

# AUDITING GOLF HANDICAPS

## Establishing Equitable Competition



The USGA instituted handicaps for golfers in 1911. The purpose of a golf handicap is to enable golfers of all skill levels to compete on an equitable basis. In order to manage a uniform handicapping system across the USA, only authorized golf associations and clubs are permitted to issue USGA handicaps. The USGA has updated the rules and method of calculation from time to time. The current version of the USGA Handicap System went into effect on Jan. 1, 2008, and the next revision will take effect on Jan. 1, 2012. The Handicap System Manual, published by the USGA is available to the public on their website.

<http://www.usga.org/Rule-Books/Handicap-System-Manual/Rule-02/>

The USGA requires that each authorized golf association and club that issues handicaps have a Handicap Committee. Per the USGA, “A handicap committee is the committee of a golf club that ensures compliance with the USGA Handicap System, including peer review. A majority of the Handicap Committee, including the chairperson, must be members of the club; club employees may serve on the Handicap Committee, but an employee may not serve as chairperson.”

The Handicap Committee is required to audit the handicaps of the members of their club to validate the accuracy of the handicaps issued by the club. The USGA refers to this as a Peer Review. The process used to conduct audits is left up to the discretion of the club and the Handicap Committee, provided that the following requirements are satisfied:

- The club must ensure that all acceptable scores are entered correctly
- The club must require the use of the USGA procedures (Equitable Stroke Control) to adjust hole scores before posting.
- The club must require the posting of all scores made at home and away.
- The club must make current scoring records and a USGA Handicap Index list available for inspection by others.

### Why Handicap Auditing is Necessary

First of all, letting the players issue their own handicaps would be like letting a Baseball pitcher call his own balls and strikes. It could lead to inequities, abuse, and less than accurate handicaps. That is why only USGA authorized clubs can issue handicaps.

There are numerous organizations across the country that offer handicap calculations and monitoring services. These organizations are referred to as “Handicap Authorities”. Ghin, GolfNet, EZLink and many State golf associations are a few examples. Once the player or club is registered with a handicap authority, all posted scores are monitored and handicaps are maintained on a regular basis.

Normally handicap indexes are recalculated at least once a month, and not less than twice a month. The specific dates when this occurs, are called cut off days. Most clubs use the first of the month and the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month as cut off days. The club sends all the data collected between cut off days to the handicap authority on the day before the cut off day. It can be done more frequently for projecting the trend in the handicap index or for auditing purposes.

Human error plays a role in creating inaccuracy in the calculation of handicap indexes. A player can forget to post a score, post a wrong score, or forget to apply the equitable stroke control rules. Golf matches are played with 1, 2, 3, or 4 players in a group. When more than one player is playing, it is common for one player to be designated as the score keeper. When it comes time to post the scores, sometimes the scorekeeper posts all the scores for each player in the foursome and sometimes it is done by each individual player. On occasion both the score keeper and the individual players will both post the scores, causing a duplicate posting to occur. Or the score keeper and the player both keep score but they don't agree, leading to an incorrect score being posted. It is up to the Handicap Auditor to catch these errors and have the player correct them.

The timing of the postings can also cause inaccuracy in the handicap index. If one or more rounds of golf are played in one cut off period, but then posted after the fact into the next cutoff period, this may cause inaccuracy in the index if both scores are used to calculate the index. If the next time period happened to be when a Club tournament or event was being played, the handicap index may be inaccurate for the tournament.

Another common occurrence is for a player to keep score cards for rounds played on vacation or when traveling. Then, when time permits, the scores are posted. But, many times the player posts them all as being played on the same day. This is an error and causes handicap index inaccuracy, especially if the away scores span one or more cut off dates.

There is always the possibility that an unscrupulous player will try to manipulate their handicap to put themselves in a better position to win a match, a tournament, or a wager by getting more stokes. Or there are players that are embarrassed to put in high scores, so they shave off a few strokes here and there to keep their vanity handicap where they think it should be. We like to think our fellow golfers would not do this, but we are all human. Routine auditing of the handicaps enables the golf committee to address these issues.

## Sources of Inaccuracy in Handicaps

There are several events that can influence the accuracy of a golfer's handicap. It is the responsibility of the Handicap Committee to audit and correct as many of these events as possible.

- a) **No Score Posted** - This is one of the most serious discrepancies that impacts handicap accuracy.
- b) **Wrong Score Posted** - If a player shoots 85 for the round and posts a 95 by mistake, this has a serious impact on the handicap calculation. Additionally, all scores must be adjusted for Equitable Stroke Control before posting.
- c) **Duplicate Score Posted** - If a player posts more than one score for a single round of golf, this can impact the accuracy of the handicap calculation if both scores are used to calculate the index.
- d) **Posting Date Wrong** - If a score or a series of scores are played before a calculation cut off date and they are posted as being played after the cut off date, it may create an error if they are used to calculate the index.

