

# There's more to a USGA handicap index than just math

BY MICHAEL WALDER

By the time this issue of Tee to Green Magazine hits the stands, golf clubs across the country will have only a few more weeks to complete the USGA's Club Licensing Program.

The Club Licensing Program was created by the United States Golf Association (USGA) to bring much-needed consistency to the USGA Handicap System across the country. The program requires all clubs to provide information demonstrating their full compliance with the entire USGA Handicap System. Such compliance will include, but not be limited to, meeting the definition of a golf club and satisfactorily completing a club compliance checklist.

One of the most challenging items on the checklist to complete is having a representative from the club attend a USGA or LGA handicap certification seminar. Since 2003, the LGA has conducted 10 handicap certification seminars across the state and, to date, more than 95 LGA Member Clubs have been represented. At these seminars, LGA staff presents important material from the USGA Handicap System Manual and discusses ways to ensure accurate handicapping at your club. At the end of each seminar, attendees must pass a quiz exhibiting a general level of knowledge regarding the system.

So, why is it important for clubs to complete the licensing process, especially for golf clubs that have used the USGA Handicap System for years?

It has become apparent over the last few years that certain handicap procedures were either not known, not well understood, or not followed properly from club to club. For example, did you know if you were to play only 13 holes before ending your round that you would still be responsible for posting an 18-hole score? You might ask yourself, how would I record a score for holes 14-18? Section 4 of the USGA Handicap System Manual says that to enter a score for a hole not played, the player would need to record a score of par plus any handicap strokes they were entitled to for that hole. Well, how should I have known that I needed to post an 18-hole score after only playing 13 holes? Section 5 states that if 13 or more holes are played, the player must post an 18-hole score. If 7-12 holes are played, the player must post a nine-hole score. And if six or fewer holes are played, a score should not be posted. It may not be conceivable for every golfer to know the USGA Handicap System Manual from cover to cover, but it is conceivable that a handicap committee be formed to try to better educate its membership regarding protocol for such procedures. The names of the clubs that have completed the licensing process will be forwarded to the USGA where they will be posted as having completed the program on the section of the USGA website dedicated to authorized golf clubs. Clubs that have not completed the licensing process prior to July 1, 2006 will not be permitted to issue an authorized USGA Handicap Index to their members and their

names will not be posted on the USGA website.

Why should an authorized USGA Handicap Index be important to you?

The answer is simple: a USGA Handicap Index is more than just a little bit of math. Sure, there are programs available on the internet that will calculate a handicap for you at little or no charge, but they would not provide you with an authorized USGA Handicap Index. An authorized Handicap Index comes from a club that exposes its members to peer review and affords their members the opportunity to play golf together. An authorized golf club follows these and all of the other checks and balances outlined in the USGA Handicap System Manual and the compliance checklist. Imagine playing in a member/guest tournament where you and your partner, who each have an authorized USGA Handicap Index, play against a team where one of the players simply uses a computer program at home to figure his handicap. He might state that he has a Handicap Index of 20.2, but how can you be sure? There is no one to verify that he has posted all of his scores or that he has adjusted them for Equitable Stroke Control. You could get into your match and find that this guy's handicap is probably closer to a 15 than a 20. Doesn't seem fair does it?

This example is an all too common occurrence. Many golfers are weary of entering themselves into net events because it is inevitable that they will be pitted against 'sandbaggers' you know, the guys who seem to win every event where a handicap is involved. Fortunately, through the Club Licensing Program, there are procedures in place to combat 'sandbagging.'

In order for a club to complete the licensing process, they must first have a handicap committee in place. The handicap committee, which was alluded to earlier, is one of the most important bodies at the club level as it has the responsibility of ensuring the integrity of the handicaps it issues. The handicap committee also has the authority to modify or even withdraw the handicap of individuals who abuse the USGA Handicap System among other responsibilities.

The purpose of the USGA Handicap System is to make the game of golf more enjoyable by enabling players of differing abilities to compete on an equitable basis. If the procedures of the system are not applied consistently, then the value of a Handicap Index and the system as a whole is diminished.

For more information on the USGA Club Licensing Program, or to find out if your handicap is an authorized USGA Handicap Index, please contact the LGA at (337) 265-3938.

See you next month...inside the ropes (at the U.S. Open)!!!

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