

Q.1 What is the purpose of the CONGU® Unified Handicapping System?

A.1 The intent of the CONGU® Unified Handicapping System is to enable golfers of differing abilities - ladies and men - to compete on a fair and equitable basis. This is done by:

- Course Rating golf courses to establish the Standard Scratch Score (SSS) based on length and playing difficulty. The SSS is the cornerstone of the handicapping system.
- Initially allotting a handicap based on a player's best score of a specified number.
- Adjusting Handicaps on completion of a Qualifying Competition in relation to players' Net Differentials with respect to Handicap Category.
- Taking account of course and weather conditions through the calculation of the Competition Scratch Score(CSS).
- Applying adjustments to Handicaps related to tees used, and respective SSS and the Course Par to enable ladies and men to compete on an equitable basis.

Provided all parties, players and Handicap Committees, fulfil their obligations to the System a high degree of uniformity in handicapping can be achieved.

Q.2 How do I obtain a handicap?

A.2 A CONGU® Unified Handicap can be allotted only to a Member of a golf club that is affiliated, as defined, to a National Union.

To obtain a handicap a player is required to submit a number of cards over 18 holes at his Home Club (preferably over a Measured Course), in such a manner as his Home Club specifies, but not less than three. Each card must be signed by a responsible person acceptable to the Handicap Committee.

Any score of 2 over par for men and 3 over par for ladies shall be amended to 2 [3] over par respectively. After these adjustments have been made an Exact Handicap (whole number) should be allotted equivalent to the number of strokes by which the best of the submitted cards differs from the Standard Scratch Score.

Q.3 Why is a separate CSS not calculated for each handicap category?

A.3 Low handicap players frequently pose this question on occasions when the CSS is SSS - 1. A statistical analysis of a wide range of CSS's calculated separately for each handicap category and compared to the overall CSS has shown that the system does not favour or discriminate against any of the Handicap Categories. Although there are occasions when one or other of the Handicap Categories, if calculated separately, would result in a CSS that differed from the overall CSS, on average there is very close agreement between the overall CSS and the separate CSS's calculated for each handicap category.

An additional problem in calculating a separate CSS for the Category 1 golfer is that he represents, on average, less than 10% of the field in a typical club competition. This is often a statistically meaningful figure and could result in erratic CSS values. The larger sample provides a more balanced determination of the CSS.

Q.4 What is the purpose of the Stableford Point Alternative or Net Double Bogey adjustment in the CONGU® Handicapping System as contained in Clause 19?

A.4 Clause 19 is a form of 'equitable stroke control' and is the downward adjustment of individual hole scores to a maximum equivalent to Net double bogey. This control is for handicap purposes only.

The intent is that by placing a limit on the maximum score that can be recorded at any hole, Handicaps are more representative of a player's potential ability.

Q.5 Why does CONGU® direct the full handicap difference in matchplay?

A.5 All the Home Unions now recognise that giving the player with the higher handicap an allowance equivalent to the full handicap difference is the most consistent with equity. In view of this CONGU® now directs that the full allowance in the difference between the handicaps be applied in singles matchplay.

It is wrong to say that there has been a debate on the question, because the argument for 'no change' has barely been presented. CONGU® has been waiting for years for a coherent document to be shown to it which finishes with the words '... Therefore the fair allowance in matchplay is three-quarters of the difference in handicap'. This has so far not been forthcoming.

To help to convince the doubters, this note sets out the basic arguments.

We start with the assumption that, for strokeplay, the present CONGU® Unified Handicap System is accurate and fair for players with a reasonably full competitive record. All statistical investigations which have been made support this statement, and certainly it is much superior to any alternatives which have been suggested. We also assume that we want the scale of matchplay allowances to be fair, in the sense that each participant has a roughly equal chance of winning. This is not such a trivial statement as it might appear, because some golfers believe that the lower handicap player should actually be given the advantage. Suppose, nevertheless, that we have been charged with the task of devising the fair matchplay odds given our present handicapping system, based as it is on stroke-play data, and no previous assumptions. How should we proceed?