## Auditing Components

How will the Handicap Committee be able to ensure that none of these errors has occurred on each round of golf played at the club? It is a big job, especially for clubs with hundreds of members and with multiple golf courses. Who can keep track of it all, even though the scores are recorded on a computer?

How will the Handicap Auditor know if a score was **not** posted?

- 1) There is no record showing that the score has been posted.
- 2) The Auditor has the player's score card showing that indeed they did play, the date they played, and the score they shot after equitable stroke control adjustments.
- 3) The Auditor has a copy of the starters tee sheet or sign in sheet, showing that the player in question, checked in, and did play that day.
- 4) The peers, of the player question, attest that this player did play with them on that day.

The record of the posted score along with the actual score card and tee sheet or sign in sheet are key components needed for auditing a handicap. An accurate audit cannot be performed without these three key components.

- Posted Scores
- Actual Score Card
- Starters Tee Sheet

Polling players of a foursome as to who played, might be possible, but it is not practical and is rarely done. All players trust that their fellow players will not forget or purposely not post their score. The auditor has to rely on the three components listed above.

Clubs that do not require the members to turn in their score card at the end of the round will be lacking a key auditing component. This means that there is a pretty good chance the results of their audit will not be meaningful or totally valid. For accurate auditing, and the resulting accurate handicap indexes, having the physical score cards is a must. Most private clubs have a starter somewhere between the clubhouse and the first tee. Their job is to regulate play, to make sure the sequence of tee times is adhered to, and to record the names and cart numbers of those playing in each group. Plus they normally give advice about course conditions, where not to drive a golf cart, hazards on the course, and speed of play required. After permission to play to each group is granted, the starter updates this information on the tee sheet with the actual names of those playing. Later, when time permits the starter keeps the Pro Shop informed of any changes to the tee sheet information. In turn, the Pro Shop updates the master tee sheet for the day. In those clubs that do not have starters, an accurate sign in sheet can be used in place of the tee sheet.

Just because a player had been listed on the Pro Shop Reservation Tee Sheet does not mean he actually played a round of golf that day. Most clubs require a receipt or starter slip, issued by the Pro Shop to the actual player for a given tee time. This information is used to keep the tee sheet accurate. The starter slip is a way for the starter to know that a player has checked in with the Pro Shop and is approved for play.

The Tee Sheet or sign in sheet is a valuable component for the handicap audit. Because, if a player has checked in, and has been acknowledged by the Starter as playing a round that day, then there should be a corresponding record of a posted score, and a physical score card available.

If the player does not post his score, and does not turn in a score card, the Auditor would have **no** knowledge that a round was played, except they would be listed on the Tee Sheet or sign in sheet. This is called a No Post - No Card error. The accuracy of the Tee Sheet becomes very important to the Auditor. It closes a loop hole for the players that don't want their scores recorded, or just plain forget to post and turn in their card.

So now we have five (5) types of infractions that the Handicap Auditor is looking for:

- **No Post**
- **Wrong Score**
- **Duplicate Score**
- **No Card**
- **No Post - No Card**

The USGA Handicap manual states that a player's handicap can not be adjusted if they posted their scores but did not turn in a score card. The No Card infraction is a means by which players are encouraged to turn in their score card in so that accurate audits can be conducted.

## The Frequency of Handicap Auditing

If a club has a Handicap Chairperson, and they have no one on their committee, then auditing handicaps is an enormous task. The frequency of auditing must be adjusted so it can be done without placing a hardship on the person doing it. Auditing one day a week or one day every two weeks could be done, however it is very time consuming.

If there are multiple people on the Handicap Committee, then the frequency of auditing can be increased. But, if done on a manual basis, without a computer, it is still a very time consuming task.

By implementing a computer based auditing system, and a team of auditors, the frequency of auditing can be increased up to 90% to 100% of all rounds played. In an ideal situation, the Handicap committee would have a Chairman, and seven (7) other committee members, one for each day of the week. This is an ideal configuration which will result in the most accurate handicap indexes for all members of the club.

## Communications with Members

A fully staffed Handicap Committee, using a computer based system, will produce an audit report for each day of the week that includes the infractions that occurred. Additionally, each person audited should have access to their individual audit reports via the Internet. These reports should also be available via the Pro Shop for Members that do not have access to the Internet.

On a website, for the members, all letters sent by the Handicap Chairman can be seen. Each member can see all of the infractions letters they have received and it will indicate if they corrected their infraction. To view a report of this type, the member must input their golf posting number (123) or an assigned password. The report for golf posting number 123 is shown below.

