

HANDICAP HINTS (2024)



TO POST OR NOT TO POST: IS THAT A QUESTION?

The success of the math calculation in the USGA Handicap System™ is only as good as the data entered. Short and Sweet: the vast majority of scores are acceptable — there aren't many good excuses for not entering a score into your record.

The USGA offers various tools for posting acceptable scores: at the course computer, using the GHIN mobile app on your smartphone, going to GHIN.com, etc.

A key tenet of the Handicap System is that it is believed that a golfer will try to make the best score at every hole in every round. Play 18 holes under the principles of the Rules of Golf — absolutely an acceptable score. Actually, if you play at least 10 holes, you can still have an acceptable 18-hole “score”. **In 2024, the USGA will have a new process for posting any round with less than 18 holes but at least 9 holes. This requires hole-by-hole posting.** Please see the rules explained [here](#). Just know if you don't play at least 9 holes, you cannot post a score. So far, so good.

SCORES ON ALL COURSES

Both a USGA Course Rating and Slope Rating are required for a score to be posted.

SCORES IN ALL FORMS OF COMPETITION

Scores in match play and stroke play must be posted for handicap purposes. You might ask how to address a stroke conceded in a match. Enter the concept of “most likely score.” This concept also applies in a four-ball (often called best ball) when a player picks up on a hole because he or she cannot better the partner's score. The most likely score is The number of strokes already taken to reach a position on a hole, plus the number of strokes the player would most likely require to complete the hole from that position, plus any penalty strokes incurred during the play of the hole.

PREFERRED LIES

Scores made when playing preferred lies or winter rules result in acceptable scores for handicap purposes.

BAD ROUND

Please don't think that a “bad” score should not be entered, as such a score might knock another score out of your scoring record and impact the calculation of the Handicap Index. The most current data is the best data. Plus, if your round was derailed by one or two "blow-up" holes, you will likely adjust your score according to your Max. Under the WHS rules, your MAX is Net Double Bogey (Double Bogey plus the strokes you would normally receive on that hole).

There are only a few situations when a score is unacceptable for handicap purposes:

- Do not post if you play alone.
- When a player uses non-conforming clubs, non-conforming balls, or non-conforming tees,
- When two balls are played throughout the round,
- While not playing your own ball — think scramble, shamble, or foursomes (alternate shot).

Didn't play a full 18? Kicked the round off with a breakfast ball? Here are some interesting situations that might come up next time you're on the course and how you should handle them for score-posting purposes:

I live near a golf course, which allows me to squeeze in some holes after work. If I play by myself, can I post? What if my buddy joins me? What if I only play six holes?

Do not post if you play alone. Since 2016, the USGA Handicap System determined that solo rounds are unacceptable for posting. More importantly, as of 1/1/24, you cannot post six holes, adding par plus strokes for the last three holes. If you don't play 9, you can't post.

I have a standing tee time on Saturdays and match with my neighbor. On hot days, we often bail before we finish all 18 holes. Should we post since we give more putts than we make? How many holes do we have to play to post an 18-hole score before we go in for a beer and a brat?

Scores made during match play are acceptable rounds for posting if nine or more holes are played. Players should use their best judgment to determine their “most likely” score when a stroke or a putt is conceded. Enter your score hole-by-hole and leave those holes you did not finish blank. GHIN will compute an 18-hole differential for your round.

On weekends, we have a standing agreement that on the 1st hole, we can use a mulligan for our tee shot. Do we add one stroke, or how do we score the first hole using a mulligan?

Mulligans are not allowed under the Rules of Golf. Consider this a skipped hole, and leave the 1st hole blank when you post your score using the Hole-by-Hole method. GHIN will compute an 18-hole differential for your round.

What if I have a really bad day and make an eight on a par three and a ten on a par 4? My Course Handicap is 15. My neighbor's Course Handicap is 22.

Use your Max when you have a bad hole. Your MAX on every hole is Net Double Bogey (Double Bogey plus any strokes you have on that hole). This mandatory procedure reduces high scores for handicap purposes to make your handicap more reflective of your playing ability. If you are using an app to keep and post your score, you can put in the 8 or 10 and the app will adjust and post your MAX score.

What if we skip a couple of holes during our round because of slow play?

If you play nine holes or more when you post your hole-by-hole score, leave those holes blank. You must actually play nine holes to post a score.

What if I borrow my friend's new driver during our round and decide to play the ball I striped down the middle of the fairway for just one hole?

Your round is acceptable for posting, but leave that hole blank when you post your hole-by-hole score.

What if it is a rainy day and our club has adopted “preferred lies” where we can bump the ball (lift, clean, and place)?

Rounds posted when the club has adopted ‘preferred lies’ due to wet conditions are acceptable for posting and are to be posted.

TOURNAMENT FORMATS - SHOULD I POST?

Format of Play	Post ? Yes/No	Comments
Individual Stroke	Yes	Must complete 10 holes or more (all 9 for 9-hole score). Post hole-by-hole scores.
Individual Match	Yes	Upon close of a match of having played at least 9- holes or more, the players have the option of leaving the remaining holes blank. If the match is still in progress and your opponent concedes a hole, post the score you most likely would have made on that hole or your Max, whichever is less.
Four-ball (Better-ball) Stroke Play	Yes	The proper name of this format is Four-Ball; however, it is commonly referred to as better ball. By either name, you must post your score for handicapping purposes. In a stroke play format, if you are out of the hole and pick up to speed up play, put down the score you would most likely have made or your Max, whichever is less. For example, if your ball were no more than 5 feet from the hole lying 5, your “most likely” score would be a 6.
Four-ball(Better-ball) Match Play	Yes	Just as in match play format, you must post for handicapping purposes. If A & B are partners and A is putting for a 3 and makes it and player B has a 25-foot putt for a 4, player B should post a 5 for handicap purposes – i.e., the score most likely to have been taken for that hole – not to exceed your Max. Please Note: If the match ends before the 18 th hole, and you have played 10 holes, do not fill in the remaining holes with Par plus strokes; instead, allow GHIN to calculate your 18-hole differential.
Foursome (Scotch)	No	In a foursome format (better known as Scotch) you will not post your scores for handicapping purposes. In this format you are not playing your own ball throughout the round

Pinehurst/Chapman	No	In the Pinehurst/Chapman format or any modification of this format, you are not playing your own ball throughout the round and therefore, you cannot post your score for handicapping purposes.
Scramble	No	Scramble formats cannot be posted for handicap purposes because you are not playing your own ball from the original spot in which the ball was hit throughout the round.
Stableford/Point-Par Points	Yes	With any type of point tournament, e.g., Stableford, Tin Whistle, etc., you must post your score for handicapping purposes. If you are out of the hole, follow the USGA posting procedure of the score you most likely would have made, not to exceed you Max.
Eclectic Event	Yes	<p>With this event you must post all rounds for handicapping purposes. If you pick up on a hole you should follow the USGA posting procedures of posting the score you most likely would have made on that hole not to exceed Max.</p> <p>If there are any restrictions imposed by the committee such as limitation of number or types of clubs – e.g., irons- only event – the resulting score should not be posted for handicap purposes.</p>