Let's think about how we would expect a match between a 6-handicapper and a 16-handicapper to go. First of all - what scores do we expect each of them to achieve if they put in an average performance? There is an annoying technical point which affects the argument. We do not actually expect a player to 'play to his handicap'. The CONGU® UHS, like all other handicap systems round the world, handicaps players according to the better half of their records. The high handicappers are more erratic and therefore their average score is relatively more in excess of their handicaps than is the case for the better players. So, instead of a difference of ten strokes between their scores, we expect something like eleven or twelve. Already our analysis is tilting the scales slightly against our sixteen handicapper.

But, for the moment, assume that in their match both players play exactly to their handicaps never having a birdie, nor a double bogey, and dropping their strokes consistently where the stroke index says they should. Playing level the 6-handicapper would have won ten holes, and under full handicap difference the match would have been all square. So where are we getting this 'three-quarters' from? In real life, of course, matches don't go like that. People take double or triple bogeys and even get birdies. We need to consider how strokes are likely to be converted into holes won, lost, or halved in matchplay. There are two ways in which strokes fail to be used at all. Our sixteen-handicapper might win a hole without needing his stroke or lose a hole in spite of having had one; so he might as well not have had a stroke at those holes! Actually, investigative work has been done on this- and there is a surprisingly consistent result. Just over 40% of a stroke entitlement, on average, is 'wasted'. Enthusiastic enquirers can check this by interrogating competitors in club handicap knock-outs. The conclusion is that our sixteen-handicapper, even if he gets ten shots, is only likely to be able to use six of them. It's beginning to look as if even full difference is not enough.

So far this is mostly theoretical. But let us consider the real life situation. Most Clubs run a handicap matchplay knockout competition each year with a reasonably large entry. Have a look at the honours board listing past winners. Even Clubs which use full difference find that low Category players predominate. And whether they have changed to full difference or not they will be pressed to produce any 3 or 4 Category winners in the last twenty years. This is even more striking when you realise that low handicap players form quite a low proportion of the total entry. You can also look at the individual results for each match in the tournament, and you will find that the low handicappers have a consistent edge. The Scottish Golf Union has done a lot of work on this. They have an excellent presentation subtitled

'Myths and misconceptions', which will soon be on the CONGU® Website. They carried out a survey of Clubs before and after the change to full difference. Before the change, 61% of handicap singles matches were won by the lower handicap player. After the change to full difference, the low handicapper won 55% (note that he still had an edge).

A good deal of experimentation has been done with what is called simulation. Using hole-by-hole scores from strokeplay many, indeed thousands, of 'pretend' matches can be run between each potential pair in the field. An objection may be raised that such a simulation is not like the real thing. But if you think about it, simulation probably actually understates the advantage which the low handicapper has. He can control the game better, preserving his winning position at a hole when necessary. Anyway, these simulations consistently show that, even at full difference, the low handicapper usually wins. (If you want to know the horrid truth, to make it even you would have to use nearly one-and-a-quarter times the difference. Not that that is recommended!). And using three-quarters gives the low- handicapper a huge edge. The actual numerical results can be provided on request; but you can rest assured that, the more 'numerical' you get, the stronger is the evidence for full difference.

It is only fair to consider counter-arguments. One common complaint just now is that 'our low handicap players don't enter handicap knock-outs after the change to full difference; because the odds are against them!'. This is nonsense; all that has happened is that the odds in their favour have been changed from 'enormously favourable' to 'favourable, but not actually unfair'. The problem is one of education. Another childish question is 'Do you seriously expect me to give two strokes at one hole?' The answer to that is 'yes'; and it happens even at three-quarters difference.

Finally, as a matter of interest three-quarters of handicap for singles appears to be used nowhere else in the world.

Affiliated Clubs are encouraged to download this answer if they think it would help them put the arguments to their sceptical members.

Q.6 There are organisations offering Golf Handicaps that are calculated in accordance with CONGU® requirements. Are these Official CONGU® Handicaps?

