

USGA'S POSITION PAPER ON COMPETING FROM DIFFERENT TEES

When players are competing from different tees, why do you make a second adjustment?

Many players question the application of [Section 3-5](#), where players are competing from different sets of tees, or men and women are competing from the same set of tees. This is a difficult concept to understand and we are offering a few different ways to allow you to explain this to your club members.

We need to define what the Slope Rating does, as many players think the different Slope Ratings automatically take care of the difference in the two sets of tees. This is a myth. The Slope Rating is used to convert a Handicap Index to a Course Handicap, which allows the player to receive the number of strokes he needs to play to the level of a scratch golfer for that particular set of tees. In other words, it is the number of strokes he needs to play down to the Course Rating for that particular set of tees.

Example

Player A: Handicap Index of 10.4

White set of tees: Course Rating of 71.1 and a Slope Rating of 130.

Course Handicap for player A on the white tees is a 12 ($10.4 \times 130/113$).

He needs 12 strokes to play down to the level of a scratch golfer on the white set of tees. The scratch golfer is what the Course Rating is based upon, so that is 71.1. For the Course Handicap of 12 to play down to the level of a scratch golfer, he would need to shoot $71.1 + 12$, or 83.1, which we will round to 83. So, if player A plays to his Course Handicap by shooting 83, he would tie the scratch golfer shooting 71 on the white set of tees. Now, we have found a way for a golfer to compete against a player with a different skill level from a specific set of tees.

Player B: Handicap Index of 10.4

Blue set of tees: Course Rating of 73.2 and a Slope Rating of 140.

Course Handicap for player B on the blue tees is 13 ($10.4 \times 140/113$).

Player B needs 13 strokes to play down to the level of a scratch golfer for this particular blue set of tees. As we said earlier, the scratch golfer is what the Course Rating is based upon, and on the blue set of tees that is 73.2. For the Course Handicap of 13 to play down to the level of a scratch golfer, he would need to shoot $73.2 + 13$ or 86.3, which we will round to 86. So, if player B plays to his Course Handicap by shooting 86, he would tie the scratch golfer shooting 73 on the blue set of tees. Great, again we have found a way for a golfer to compete against a player with a different skill level from a specific set of tees.

So now the two non-scratch players decide to compete against one another; Player A from the white tees and Player B from the blue tees. We have determined their Course Handicap when they were going to play someone else from the same set of tees, but that is no longer the case. However, we have already determined that player A needs 12 strokes to play down to a scratch for the white set of tees and player B needs 13 strokes to play down to the level of a scratch player for the blue set of tees. If both players play exactly to their Course Handicap, player A scores 83 for a net of 71 and player B scores 86 for a net of 73. Player A wins every time if they shoot to their Course Handicap, as 71 is better than 73. This is because the Course Handicaps were set up allowing each player to score down to the level of the scratch

golfer for the specific set of tees they are playing. SLOPE allows one to compete with someone from the same set of tees, but in our example the players are not playing the same set of tees.

Now, we have to standardize/equalize the Course Ratings in order for the two players to compete equitably. The same thing would apply when two scratch players chose to play from these two different sets of tees. A scratch golfer would shoot a 71 from the white tees and another scratch golfer would shoot a 73 from the blue tees. Because the player playing the blue tees is playing a course with a higher Course Rating (more difficult set of tees), we must equalize the difference in Course Ratings in order to do any type of comparison or competition. This applies to every golfer, no matter what their level of skill, as all the Slope Rating has done is given a player enough strokes to play down to the level of a scratch for the specific set of tees.

Back to our net players A and B. Because player B is playing a set of tees with a higher Course Rating, we must add the difference between the two Course Ratings to his Course Handicap if he is going to compete with someone else from a different set of tees. $73.2 \text{ (blue)} - 71.1 \text{ (white)} = 2.1$, which we round to 2. So player B will add two strokes to his 13, resulting in a Course Handicap of 15. Now let's look at the competition if both players score to their Course Handicap:

Target Score	83	86
Course Handicap	12	13
Diff. in Rating		2
Net Score	71	71

We have reached our desired goal. Both players have scored to their Course Handicap and their net score results in a tie.

