



“Safeguarding” Handicaps

By Kevin Jones

We all know that handicapping was created to allow all players to compete across a level playing field. The handicapping system was designed under the premise, which guides the game of golf, that all players are honest and try to show the highest integrity. That premise does not just exist in handicapping, but in all aspects of the game. What other sport exists where we are the only ones officiating our own play? Golf is truly a unique sport where the individual is ultimately the one who upholds the integrity of the game.

Golfers must play by the rules, post every score, and be governors of the game in order for the sport to live up to its standards. As much as we hope for all these things to be true, we all know that this is not a perfect world. We must have “safeguards” in place to uphold the standards of golf so that we can enjoy the game in the way which it was intended. The United States Golf Association (USGA), our country’s governing golf body, has created two mechanisms to protect the handicapping system. These processes are peer review and club-run handicap committees. With these two elements in place, they eliminate most errors and increase the players’ confidence in the system. It takes everyone’s effort to participate in these processes so that handicapping can maintain the highest integrity.

Peer review is exactly what it sounds like. The USGA wanted to create a way so that golfers could gain a fair understanding of their fellow competitors’ abilities and be able to accurately assess the scores those players are posting. As much as we trust our friends and golfing buddies, we also have an obligation to the game to make sure they are posting their true scores into the system. Peer review is split into two parts: having reasonable opportunity to play with each other in a club and having

access to a player’s scoring record and Handicap Index. The premise behind having a reasonable opportunity to play with other members is saying you must be able to observe a member playing a round of golf before judging the accuracy of the scores that they have posted. Basically you should have some baseline knowledge of someone’s playing ability before making judgments about someone’s scores. The other side of peer review is seeing a player’s scoring record and Handicap Index. This will help a golfer create a baseline of how someone should perform before playing with them and help you assess whether their Handicap Index is accurate. Peer review is available to all golfers and can be accessed through your club’s handicap computer and our website (LGAgolf.org). Just look for the peer review icon and that will give you all the information you need to assess a player’s scores and Handicap Index. If you believe a player is not accurately posting their scores then your next step would be to take it to your club’s handicap committee. The handicap committee is the other “safeguard” instituted by the USGA to govern the handicap system for the club. In 2005, the USGA created the Club Licensing Program, which stated that a club must be licensed in order to issue a valid Handicap Index to its members. The club is required to meet all the qualifications, which are listed on the Club Verification Checklist. All of this information, including which clubs are licensed, can be viewed from our website under the Handicapping section. One of those qualifications is that a club must form a handicap committee comprised mostly of members. The committee must also have a handicap chairman who is also a member and cannot be a staff member of the club. The purpose behind the committee is to make sure the handicap system is being used by the members properly, to handle disputes or questions

regarding any members’ handicaps, and to maintain the integrity of the system. The handicap committee has a significant amount of authority over a club’s handicap system. To mention a few items, the committee can issue penalty scores and modify a Handicap Index based on multiple player disputes or health reasons. The committee consists mostly of members and as your peers, helps to protect your handicap. The committee should meet periodically (i.e. once a month) to make sure the system is doing what it was intended for. I encourage anyone who is interested to join their club’s handicap committee and/or to make sure one is in place. Please contact your club or handicap chairman regarding your club’s handicap committee.

Remember, the handicap system starts with you by making sure all your scores are posted and that they are accurate. As long as every golfer strives to achieve these standards, these “safeguards” will not be needed as much. I encourage all golfers to take a look at the USGA Handicap System Manual. It will give you additional insight into the system and make sure you are using the handicapping system properly. Every club has a copy and you can also view it from the USGA website (USGA.org). The handicap system was not built to be complicated, but as long as we all make an effort to use it properly there will be a lesser need for these “safeguards.”

If you have additional questions regarding this topic or handicapping in general, please call me in the office at (337) 265-3938 or by email at kjones@lgagolf.org any time. Check out next month’s ‘Inside the Ropes’ to see Carr McCalla’s report from the U.S. Amateur at Pinehurst!

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