



## GOLF HANDICAPPING COLUMN - Fall 2002

### *"Index & Handicap - What's the difference?"*

by Mark Conratt

This year, I have received a rash of questions and comments regarding converting a USGA Handicap Index to a course handicap. From these questions, there is obviously a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the subject. Let me see if I can clear up a couple common misconceptions.

First of all, the most often asked question I receive is something like: "Why does my handicap not change when I go back to the Blue Tees, when everyone knows the Blue tees are 2-3 strokes harder?". Obviously, there is more information needed here. This question would probably have come from a low to middle handicapper who plays at a course where the slope ratings of the White and Blue tees are only a few points apart, but the course ratings substantially different. An example might be, White: 70.2/124, Blue: 72.8/127. One might also ask how a course with such a big difference in course ratings could have such a small difference in slope ratings. I'll get to that later.

First, you must understand that according to the USGA Handicap System to convert a USGA Handicap Index to a Course Handicap, you merely multiply the Index times the slope rating over a constant (113). Then you round the result to a whole number. For example, a 9.6 Index would be an 11 handicap (10.6 rounded) with a slope rating of 124. That same 9.6 Index would equate to the same 11 handicap (10.7 rounded) with a 127 slope rating. Try the math yourself with your index. Obviously, there is a point where your index would put you right on the bubble where a small slope difference would change your resulting handicap, but that is rare.

If everyone is playing the same set of tees, that is all you need to do. However, if some players are playing the white tees and some are playing the Blues, there is more work to be done. Now, you need to take into consideration the Course Rating numbers (70.2 and 72.8). According to the USGA Handicap System, you would add the rounded difference between the course ratings to the person's converted course handicap who is playing from the higher rated set of tees. In this example, you would add three strokes to the player's handicap playing from the Blue tees (2.6 rounded to 3). Now it makes more sense, doesn't it? You could also subtract three strokes from the player's handicap playing from the White tees.

The overriding principle this illustrates is that you can't just use the slope rating to evaluate different tees or different courses! You have to look at both the Course

Rating and the Slope Rating. This is a common, but unfortunate, mistake most golfers make.

The reason the USGA doesn't factor in the Course Rating difference between different sets of tees on the Conversion Charts or on the computer you may have at your club is that it is the same adjustment for all handicap ranges, so why bother. Personally, I don't agree. I would much rather see the USGA change this to factor both the Slope Rating and Course Rating into consideration converting a USGA Handicap Index to a course handicap. I think it would make things much more understandable to the average player. If you agree, send me an email or a snail-mail and I'll forward them on to the USGA.

Now, how can a course have a large difference between its white and blue Course Ratings, but only a small difference between its Slope Ratings? Well, there could be a number of reasons, but I think the most common would be that the course is so much longer from the Blues that, on a lot of holes, the bogey golfer cannot reach the green in regulation. Therefore, those golfers are hitting into the green, where strokes can be thrown away the fastest, due to obstacles like bunkers, heavy rough, etc., with a very short shot and probably won't get into any of this trouble. In other words, "Better to lay-up short of the green than to take three shots to get out of that \*%#!^\$ bunker". I like to say that the extreme length of the course is doing "Course Management" for the bogey golfer that he or she normally wouldn't do on their own.

I hope this has been helpful and you will all know the difference between your USGA Handicap Index and your Home Course Handicap.