Audit Letters Sent To: SANDY WEDGE (123)				
Date	Problem	Card Score	Posted Score	Corrected
09/14/11	No Post	104	0	Yes
07/15/11	No Post	97	0	Yes
07/13/11	No Post	110	0	No
06/28/11	Wrong Score	96	92	No
06/17/11	No Post	100	0	No
06/15/11	No Post	105	0	No
06/08/11	No Post	97	0	No

In this report she can see all of the audit letters she has received. It shows the problem, the scores, and indicates if she took corrective action to expunge the infraction from her record. The letters marked “Corrected = Yes”, will not count as a violation. (More on this later).

## Committee Communications

The report below is what the auditor and the handicap chairman see when an audit is complete. It represents a summary of the audit performed by the auditor. It can also be viewed by the Handicap Chairman.

Audit Report for Monday - Nov 28, 2011

Player	Posted Score	Card Score	Disposition	Letter Sent	Send Letter
VALLEY, JOHN	82 H		No Card	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
GRAHAM, CATHY	110 H		No Card	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
WOLF, BILL		87	No Post	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
LANGSTON, MARGE		110	No Post	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
SANFT, ARNIE	105 H	106	Wrong Score	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
QUIROS, DAVE	92 H	93	Wrong Score	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Typical Audit Report

The members cannot see this report , but they can see their individual Audit History as described previously.

In the last column, Letter Sent, a “Yes” means that the Handicap Chairman has sent a letter to the member.

The Handicap Chairman is the only one that can send letters to the members for handicap infractions. In the report above, the Handicap Chairman has sent letters to two of the members.

Many private golf clubs have an official Golf Committee. The Handicap Chairman reports to the Golf Committee, and submits periodic reports on his activity to them.

This is an example of the reports that may constitute the Handicap Chairman’s report to the Golf Committee.

<b>Handicap Audit Summary</b>							
From Nov 01 2011 to Nov 30 2011							
Type	No Post	No Card	No Post-No Card	Wrong Score	Dup Post	Letters Sent	Total Audits
Infractions	80	0	0	5	5	90	1825
Corrected	20	0	0	1	2	23	

Handicap Chairman's Report to Golf Committee

Along with this summary level report, the Chairman may also submit a list of the most frequent violators. The Chairman will discuss with the Golf Committee on how the Handicap Sanctions should be applied to the members listed in the report.

The Golf Committee has the responsibility for imposing sanctions on the members who are in violation of the Handicap rules.

<b>Audit Infractions</b>								
Sep 01, 2011 to Nov 30, 2011								
Member Name	No Post	No Card	No Post No Card	Wrong Score	Dup Score	Letters Sent	Corrected Scores	Outstanding Letters
THOMAS, MIKE	2	1	0	1	1	5	0	5
VERITY, JIM	5	0	1	0	0	6	1	5
LANDIS, CAROL	4	0	1	0	0	5	1	4
SMITH, BOB	5	0	0	0	0	5	1	4
WINDER, LINDA	7	0	0	0	0	7	7	0
Totals	23	1	2	1	1	28	10	18

Frequent Violators Report Sept, Oct, Nov

This is not a complete list of all members that received letters during this period. The Handicap Chairman, when preparing the report can chose how many letters it will take to get on the report (five in this case). Had he picked one letter, then the report would show all the members that received letters during this period.

Note: If a member takes corrective action to clear their infractions, then the number of outstanding letters is reduced. Application of the sanctions depends on the number of outstanding letters in a given time period.

## **Handicap Sanctions**

Rules that are not enforced soon become meaningless. Having a Handicap Audit System as described above, is a total waste of time and effort if there are no consequences for violation of the handicap rules.

Each club that is serious about having accurate handicaps, that the members know and trust, must enforce the rules. Otherwise, the competition that occurs on the course in everyday play, and in club sponsored events and tournaments will not be equitable.

Here are some suggested sanctions:

- 1st Infraction, notification letter to member.
- 2nd Infraction, second notification letter.
- 3rd Infraction, within a two month period, meeting with Golf Committee.
- 4th Infraction, within a three month period, meeting with Golf Committee and Head Golf Pro
- 5th Infraction, within a four month period, meeting with Golf Committee, Golf Pro, and President of the Board of Governors.
- Continued Infractions, notification from Club Manager that the member is prohibited from participating in ALL Club sponsored events for 90 days.

## **Record Keeping Benefits**

Well kept records of who is in violation of handicap rules, and what type of violations have occurred, go a long way in promoting handicap accuracy at the club. The computer based auditing system does a beautiful job of documenting all of the handicap committee activity. Not having records can lead to interpersonal conflicts, emotional outbursts, and potential resignations. Or alternatively, total mistrust in the handicaps of fellow golfers, and low participation in club events and tournaments.

A well structured and fair application of the handicap rules, via a Handicap Committee, and a valid Handicap Audit process or system, will not only give the members a feeling of security, but will improve the well being of the club.

