

Memo

To: Member States & Clubs
c.c.: GA Board, GA Handicapping & Course Rating Committee, GOLF *Link*, Tier 3 Providers
From: Simon Magdulski
Date: 23 April 2010
Subject: Handicapping Four-Balls & Procedures for Handling NCRs

Dear All,

Further to various frequently-asked questions, following is advice regarding:

- The handicapping of four-ball competitions under the new handicap calculation method.
- The procedures for handling non-returned score cards.

1. Handicapping of Four-Ball Competitions Under the New Handicap Calculation Method

The old regulations stipulated that an extended individual score is only to be used for handicapping purposes in the event that it will reduce a player's handicap. (Note: The technical meaning of this is that: "The adjusted score is only to be used for handicapping purposes in the event the handicap differential is better than the handicap.")

Whilst we were aware the application of the old regulation as it was written was potentially going to prove awkward to apply under the new calculation method, we were reluctant to make yet another interim change to the four-ball regulations (following the two updates distributed last year). Essentially, we were keen to see if the practical experience would indicate an immediate amendment really is necessary and it appears it is.

Effective immediately, the four-ball handicapping regulations contained in the Australian Men's & Women's Handicap System will be adjusted such that the previous stipulation that:

"The adjusted score is only to be used for handicapping purposes in the event that it will reduce a player's handicap."

WILL BE CHANGED TO

"The adjusted score is only to be used for handicapping purposes in the event the handicap differential is equal to or better than the handicap."

- Note i: We have tried to minimise any real change and hence the new regulation is very similar to the technical meaning of the old regulation.
- Note ii: Handicap Differential = Gross Score – Course Rating.
- Note iii: Four-ball competitions held between 9 April 2010 and the current date may be processed according to the new regulations set out above. (If such a competition has been processed according to the old regulations, it may be unprocessed and reprocessed in accordance with the new regulations at the discretion of the committee in charge of the competition.)

2. Procedures For Handling Non-Returned Score Cards in the Case of a Player who USUALLY Returns Their Card

Where a player (who usually returns their card (ie this covers the vast majority of players)) fails to return a score after playing a competition round, their round should be processed through GOLF *Link* with one of the following three score status options:

i) **'No Score – Approved'**

This option is to be chosen where a player fails to return a score as a result of the player's experience of any of the following being considered by the committee in charge of the competition to be of reasonable significance:

- (a) Illness.
- (b) Injury.
- (c) Emergency.
- (d) Bad weather. (Note: In this context, 'bad weather' does NOT generally need to be of such intensity as to warrant a suspension or cancellation of play. If some players are willing to continue does not mean it is necessarily unreasonable in this context for others to cease. Competition committees

should be reasonably understanding in determining when weather is considered to be 'bad'. It should be remembered that club golfers play the game as a recreation.)

- (e) Some other impinging condition or circumstance considered valid by the committee in charge of the competition.
- ii) **'No Score – Not Approved'**
- (a) This option is to be chosen when the player fails to return their card for a reason which is not approved by the committee in charge of the competition and where the committee does NOT deem the player to have been likely to have had a GOOD score).
- (b) This will cover the vast majority of cases in which a player who generally 'does the right thing' has failed to return a score card. We believe the vast majority of golfers try to 'do the right thing'.
- (c) This will result in GOLF *Link* automatically deeming the player's handicap differential for that round to be the equivalent of the worst handicap differential of the player's most recent (before the penalty score is added) 19 handicap differentials.
- iii) **'Disqualified' (accompanied by the listing of a score)**
- (a) This option is to be chosen when the player fails to return their card for a reason which is not approved by the committee in charge of the competition and where the committee DOES deem the player to have been likely to have had a GOOD score. (Note: A committee has complete discretion in the determination of whether a non-return will have been either a good or bad score – for a player to avoid being allocated a penalty score moving forward, they only need to return their score card at the completion of every round.)
- (b) The score the Club needs to enter for the round in question (in addition to choosing the 'Disqualified' Score Status option) is a value that is equivalent to the best handicap differential of the player's most recent (before the penalty score is added) 19 handicap differentials.
- (c) Whilst clubs are permitted to adopt a general rule deeming all non-returned cards to be 'good' scores, strong consideration should be given to the distortionary effect adding low scores can have to the handicap of a player who very rarely fails to return a card (and the vast majority of players fall into this category). Particularly as it is most likely that such a player will have had a 'poor' score. However, a club may consider such an outcome will serve as an effective catalyst for lessening the general incidence of failure to return scores.
- (d) For handicapping purposes, the score is treated in exactly the same fashion as if the player had not been disqualified.

Note i: Where a committee records a player's score status for a round as either 'Disqualified' (and also includes a score) or 'No Score – Not Approved', but then subsequently becomes aware of the score the player actually had, it SHOULD replace the 'penalty' entry with the actual score.

Note ii: The Decisions table in Section 9 of the Australian Men's & Women's Handicap System contains additional guidance regarding the handicap treatment of scores/cards which have been returned other than correctly (<http://admin.golfaustralia.org.au/site/content/document/00007884-source.pdf>).

Note iii: Where 'counting' rounds in a player's handicap record have been entered other than in accordance with the above guidelines, the chosen GOLF *Link* Score Status option should be amended in accordance with the procedures described in the GA memo to Clubs dated 9 April 2010 (<http://admin.golfaustralia.org.au/site/content/document/00007886-source.pdf>).

3. Players Who Have REGULARLY Failed to Return Score Cards

COMMENT: GA has always been aware that there exists a very small minority of players who regularly fail to return score cards. The move on 9 April to the new handicap calculation method has identified that this very small minority have in some cases been failing to return far more cards than had previously been felt to be the case by GA (and also seemingly by Clubs and State Associations). For example, we have become aware of instances where as many as 18 of a player's most recent 20 competition scores have, for no good reason, not been returned. Moving forward, it is important to have in place widely-understood procedures for addressing this issue generally.

POINTS TO NOTE

- i) The Australian Men's & Women's Handicap System contains the following stipulation: "The System is based on the assumption that every player will report every eligible score for handicapping purposes, regardless of where the round was played."
- ii) In addition to it being a breach of handicap system obligations, the practice of frequently failing to return score cards (for no good reason) appears to be viewed almost universally (by golfers and administrators alike) as poor at best.
- iii) GA has historically taken the view that it would be both impractical and undesirable to be too concerned about occasional incidences of a failure to return score cards.
- iv) However if too many cards are not returned (irrespective of how these non-returns are treated), the handicap will be distorted as it will be based either on too small a sample of the player's scores or too many assumptions (manifesting as penalty scores or omissions). Essentially, unless a player is returning the vast majority of their cards, there is no way to get around the fact that a calculated handicap will NOT be an accurate reflection of their play.
- v) As a result, any handicap posted for a player who has failed to return a material number of score cards (for example more than 25% of their eligible scores) MAY be considered by a committee in charge of a competition to have NOT been calculated in accordance with the Australian Men's & Women's Handicap System. Note:

This consideration does NOT apply for players who have failed to return cards for reasons set out under the heading 'No Score – Approved' in Section 2(i) above, even if such rounds have been recorded otherwise.

4. Competition Results (Past & Future) of Players Who Have REGULARLY Failed to Return Score Cards

- i) A committee in charge of a competition has full authority to consider a player who has regularly failed to return scores from their most recent 20 competition rounds (as per Section 3(v) above) to not have a valid handicap. GA will fully support any committee in charge of a competition which takes such a stance.
- ii) As a result, such players MAY be considered by the committee in charge of a competition to be ineligible to win a prize. (Such players should though be permitted to play amongst the competition field with a view to enabling them to return enough scores such that their handicap record will contain a reasonable proportion of recent real scores. Such players should also be permitted to return verified Extra Day Scores for the same purpose.)
- iii) There is no time limit on amending the results of such competitions or for retracting any prizes won. (Note: This includes for competitions held prior to 9 April 2010.)
- iv) This authority is provided in accordance with the Australian Men's & Women's Handicap System and the Rules of Golf.

5. Recommended Action for Handling the Issue of Players Who REGULARLY Fail to Return Score Cards

- i) Clubs should use their best endeavours to 'encourage' ALL players to regularly return cards.
- ii) Clubs have full authority moving forward to consider a player who in the past has regularly failed to return scores from their most recent 20 competition rounds (as per Section 3(v) above) to not have a valid handicap.
- iii) As an interim measure, Clubs are permitted to perform an 'Official Adjustment' to the handicap of a player in this category. The Club may choose to adjust the player's handicap to whatever value they feel is appropriate. The value chosen should err towards a value the player is least likely to want (which may be higher or lower depending on the player). Such decisions need to be made in accordance with Section 8 of the Australian Men's & Women's Handicap System (<http://admin.golfaustralia.org.au/site/content/document/00007884-source.pdf>) EXCEPT that the need to compile documentary support for a decision is waived at the discretion of the Club. Where a Club chooses to effect this procedure, it is recommended that the adjustment to the handicap be effected as soon as possible, with the ratification of the General Committee (Board of Directors) being sought at such later time as suits the operation of the Club.
- iv) Where 'counting' rounds in a player's handicap record have been entered other than in accordance with the guidelines set out in Section 2 above, the chosen GOLF *Link* Score Status option should be amended in accordance with the procedures described in the GA memo to Clubs dated 9 April 2010 (<http://admin.golfaustralia.org.au/site/content/document/00007886-source.pdf>).

6. Proposal to Amend Regulations Such That GOLF *Link* will Automatically Withdraw the Handicap of Any Player to Have More Than 25% (Reduced at a Later Point to 15%) of Their Most Recent 20 Rounds Recorded as 'No Score – Not Approved'

- i) The GA Handicapping & Course Rating Committee will consider a proposal to amend the Australian Men's & Women's Handicap System such that GOLF *Link* will automatically withdraw the handicap of any player to have more than 25% (reduced at a later point to 15%) of their most recent 20 Rounds recorded as 'No Score – Not Approved'. (Note: In order to reinstate a withdrawn handicap, a player would merely need to have their club enter into GOLF *Link* the verified actual scores they have previously failed to return, or to return enough scores moving forward such that their most recent 20 scores will no longer contain more than the permitted number of 'No Score – Not Approved' cards.)
- ii) A potential variation on the proposal outlined in Section 6(i) is that whilst the Australian Handicap would be withdrawn in such circumstances, GOLF *Link* would continue to display the calculated figure, but in a way that clarifies that the handicap no longer has 'full' status.
- iii) If a regulation is introduced such as is outlined in Section 6(i) or 6(ii), advance notice of for example three months will be provided to clubs in order to allow adequate communication of any change with their members.
- iv) We will be pleased to receive from Clubs or State Associations prior to Friday 4 June any thoughts on the proposals outlined in 6(i) or 6(ii), or any alternate proposed solution.

I hope the above information is of assistance. Please contact me if you have any queries.

Kind regards,

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