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September (2013) news update – EGA Handicapping and Course Rating Committee

The EGA Handicapping and Course Rating Committee (HCRC) is committed to provide all members of the EGA with continuous news updates, in addition to the information contained in the minutes of the HCRC (available on the EGA website). The news updates are sent to all national associations and we recommend that the national associations distribute them at their discretion.



Handicap Questionnaire

During the spring of 2013, the HCRC administered a questionnaire to all EGA national associations holding a license to use the 2012-2015 EGA Handicap System. The purpose of the questionnaire was to get a better understanding of the handicapping situation and handicapping praxis among our national associations. We were also keen to see what parts of the system were working as expected, and to receive feedback to assist us in connection with future amendments. The results from the questionnaire are crucial for the HCRC in our continuous research-informed development of handicapping procedures in Europe. In this “news update” we would like to share some of the general findings and conclusions with all national associations (any national association interested in receiving an “individual” country-specific report from the Handicap Research Group should contact the EGA Handicap Secretary, Malcolm Gourd at: EGA-HCP@dgv.golf.de.)

Sample

Twelve national associations responded to the questionnaire, providing for a small but varied sample; the sample includes data from national associations with 500 players as well as national associations with more than 500,000 players. Needless to say, large variations make statistical analysis difficult as trends in the large associations can obscure general trends in the EGA as a whole, but we have tried to make allowances for that in our data reporting and when drawing conclusions. Overall, the sample is representative of more than 2,000,000 players, or more than 80 % of the player population under the jurisdiction of the EGA.

There were three areas in particular where the data showed consistent and statistically significant similarities or differences across the replies received.

Distribution of handicaps

In 75 % of the national associations, more than 50 % of the players have an EGA Exact Handicap which is higher than 26.5; actually as much as 30 % of all players have a handicap which is higher than 36.0 (i.e. not an EGA Handicap but some sort of club or national handicap). Only four in ten EGA-players have a handicap which is lower than 26.4.

Average handicap

The average male (EGA Exact) handicaps range between 20.0 and 25.3, with an overall average across EGA North, Central and South zones of 22.0. The average female (EGA Exact) handicaps range between 26.1 and 31.5, with an overall average across North, Central and South zones of 28.1.

Qualifying scores

There is a correlation between a player's handicap and the number of scores returned for handicapping purposes: the higher the handicap, the fewer the scores – players with lower handicaps consistently return more qualifying scores. With the current handicap distribution (see above) it is not surprising that in many national associations, players return far fewer qualifying scores (EDS or competition scores) than is desired if the system should work optimally.

In many national associations, the average number of qualifying scores returned is well below the mark needed to qualify for an active handicap (four scores in a calendar year). It is also notable that significant numbers of EGA-players do not play at all in qualifying competitions, and those that do play in competitions play, on average, in very few. Data submitted from one of the larger national associations within the EGA indicates that as much as 60 % of the players within that country did not play in a single qualifying competition (though they may well have played in non-qualifying competitions, e.g. match play, four-ball or foursome events), and less than 20 % of players in that country played in more than four qualifying competitions. These numbers are representative for some other national associations as well, but not for all.

There are significant differences between respondents concerning the *type* of qualifying score returned. In some countries (particularly countries in the North Zone) there is a fairly even distribution between the number of Extra Day Scores and scores from Qualifying Competitions returned. In some other countries (notably some countries in the South zone) qualifying scores come almost exclusively from qualifying competitions. Patterns within the Central zone are less coherent.

Summary

- Most EGA-players have a high EGA Exact Handicap (50 % have a handicap higher than 26.5).
- The average EGA Exact Handicap is 22.0 (men) and 28.1 (women).
- Typically, players with high handicaps play in few (if any) competitions compared to low handicap players.
- Significant numbers of EGA-players do not return enough qualifying scores.

Conclusions

Two stereotypes of EGA-golfers emerge from the survey: a competitive golfer and, for the want of a better term, a recreational golfer. It is perhaps a little surprising that the number of recreational golfers is so high. Additional data indicates that the number of recreational golfers has grown dramatically over the last couple of decades, and that it continues to grow steadily. We estimate that the distribution in the continent of Europe at the moment is approximately 80 % recreational golfers and 20 % competitive golfers (by "competitive" we mean players who play in at least four qualifying competitions every year). The EGA Handicap System was developed from the CONGU men's system where both the playing culture and the player handicap distribution is entirely different, with much more competition-only rounds for handicap purposes and with a much smaller percentage of players with high handicaps. Owing to its origin, the current EGA Handicap System is essentially a system which assumes that the majority of the scores submitted for handicap purposes come from qualifying competitions; what is more, the system structures are not really designed to take into account the much more inconsistent performance of a large population of high handicap players. The HCRC believe that, in view of the current situation, it is pertinent to ask whether it is desirable to have a handicap system that only works very well for competitive players, but offers limited attraction and possibly unnecessary complexity to players who do not play competitively.

As part of the regular continuous review process, the EGA has decided to launch an investigation to see whether the EGA Handicap System can be designed so that appropriate precision can be maintained for those who need it (essentially competitive golfers), while more flexible (and much less rigidly managed) system structures can be made available for golfers who play golf as a recreational rather than competitive sport. The overall aim of the review will be to see whether it is possible to create a more inclusive handicap system that caters for and is sensitive to different player profiles.

It should be stressed that the process leading up to a concrete proposal to this effect will be characterized by continuous consultation with the EGA membership. A status report will be given to the 2013 EGA Annual General Meeting. This will be followed by handicapping conferences and workshops in the EGA zones during the winter of 2013-2014 where ample opportunity will be given to discuss any proposed revisions. National associations will then be allowed time during 2014 to internally evaluate a first operational version, and time to consult with their software providers. Following a constructive dialogue with national associations a second version will be prepared. At that point, an introduction/implementation policy will also be established. In the light of experience, we intend to give national associations considerable latitude to expand the options for recreational players in line with local requirements and the national golfing culture, i.e. a “voluntary” phased implementation process is anticipated.

Hans Malmström
Chairman, EGA Handicapping and Course Rating Committee