## The Complete Handicap Auditing System



This is the puzzle

There are fifteen elements to a successful Handicap Auditing System. Here is a brief discussion of each element.

### 1. Management Support -

If having accurate handicaps is not a priority for the club and its general manager, then this reduces the chance of success. Management support is a prerequisite to a successful system.

### 2. The Golf Professional -

A club without a USGA certified Golf Professional is going to have a hard time implementing handicap auditing. Or a club with a Golf Professional that does not think accurate handicaps are a vital part of his or her responsibility will quickly become a problem. The local Golf Professional should be the final authority on the interpretation of the USGA Handicap Rules. He must be in concert with the goals and objectives of the Handicap Committee. As an employee of the Club he cannot be the Handicap Committee Chairman.

### 3. Golf Committee and Handicap Chairperson -

Having a Golf Committee and an appointed Handicap Chairperson are very important elements in achieving accurate handicaps. The personality of the Handicap Chairperson is a critical success element in the system. They must be fair, unbiased, friendly, and have expert knowledge of USGA Handicap Rules. The chairperson must have the full support and cooperation of the Golf Committee.

### 4. Software -

Manual Auditing is very time consuming. An online, Internet based, system with a database of members and scores is highly desirable. The software and associated data play a crucial role in recording results, and preparation of reports. Without it, high percentage auditing is not practical.

### 5. Member Roster -

The Handicap Committee must have access to the list of members in the club, showing their current status, i.e. (resigned, seasonal, medical leave, etc). The roster must have accurate and current email addresses.

## **6. Posting -**

One or more computer terminals are needed for the members to post their scores at the end of a round. They can be placed in the Pro Shop or at a convenient location in the club. The posting computer must be connected to a Handicap Authority, like Ghin, GolfNet, etc. The Handicap Committee must have access to the posted scores for all of the members.

## **7. Tee Sheet or Sign Up Sheet -**

The club must have an accurate Tee Sheet or Sign Up sheet that can be used by the handicap auditors. Accurate is the key word here. It must contain the names of all the golfers who played, not just the person that made the tee time.

## **8. Score Card Collection -**

All score cards must be kept in a central location in folders for each day, preferably in the Pro Shop. Each card must contain each golfer's first and last name, or golf posting number, and the date the round was played. The auditor will use these cards to perform an audit.

## **9. Transferring Scores -**

The Pro Shop or designated authority, must transfer the local and Internet posted scores, to the Handicap Authority on a daily basis. This promotes efficient auditing. On cut off days for reissuing handicaps, the transfer of scores to the Handicap Authority is vital.

## **10. Auditors -**

The Handicap Committee will need at least five auditors that can complete the auditing process online. Seven auditors is more desirable, one for each day of the week.

## **11. The Audit Process -**

In the appendix of this article, you will find a description of the process of completing an audit. This is what the auditors do each week. When the auditor is satisfied that they have all the score cards for that day, and that their work is accurate, they release the report for viewing by the Handicap Chairman.

## **12. Sending Letters to Members -**

Only the Handicap Chairman should be allowed to send infraction letters to the members. There is some judgment involved in who receives a letter and who is subject to the club handicap sanctions. The Handicap Chairman should be a fair and honest person dedicated to achieving the highest possible handicap accuracy for the club.

## **13. Chairman's Report**

Normally, once a month the Handicap Chairman will issue a report to the Golf Committee. This report is a key element in applying sanctions.

## **14. Application of the Sanctions -**

If the sanctions are not applied, then the whole idea of auditing handicaps to improve handicap accuracy will not happen long term.

## **15. Member Behavior -**

The ultimate result of auditing handicaps is improved handicap accuracy. Knowing that handicaps are being constantly audited, can have a positive impact on the behavior of the members. i.e.. they will make sure they post their scores, and that the scores are correct. If they receive a letter from the Handicap Chairman, then they will go out of their way to make the necessary corrections to their scoring record, as indicated in the letter. Thus, improving the handicap accuracy of the club.

On the other hand, if the Handicap Committee is viewed as being similar to the *gistspeople*, then there can be a rejection, by the members, of handicap auditing. The attitude of the Handicap Chairman, must be friendly, honest and fair to avoid this. A balance must be struck, between being extra lenient, and excessively strict. This fairness attitude must prevail, not only in the Handicap Committee, but in the Golf Committee and Club management.



The 15 Pieces Fit Together

Each of these 15 elements are like the pieces of a puzzle. They all fit together to form a complete handicap auditing system. If a piece or two are missing, the system is not complete.

When complete, and implemented with a fair attitude, the auditing of handicaps will result in significant improvements in handicap accuracy. That in turn, sets the stage for equitable competition among the club members, more member participation in Club events, and an improved feeling of well being among the competing golf members.

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## Appendix:

