



GOLF HANDICAPPING COLUMN - Fall 2003

"Why can I no longer post home scores at my club?"

by Mark Conratt

It's late November and we're experiencing one of those gorgeous Indian Summer days. You anxiously go to the course, play 18 holes and go into the clubhouse to post your score. Unfortunately, the computer has been turned off or if it is on, the handicap program does not allow you to post. "What is going on", you ask?

Unless you are in Florida, or much of the southern part of our country, there is an active season for posting. The USGA defines "Active Season" as "...the period of time, determined by the authorized golf association having jurisdiction in a given area, during which scores made there will be accepted for handicap purposes."

To better understand why the USGA has mandated this, let's look at an extreme case. During the middle of the winter when the greens are frozen and there is usually snow on the ground, some golf nuts might still try to play something vaguely resembling golf. Obviously, it would be impossible for them to shoot a score anywhere near what they could shoot on a nice, warm day in July. Not only is the course in dramatically poorer condition, but, the players would no doubt be all bundled up and almost certainly out of practice. If allowed to post scores shot under these conditions, those players' USGA Handicap Indexes would go up dramatically. Since most of us have no desire to play in those conditions, it would not be fair to allow the "snowmen" to pad their handicaps in this way.

Now, for the more difficult decision: when to allow and not allow posting. Should we let each golfer decide what rounds should or should not be posted? I don't think so. Should we somehow announce to all golfers when a particular day is deemed acceptable? That doesn't sound very practical.

From an administrative standpoint, we golf administrators look at long-range weather patterns to establish what, year-in and year-out, are appropriate dates to begin and end the active season for posting in our area. Some years, we have an early spring or an unusually extended fall and it seems like those dates are incorrect. However, since we have to make decisions regarding the posting season long in advance, we cannot wait till the last moment to say: "OK you can start or stop posting, now". Furthermore, some courses, like some golfers, are able to get in shape or stay in shape longer than others. For consistency sake, and so that golfers and courses have some advance idea of the extent of the active posting season, we set it to be roughly the same every year.

As you go farther south the appropriate active posting season gets longer and longer until you get to a point where it lasts all twelve months - Florida, for instance. When a golfer travels in the spring or fall, he or she should ask if the course they are playing is currently in their active season. If it is, then any "Eligible Score" can be returned for handicap purposes. Needless to say, Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) should always be applied to any score posted. Hmmmm... these sound like topics for future "Golf Handicapping" columns to me.

To further complicate all this, in New York there is quite a dramatic difference in long-range weather patterns between the northern and southern parts of the state. Therefore, the NYSGA has established two different active posting seasons in our state. The NYC, southern tier and far western part of the state starts posting roughly around April 15th and stops posting roughly around November 1st. The rest of the state starts posting roughly around May 1st and stops posting roughly around October 15th, each year.

I hope this has been helpful.