Common thoughts:

- 1. My Handicap Index converts to the same Course Handicap from two different sets of tees. This system must be screwed up because I definitely score higher on the longer set of tees and I need more strokes.** Example, a player has a Handicap Index of 10.4. The white set of tees has a Course Rating of 70.9 and a Slope Rating of 118. The blue tee has a Course Rating of 73.1 and a Slope Rating of 122. In both cases 10.4 converts to a Course Handicap of 11. As we learned in Example 1, the Slope Rating allows us to receive enough strokes to play to the level of a scratch golfer from a particular set of tees. So, when this player plays the white set of tees, he needs 11 strokes to play down to the Course Rating of 70.9. When he plays the blue set of tees, he needs 11 strokes to play down to the Course Rating of 73.1. So, to play to his Course Handicap, he needs to score $70.9 + 11 = 81.9$ or 82 from the white tees and $73.1 + 11 = 84.1$ or 84 from the blue tees. The system recognizes the difficulty difference in the two sets of tees, but it doesn't show up until we take into account both the Course Rating and the Slope Rating.
- 2. A player develops a Handicap Index from a certain set of tees, so a 10.4 who plays all the time from the blue tees is better than the 10.4 who plays from the white set of tees.** Another way to read this is that a player develops a Handicap Index from a specific set of tees. In our last example, we said the white tees had a Course Rating of 70.9 and a Slope Rating of 118. What would a player have to average with his ten best scores/differentials to become a 10.4? Let's skip the 96 percent factor in the formula to make it easier to determine. First, we need to determine how to calculate a handicap differential. It is the adjusted gross score minus the Course Rating multiplied by a 113 STANDARD for Slope Rating, divided by the Slope Rating of the tees played. $81.8 - 70.9 \times 113/118 = 10.4$. So if a player averaged 81.8 on his ten best differentials, the result would be 10.4. If a blue tee

player averaged 81.8, the result would be 8.1 ($81.8 - 73.1 \times 113/122$). Result: Shooting the same score from different sets of tees does not result in the same Handicap Index.

For a player averaging 84.3 from the blue tees, the resulting Handicap Index would be 10.4 ($84.3 - 73.1 \times 113/122$). The combination of the differences in Course Ratings, plus the weighting of the Slope Rating shows that a blue tee player averaging 2.5 strokes higher than the white tee player would result in the same Handicap Index. This is how we determine which ten rounds to count in your Handicap Index, whether played from the blue tee at your course, the white tee at your course or the blue tees at Pebble Beach.

Nowhere in the above information did we mention the word par. Players often try to throw par into the mix when trying to figure if scores are equal. Par is of little relevance in the handicap system and is a terrible indicator of predicting score. For example, one course may be 5500 yards long and have a par of 72 and another may be 7200 yards long and have a par of 72. It is highly unlikely that scores on these two courses would be equal for any level of golfer.

In each of the examples, we have used both Course Rating and Slope Rating. The point is that Slope Rating by itself has little meaning within the Handicap System. There must be a Course Rating standard to connect/attach to the Slope Rating in order for there to be any meaning. If there is one thing to remember from all of this, it is that the Slope Rating is used to convert a Handicap Index to a Course Handicap, which allows the player to receive the number of strokes he needs to play to the level of a scratch golfer for that particular set of tees.

If a club has players competing against one another from tees with different ratings, can it choose to ignore Section 3-5/9-3 of the USGA Handicap System? [top](#)

No. Please see the following letter that is now sent out regarding this subject:

In regard to your inquiry, we want to clearly note the USGA's position regarding handicap competitions in which players are competing from tees where there are different USGA Course Ratings(tm). Sections 3-5 of the USGA Handicap System® and Rule 6-2 of the Rules of Golf ® both apply in this situation.

Rule 6-2b, which references Stroke Play, in part states, "In any round of a handicap competition, the competitor shall ensure that his handicap is recorded on his score card before it is returned to the Committee."

Section 3-5, which references differences in Course Ratings, in part states, "...the player playing from the set of tees with the higher USGA Course Rating receives additional strokes equal to the difference between the Course Ratings, with .5 or greater rounded upward. The additional strokes are added to the Course Handicap(tm) of the player playing from the higher-rated set of tees."

For more information on the background of Section 3-5 and why it is applied, the USGA can provide you with a "white paper" on the subject. This information is also available on the USGA's web site, www.usga.org or more specifically at www.usga.org/handicap/faq/7.html.

