



## **The USGA Handicap System and The Rules of Golf**

The USGA has received many inquiries regarding whether rounds played with equipment that does not conform to the Rules of Golf are acceptable for handicap purposes.

The USGA's long-standing policy according to the USGA Handicap System is that scores made using non-conforming clubs or balls are not acceptable for handicap purposes.

The USGA recognizes that it is a player's choice whether or not he adheres to the Rules of Golf. While the USGA cannot ensure that all players use only conforming equipment, the integrity of the USGA Handicap System relies on a single set of Rules and uniform equipment standards to predict accurately a player's potential ability and designate an appropriate USGA Handicap Index.

It should be noted that over time the USGA Handicap System has allowed a few key exceptions that promote the inclusion of some scores that are not played strictly according to the Rules of Golf. These exceptions represent an effort to make it easier to obtain scoring data needed for formulating an accurate USGA Handicap Index.

### **Preferred Lies and Winter Rules**

The use of preferred lies or winter rules is not endorsed nor interpreted under the Rules of Golf. But a local rule denoting the existence of such a practice is included in the Rules of Golf for the benefit of local Committees faced with adverse course conditions. Scores made under preferred lies or winter rules will be posted for handicap purposes unless a club's Handicap Committee determines that conditions are so poor that such scores should not be posted.

### **Conceded Putts and Incomplete Holes**

In stroke play, a player is required under Rule 3-2 to hole out at every hole. However, in some special forms of stroke play (see Rules 31-32) there are instances where holing out is not a requirement. When a player fails to hole out, in either stroke play or match play, the Handicap System requires data that is reflective of what transpired that will help in predicting potential ability. Section 4-1 of the USGA Handicap System Manual states: "A player who starts, but does not complete a hole or is conceded a stroke must record for handicap purposes the most likely score. The most likely score may not exceed the player's Equitable Stroke Control limit." The most likely score consists of the number of strokes already taken plus, in the player's best judgment, the number of strokes the player would take to complete the hole from that position more than half the time.

## **Mulligans**

“Mulligans” are a relatively frequent occurrence on the golf course. But they are not recognized under the Rules of Golf.

The USGA Handicap System doesn't want to eliminate a round that has seventeen holes of valid scores if a “mulligan” was played on a single hole. So, for handicap purposes, the hole score made with the mulligan is tossed out and replaced with a hole score that is not considered out of the ordinary for the player, based on his Course Handicap. The player's score becomes par, plus any handicap strokes the player should receive, on the hole(s) in question. A player with a Course Handicap of eighteen receives a stroke on every hole, so that particular player's hole score would be par plus the one stroke, or a bogey.