'manual' outward adjustment to the handicap?

In the vast majority of cases, Committees should be very wary of lifting a player's handicap in response to a loss of form. The likely outcome is that the player's regular form will return and their new handicap will enable them to return an exceptional net score that will leave correctly-handicapped members feeling disgruntled.

That said, Committees are encouraged to consider reviewing the handicaps of players whose circumstances reflect the following:

- Where a player is in the process of recovering from a significant long-term injury or illness.
- Where a player has changed clubs and finds the new course to be far more challenging for them for whatever reason than the previous course.
- Where a player has been Anchored due to them reaching a handicap that is clearly better than any other handicap they have achieved for at least two years AND that the Committee believes was clearly better than their underlying ability.

Note 1: As has always been the case, if a club feels a player's handicap may warrant adjustment for ANY reason (including to cater for one of the above sets of circumstances), GA strongly advises Clubs to consult with their State Association (or DGA at the discretion of the State Association) before any decision is taken. Any Club contact with the GOLF Link Customer Service Centre should not occur until agreement has been reached between the Club and the State Association (or DGA at the discretion of the State Association).

Note 2: Clubs are reminded that it is a requirement of the Australian Handicap System that advice be provided to State Associations of any decision to 'manually' adjust a player's handicap. (Provision of this advice to State Associations is for information purposes only – transparent decision making in this area is important. That said, State Associations are authorised to review and amend any decision regarding handicap adjustments with a view to ensuring consistent application of the handicap system.)

Note 3: When a player's handicap is adjusted outward, the new figure will over-ride the old Anchor point in GOLF Link and a new Anchor point will be set.