



Stroke Hole Allocation: Whose responsibility is it?

The SCGA Rating Committee is often called upon to answer mysteries that vex our member clubs. Following the alchemy utilized to determine USGA Course and Slope Rating, a very popular inquiry centers on the topic of handicap stroke allocation. Judging from the frequency and range of the questions, it is obvious that this subject is often misunderstood. We hope by addressing some of these queries we can reduce the confusion surrounding this subject.

Will the handicap stroke allocation change as a result of the SCGA Rating Committee visit?

The answer is no unless the club chooses to reevaluate the current order. The numbers derived in the course rating process go to determining the USGA Course and Slope Rating but are not useful in assigning handicap stroke allocation. It is often surprising to club members and staff that the function of establishing the allocation order is the responsibility of the club. This makes sense, however, since the club, and specifically the handicap committee, is most knowledgeable about how the holes play for the range of golfers in their club.

After seeing the course, don't you feel that hole number six is more difficult than hole number four and yet hole number four is the number one handicap stroke allocated hole?

This question goes to the very nature of the purpose of handicap stroke allocation. There is nothing that promotes the deer staring in headlights gaze swifter than the reply that your number one handicap stroke hole may not be your most difficult hole on your course. A handicap stroke is meant to be an equalizer and should be available on a hole where a higher handicapped player needs it to obtain a half (not a win) from an opponent. The goal is even out the gap between players of unequal skills in a match play competition, the most popular form of play at the club level.

A very difficult hole that proves to be a problem for both the skilled player and the higher handicapped individual may not be the hole where an equalizing stroke is needed. The prevailing logic may, in fact, dictate that a hole perceived to be easier might be the place that the higher handicapped opponent needs that extra shot.

How does the committee at the club determine the correct allocation of handicap strokes?

The recommended procedure is outlined in [Section 17](#) of the USGA Handicap System Manual. Section 17-2 gives two options for analysis of scores, a comparison method and a regression method. The comparison method suggests that a comparison is made between a group of low indexed players with Course Handicaps of 8 and below and a group of players

whose Course Handicaps average 15 to 20 strokes higher than the average of the first group. While this analysis reviews a relatively significant range between golfers, the results also apply to players separated by a single handicapped stroke. The regression method utilizes all levels of Course Handicap and plots a regression line showing how quickly scores increase on a single hole.

For either scenario, enough data to be statistically significant is necessary. For the comparison method, the committee begins by collecting around 200 cards for each group. For the regression method a total of 400 scores of various handicap levels is necessary. In either situation, scores need to be from a single set of tees. Calculations are made using hole-by-hole scores (not adjusted for equitable stroke control) to determine the average hole scores for each group. A comparison follows identifying the difference between the scoring averages on each hole between the two groups. Those holes that feature the largest gap between scoring averages of the two groups are the holes where the equalizing strokes are most needed.

Can the analysis be automated in any way?

In order to aid clubs in doing an analysis, the SCGA provides a stroke hole allocation utility program to all of its regular member clubs. Hole by hole scores can be captured via the score posting program (if the setting is turned on to allow for input of hole by hole scores) or through the Tournament Pairing Program (TPP) and imported into the allocation utility. Manual entry of scores also is accepted. All of the tools necessary to analyze data using the two Section 17 options are available. If the regression method is used, the SCGA will be happy to send an explanation of how that analysis is accomplished.

Our two strongest holes are on the first nine. Are we allowed to call them the number one and two handicap stroke holes?

The recommendation is to number the holes such that the odd-numbered handicap holes fall on the front nine and the even-numbered handicap holes are assigned to the back nine. This is done to equalize the distribution of strokes over 18 holes. On occasion, the second nine is definitively more difficult than the first nine and the committee may think about allocating odd-numbered strokes to the back nine. See [Section 17-1](#)

We find our first hole is the number one handicap stroke hole. Is this permissible?

It is permissible but certainly not recommended. Whenever possible a committee should avoid assigning low numbered strokes to the first (and even second) hole(s) of a course as well as the last holes of each nine. The avoidance of the low strokes on the early holes relates the possible advantage gained by a side in a hole-by-hole play-off. Conversely, if low numbered holes are assigned to last holes of each side the possibility looms that the players receiving strokes will not have the opportunity to utilize them before the match has been decided.

Can we have different handicap stroke allocations for our blue and white tees?

This is acceptable if the club feels there is a decided difference between play on the two sets of tees and are willing to go through the exercise of determining the handicap stroke allocation for each. However, the perceived benefit of more accurate information is often outweighed by the confusion created in having separate stroke hole allocations for different tees. Most clubs follow the recommendation to determine the handicap stroke assignment using the tees played most often by the majority of club members.

In the end, the desire is to provide for equal competition between golfers of varying abilities. Ultimately it is the club's handicap committee who decides how and where these stroke holes are allocated in a manner will provide fair results.