

A Player's Guide to the CONGU Handicapping System

The aim of this guide is to explain the rudiments of the CONGU system of handicapping. CONGU stands for the Council of National Golf Unions. England Golf is one of the Unions. The CONGU handbook should be available at your club; you can buy your own copy if you wish or read it online.

Your Handicap Secretary will be able to help you with any queries you may have.

It is not compulsory to have a handicap but most players enjoy competing with others in various forms of competition and a handicap is generally required to do this.

How to obtain a handicap.

Play a total of 54 holes preferably when the course is set up correctly for competition play. This can be any combination of 9 or 18 holes. All cards must be marked by a person acceptable to the Club, (that is a person who has knowledge of the course and the rules of golf), and returned to the Handicap Secretary. Then the cards will be assessed and, if acceptable, allocate an appropriate handicap and issue you with a Handicap Certificate; you should keep this and take with you if you play at another course. If you have a recent handicap from another club you need to tell your Handicap Secretary. A current handicap certificate can be issued by asking in the Pro shop.

What does your handicap certificate mean?

It confirms you are a playing member of your golf club.

Your handicap will have two parts:

a whole number and an exact handicap. E.g. playing handicap 32c, exact handicap 32.4c; or playing handicap 32, exact handicap 32.4.

The 'c' means a competition handicap and you can play in most competitions. No 'c' means you still have a CONGU handicap but may be restricted from some competitions until you have regained your 'c'.

To keep/regain your 'c' you must return at least three qualifying scores in the handicapping year which runs from March 1st one year until the end of February the next.

Your Home Club is the club that deals with adjusting your handicap. Of course you can belong to more than one club but you can only have one Home Club and one handicap.

You are responsible for your handicap, so return all cards promptly and tell your Handicap Secretary if you play a qualifying competition away from your Home Club.

How does your handicap change?

Your handicap may change by returning qualifying scores.

These are 18 or 9 hole strokeplay competitions, (medal, stableford or par format), or 18 hole supplementary scores. After each competition or supplementary score your handicap may be adjusted depending on your score.

What is a Qualifying Competition?

Any singles competition in normal conditions off full handicap is likely to be a Qualifying Competition. Always check before you go out to play.

What is a Supplementary Score?

This is a qualifying card played over 18 holes at your Home Course but not in a competition. This will count for your handicap and must be marked by a person acceptable to the Committee.

What do I need to do before I play a Supplementary Score or a Qualifying Competition?

You always need to indicate your intention to play, on the day of the competition or Supplementary Score, by signing the competition book in the Pro shop.

You should always check the handicap list before you play, in case your handicap has changed after the last card you returned. Also ensure that your name, date, playing handicap and competition title are on your card and you exchange cards with your playing partner before you start your round.

If you have played well recently and think you may have cut your handicap, particularly at another course, and you are in any doubt what your playing handicap is, always put the lower one on the card. Never play off a higher handicap until you have been informed officially by your Handicap Secretary, either by word of mouth or a new handicap list displayed at your club.

At the end of your round BEFORE you and your playing partner sign your card, check that you have the correct gross score for each hole correctly recorded. No matter what format the competition is this is an important check. When you are satisfied all is in order sign legibly in the correct space on the card after your marker has signed in his/her space, and then return the card by posting it in the competition box.

Always return your card even if it is incomplete for any reason.

Standard Scratch Score (SSS)

Every course is allocated a SSS based on length and degree of difficulty and is the score a player off a handicap of 0 is expected to score. Your net score (gross score minus handicap) is compared with the SSS to see how well you have played.

Please note that the SSS alone is used to evaluate Supplementary Scores and 9-hole competitions.

Competition Scratch Score (CSS)

After a qualifying 18 hole strokeplay competition a CSS is calculated to take into account conditions on the day.

This is done by analysing the scores of all players in Category 1,2,3 & 4. Your handicap determines the category you are in as follows:

Handicap Category Buffer Zone Exact Handicap Playing Handicap

1 0 to +1 plus to 5.4 plus to 5
2 0 to +2 5.5 to 12.4 6 to 12
3 0 to +3 12.5 to 20.4 13 to 20
4 0 to +4 20.5 to 28.4 21 to 28 (maximum men)
5 0 to +5 28.5 to 36.0 29 to 36 (maximum women)
Junior club handicap 37-54

Each category has a buffer zone. If your net score compared to the CSS is in your buffer zone your handicap remains unchanged. If your net score is below the CSS your handicap may reduce; if it is outside your buffer zone your exact handicap will go up 0.1.

Stableford Adjustment. (SA)

For HANDICAP PURPOSES ONLY, all qualifying competition scores, no matter what format is played, are considered on a Stableford basis.

This means if you have a very high score on one or more holes during a round it will be adjusted down using the SA. Your Handicap Secretary will explain this system.

So remember that if you do have a high score on any hole in a medal round, or have to 'pick-up' for any reason, and you continue to score well your handicap may well stay the same or even be cut! This may be some consolation for not winning the prize!

Rules and penalties.

Whilst this guide is not a guide to the Rules of Golf, it is advisable to acquaint yourself with the most common rules you are likely to encounter on your Home Course. Such as: ball unplayable, ground under repair (GUR), water hazards and out of bounds.

It is good practice to carry an up to date rules book in your golf bag. This is available, free of charge, at your club.

There are times when mistakes are made and a player is disqualified from a competition for breaking a rule or not including a penalty. Despite this, your card may still count for handicapping purposes even though you cannot win the competition. The list of situations can be found in the CONGU handbook in appendix P and is well worth reading!

Annual Review

Towards the end of the playing year your Handicap Committee will review every player to see if their handicap is a true reflection of their current ability. This is another time when your handicap may be adjusted up or down.

The CONGU Handicapping System can seem intimidating but don't worry - your Handicap Secretary is always there to help you; if he/she doesn't know the answer he/she will always be able to ask someone who does. Above all...

ENJOY YOUR GOLF!