A player applying Section 3-5 is proceeding correctly in an effort to satisfy the requirements of Rule 6-2. A committee does not have the power to adopt a Condition of Competition that waives this procedure, as that would be a violation of Rule 33-1, which includes the following wording, "The Committee has no power to waive a Rule of Golf."

The USGA Handicap System has been developed so that competitions from different tees utilizing the differences in Course Ratings can result in equitable competition. We encourage golf clubs to offer competitive opportunities following this philosophy. This letter emphasizes that attempting to ignore this is a violation the Rules of Golf and the USGA Handicap System. If a golf club is issuing Handicap Indexes® to its members, it is expected that the club will follow the Rules of Golf and the USGA Handicap System. A club is subject to loss of the ability to utilize the USGA Handicap System as summarized in Handicap Decision 1-2/1:

1-2/1. Club's Policies Not in Compliance With the USGA Handicap System

The USGA requires that a club's policies be in compliance with the Rules of Golf and the USGA Handicap System for the members' handicaps at that club to be USGA Handicap Indexes. If the USGA is notified in writing that a club is not complying, what action will the USGA take?

A: If notified in writing, the USGA will request the authorized golf association in the area to contact the club about policies not in compliance.

If that association is unable to get the club to comply, the USGA will advise the club in writing that without compliance the club may not issue USGA Handicap Indexes to its members, may not use any part of the USGA Handicap System, and may not use USGA trademarks in any manner. If a club refuses to comply, the USGA will inform other USGA member clubs in the region that the club's right to issue USGA Handicap Indexes has been withdrawn. The USGA will not accept an entry into USGA Championships from any member of this club. As a practical matter, this last action rarely becomes necessary.

Thank you for making an inquiry on this subject. The USGA appreciates your support in promoting its policies.

USGA 2012-2015 Rules of Golf

3-5. Players Competing from Different Tees or Men and Women from Same Tees

a. Different Tees: Men vs. Men; Women vs. Women; Women vs. Men

Different tees usually have different Ratings. Because a *USGA Course Rating* reflects the probable score of a *scratch golfer*, the higher-rated course is more difficult, and the player playing from the set of tees with the higher *USGA Course Rating* receives additional stroke(s) equal to the difference between each *USGA Course Rating*, with .5 or greater rounded upward. The additional stroke(s) are added to the *Course Handicap* of the player playing from the higher-rated set of tees. (See Decision 3-5/1.)

Example 1: If men playing from the middle tees where the men's *USGA Course Rating* is 70.3 compete against men playing from the back tees where the men's *USGA Course Rating* is 72.6, the men playing from the back tees will add two strokes ($72.6 - 70.3 = 2.3$ rounded to 2) to their *Course Handicap*.

Example 2: If women playing from the forward tees from which the women's *USGA Course Rating* is 73.4 compete against men playing from the middle tees from which the men's *USGA Course Rating* is 70.9, the women will add three strokes ($73.4 - 70.9 = 2.5$ rounded to 3) to their *Course Handicap*.

b. Same Tees: Men vs. Women

Men and women playing from the same set of tees will have different ratings. Because the women's [USGA Course Rating](#) usually will be higher, women receive additional stroke(s) equal to the difference between ratings, with .5 or greater rounded upward.

Example: If women playing from the middle tees from which the women's [USGA Course Rating](#) is 77.3 compete against men playing from the middle tees from which the men's [USGA Course Rating](#) is 70.9, the women will add six strokes ($77.3 - 70.9 = 6.4$ rounded to 6) to their [Course Handicap](#).

The adjustment must be added to the higher-rated tee players' [Course Handicap](#) even if it causes a [Course Handicap](#) to exceed the maximum possible for the [Slope Rating](#) of the set of tees being played. Alternatively, it is permissible to subtract the extra handicap strokes from the [Course Handicap](#) of the player playing from the tees with the lower [USGA Course Rating](#).

How to Properly Apply Section 3-5:

Step 1: Calculate [Course Handicap](#) from tees played per Section 3-3.

Look up each player's [Course Handicap](#) on the appropriate gender-based [Course Handicap Table](#) for the tees played or use the [Course Handicap](#) formula:

[Handicap Index](#) x [Slope Rating](#) of tees played, and then divided by 113.

Example: A woman with a [Handicap Index](#) of 26.5 who is playing from tees with a [Slope Rating](#) of 120 has a [Course Handicap](#) of 28. (See Section 3-3 to compute a [Course Handicap](#).)

