

NEW ZEALAND GOLF HANDICAP REVIEW

The New Zealand Golf handicap review has been completed and there are some changes that will be introduced over time, the majority of which will not directly affect members.

Changes more pertinent to members are:

- revert to the use of tournament scores in the handicap system
- ability for clubs to modify a player's handicap if it is obvious that a player's current handicap index does not fairly reflect the current playing ability
- lifting the compulsory entry of all match play cards. (New Zealand Golf will stipulate which match play cards must be returned for handicapping.)
- all members to hold an 18-hole handicap

With the exception of the change to all players holding an 18-hole handicap, details of which are set out below, more detailed information of the above proposed changes will be sent to Clubs in due course.

THE CHANGE TO ONE 18 HOLE HANDICAP FOR ALL MEMBER CATEGORIES

The significant change that needs some explanation which will affect members who hold 9-hole handicaps is the removal of the 9-hole handicap. The following is an explanation on the reason for change and the positive impact we anticipate this will have for all Club members.

BACKGROUND

In the late 1990s Womens Golf New Zealand introduced 9-hole golf. The women's Front and Back 9 courses were rated accordingly and 9-hole Club members achieved 9-hole handicaps.

Under the New Zealand Golf Association men held an 18-hole handicap only. Courses were rated for the full 18 holes and if 9 holes were played a card could not be returned for handicap purposes. In 2006, New Zealand Golf introduced men's 9-hole golf.

Clubs were then able to offer 9-hole membership to both men and women members.

In 2009 a major exercise was undertaken, working with DotGolf, which updated the handicapping system to enable 9-hole scores to be submitted by players holding 18-hole handicaps. With 9-hole scores submitted by 18-hole players being accurately calculated for handicapping purposes, the issue was raised as to whether there was a need for a 9-hole handicap category at all.

THE CHALLENGE ALLOWING BOTH HANDICAP OPTIONS

There has been a perception that players holding an 18-hole handicap need not enter cards when playing only 9 holes. This is not correct. For the system to provide the most equitable platform all scores need to be returned.

Currently in the 9-hole section of the New Zealand Golf Manual it sets out that players holding 9-hole handicaps may only compete in designated 9-hole competitions and events. We believe this eligibility clause to be too harsh and would like to recommend a more inclusive approach. To assist with the acceptance of such a change in philosophy we also believe the best option is for all members to have the same handicap, while recognising that Clubs will maintain membership options such as 9-hole, midweek and 6 day etc.

9-hole membership is in place to provide those with limited time to play the game we all love. It is not meant to provide restrictions and barriers as a member and this should be avoided.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF ONE HANDICAP

A change to one handicap provides many positives but firstly we need to be reminded that there are two basic premises that underlie the USGA Handicap System, namely:

- each player will try to make the best score at every hole in every round, regardless of where the round is played, and
- the player will post every acceptable round for peer review. An acceptable round includes 9-hole scores and they must be entered for handicap purposes.

The most convenient change is that all players will have a handicap calculated on the same formula and representing their ability relative to all members. Previously if an 18-hole handicap was halved to compete in a 9-hole event, or a 9-hole handicap doubled to compete in an 18-hole event, this was the correct method but it wasn't quite accurate enough.

There will be more awareness for the member who has always held the traditional 18-hole handicap to follow the 9-hole member's example by entering score cards every time they play 9 holes. This ensures more uniformity and equitable competition. Whilst we have heard a common argument that the more senior golfers play better on the first 9 holes and tend to fade on the back 9, there is enough information and research to counter that reality. The actual tendency for these veteran players is that they are warmed up, have the feel of the greens and how the course is playing, and score slightly better on the back 9.

THE CHANGE THAT CURRENT 9-HOLE HANDICAPPERS WILL NOTICE

All 9-hole scoring records will be retained. The easiest approach to convert a current 9-hole handicap to an 18-hole handicap is to run a formula through every player's scoring record to combine 9-hole scores into 18-hole scores. The result will be a scoring record showing 18 hole scores for which an 18-hole handicap will be automatically calculated. No longer will there be an 'N' displayed by the figure that has represented a 9-hole handicap in the past.

This is the most significant challenge for DotGolf and the change is not anticipated to be introduced until 1 January 2015.

SUMMARY

To summarise, listed below are the reasons for this change:

- to promote more participation in club competitions with there being no stigma attached to what handicap is required to enter
- club competition conditions eligibility criteria may also include what membership category is eligible to enter, as opposed to the current handicap category eligibility
- whether an 18 or 9-hole member, the handicap formula is the same and competition is therefore more equitable
- retain the benefit of being either a 9 or 18-hole Club member
- increasing player awareness to submit 9 hole scores as whenever they play they are trying to make the best score possible

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