A.6 No, not in the generally accepted understanding of the term 'Official Handicaps'. A CONGU® Handicap, awarded by a club affiliated to one of the seven National Unions/Associations that administer amateur golf in Great Britain and Ireland, is recognised by National golfing authorities and clubs throughout the world as reflecting the current golfing ability of the holder. The System is the result of many years' development and refinement, relying on stringent checks and balances which enable scores obtained from quite widely differing courses and playing conditions to be compared on a like-for-like basis. The detail of the CONGU® System is Copyrighted and the acronym CONGU® is a registered Trademark. Only Clubs affiliated to one of the seven National Unions or Associations that govern amateur golf in Great Britain and Ireland (and other approved overseas Organisations) are allowed to issue and maintain CONGU® Handicaps. All this ensures that CONGU® Handicaps reflect, as accurately as possible, the playing standard of the individual golfer at any one time.

Q.7 As a category 1 golfer, if I return a net differential of SSS +2 that score, on occasions, contributes to the resulting CSS being one stroke below the SSS. My Buffer Zone for handicap alteration purposes, however, is SSS +1. Can CONGU® explain this anomaly?

A.7 The CSS calculation is based on the percentage of returns to the SSS +2. The reasons for this are historical. Following the introduction of the 1983 Standard Scratch Score and Handicapping Scheme, a Buffer Zone of two strokes for all handicap categories was introduced the next year. The 1989 Revision brought in the CSS to take account of weather and course conditions. The CSS Tables were based on the two stroke buffer zone. The variable Buffer Zone of one, two, three and four strokes for handicap categories 1-4 was incorporated in the 1993 Revision. At that time CONGU® investigated the need to modify the CSS Tables to reflect the changed buffer zones. It was concluded that although the tables could have been amended, the resulting CSS would have been the same irrespective of

method used.

Q.8 A player should know before he competes what is required of him to play to, or better, his handicap. How can, for example, CONGU® justify a situation in which the CSS reduces to one stroke less than the SSS of the course? This can result in a player being denied a reduction in handicap or scoring outside the relevant buffer zone

A.8 The Course Rating system from which the SSS is derived is based on normal midseason playing conditions and includes an allowance for average wind speeds at the various golfing locations. When course or weather conditions are more or less difficult than 'average' the expectation is that scoring will be affected. Scoring conditions more favourable than 'average' include little or no wind, favourable pin positions and additional roll. In such circumstances the CSS can be one stroke less than the SSS. Conversely in unfavourable weather and course conditions the CSS can increase by up to three strokes above the SSS. In extreme circumstances the competition can become 'SSS + 3 Reduction Only'. The intent of the CSS system is to standardise the 'reward' for equal performance in different playing circumstances. For example, by applying the CSS system the performance of a player who returns a net score 2 strokes below the SSS on a day of high wind when the CSS is calculated to be SSS +3 (Net Differential -5) equates to that of another player returning a net score 6 strokes below the SSS on a day when the CSS is calculated to be SSS-1 (Net Differential -5)

Q.9 Why have Supplementary Scores been introduced?

A.9

The broad purpose is to encompass more club golfers in the handicap system. Currently too few golfers participate in the handicap system and consequently many may not have a handicap reflective of their current playing ability. If few scores are returned it is difficult for the handicap committee to make informed decisions regarding the Annual Handicap Review procedure. Whilst it is preferable for players to compete in Qualifying Competitions CONGU® recognises that for some players this is not always possible. Supplementary Scores have been introduced to help address the needs of some members of golf clubs who for example:

- Cannot submit many cards in Qualifying Competitions because of work or family commitments or who, particularly in busy clubs which have pressure on tee times, cannot regularly arrange to play on competition days;
- Are relatively new to the game of golf and are apprehensive about playing in competitions until they have acquired more experience;
- Because of advancing age, medical or other reasons play when the course is quieter when they can play without feeling they are holding up other competitors in the field; or
- Play most of their golf from forward tees with a lower SSS and would prefer to return some of their scores for handicap purposes from these forward tees.

Controls have been put in place to ensure that Supplementary Scores are not abused by restricting the number of scores that may be returned under these conditions.