A man with a [Handicap Index](#) of 26.5 who is playing from tees with a [Slope Rating](#) of 115 has a [Course Handicap](#) of 27. (See Section 3-3 to compute a [Course Handicap](#).)

Step 2: Apply any [handicap allowance](#) per Section 9-4 (if applicable).

Example: Suppose the committee in charge of a four-ball stroke play competition determines that men compete at 90 percent and women at 95 percent of [Course Handicap](#).

The [Course Handicap](#) of 27 for the man in step 1 would be reduced to 24 handicap strokes ($27 \times .90 = 24.3$, with the difference of .4 or less rounded downward to 24 strokes).

The [Course Handicap](#) of 28 for the woman in step 1 would be reduced to 27 handicap strokes ($28 \times .95 = 26.6$, with the difference of .5 or greater rounded upward to 27 strokes).

Step 3: Calculate the difference in [USGA Course Rating](#) from tees played, with any difference of .5 or greater rounded upward.

Example: Suppose the man in step 2 is playing from the middle tees from which the [USGA Course Rating](#) is 73.7 and the woman is playing from the front tees from which the [USGA Course Rating](#) is 69.8.

[USGA Course Rating](#) 73.7 - [USGA Course Rating](#) 69.8 = 3.9, with the difference of .5 or greater rounded upward to 4 strokes.

Add the extra handicap strokes from step 3 to the [Course Handicap](#) of the player playing from the tees with the higher [USGA Course Rating](#). Alternatively, it is permissible to subtract the extra handicap strokes from the [Course Handicap](#) of the player playing from the tees with the lower [USGA Course Rating](#). (See Decision 3-5/1.)

Example: A man playing the tees with the higher [USGA Course Rating](#) (73.7), adds 4 strokes to his [Course Handicap](#) and competes off 28 strokes ($24 + 4 = 28$ strokes), while the woman in steps 2 and 3 competes off 27 strokes.

Alternatively, the woman could be reduced to a [Course Handicap](#) of 23 strokes ($27 - 4 = 23$ strokes), while the man in steps 2 and 3 competes off 24 strokes.

Note: Strokes given or received under the procedures in steps 2 and 3 above are to be disregarded when applying [ESC](#) for handicap purposes. (See Section 4-3, Examples 2 and 3.) *Example:* After a Section 3-5 adjustment, a player has added three strokes to a [Course Handicap](#) of 25. The [Course Handicap](#) when applying [Equitable Stroke Control](#) is 25. The correct handicap for competition is 28. (See Section 3-6.)

EXAMPLE: SECTION 3-5 PROMOTING EQUITABLE COMPETITION

Gary Gold Tees	vs.	Bob Blue Tees
10.4	Handicap Index	10.4
130	Slope Rating	140
12	Course Handicap	13
+71.1	USGA Course Rating	+73.2
83	Target Score	86
83	Target Score (minus)	86
-12	<u>Course Handicap (adjusted for Section 3-5)</u>	-15
=71	=Net Score	=71

See Appendix D for a sample letter explaining Sections 3-5 and 9-3c.

3-6. Applying Handicaps Correctly in Competitions

Rule 6-2 of "The Rules of Golf" requires players to apply handicaps correctly in competition. The correct handicap for competition should mean the [Course Handicap](#) adjusted for any strokes given or received as a result of [handicap allowance](#), condition of competition, players competing from different tees, or men and women from the same tees. (See Sections 9-4 and 3-5.)

■ a. Match Play

Before starting a match in a handicap competition, each player should determine from one another the player's respective [Course Handicap](#). If a player begins a match having declared a [Course Handicap](#) higher than that to which the player is entitled and this affects the number of strokes given or received, the player is disqualified; otherwise, the player must play off the declared [Course Handicap](#).

■ b. Stroke Play

In any round of a handicap competition, the player must ensure that the player's [Course Handicap](#) is recorded on the score card before it is returned to the committee. If no [Course Handicap](#) is recorded on the score card before it is returned (Rule 6-6b), or if the recorded [Course Handicap](#) is higher than that to which the player is entitled and this affects the number of strokes received, the player is disqualified; otherwise, the score stands.

Note: It is the player's responsibility to know the holes at which handicap strokes are to be given or received.