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## South African Golf Association

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### **1. Why have we gone to a “single handicap” system?**

From media and golf clubs, the SAGA was advised that most golfers in the country disliked the handicap system introduced mid 2007. The SAGA has announced that as from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010, the allowance will be discarded, and players will now use their handicap in all forms of competition that previously required the use of the “Allowance”. Should the term “Allowance” still appear on screens and till slips at those clubs currently supported by NGN, they are to be disregarded from 1<sup>st</sup> April.

### **2. Was South Africa the only country with two handicaps?**

At no stage did we have two handicaps. We had a handicap and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of handicap to be used during Better-ball, which was termed an “Allowance” or “Competition Allowance”, and displayed on screens and till-slips so that the golfer did not have to perform the calculation. An unfortunate piece of terminology that entered the SA golfing scene was “high-handicap and low-handicap”. The origins of this are obscure, but were never sanctioned by the SAGA.

### **3. Why does the world not have a uniform handicap system?**

This is a difficult question as the answer is probably somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, as it would require amateur golf’s two governing bodies, the R&A, and the USGA, to reach consensus on how that should operate. The R&A devolve handicap responsibility to the national body of each of the countries affiliated to it, and for South Africa, that body is the SAGA. The USGA by contrast, insist that to carry a USGA handicap, the USGA handicap system has to be adopted. The USGA has roughly 40 million golfers and the R&A is responsible for a further 30 million, so the numbers that would be affected are substantial.

### **4. Does the R&A not have a handicap system for the UK?**

No, that responsibility rests with CONGU (Council of National Golf Unions) which acts as the controlling body for England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Each of these country Unions used to operate their own handicap system, and in some smaller clubs, may continue to do so.

### **5. Which system is the SAGA handicap system based upon?**

The USGA system with the primary handicap calculation being done on the best 10 of the last 20 valid scores. Valid scores are those with actual gross scores rather than N/R (Non-return). The essence of both systems is that all scores, both club and casual are entered for handicap purposes, in direct contrast to many other countries where only certain competition rounds are eligible for handicap computation.

#### **6. How is the SAGA system different to the USGA?**

The key difference is that we allow just the gross score to be entered, whereas the USGA system requires that the score made on each hole be entered for a specific round. Clearly, hole-by-hole scoring is far more accurate, but does require a small amount of additional time to enter 18 scores rather than just one. The new SAGA Handicap Server makes provision for players to enter hole-by-hole scores, but will initially only expect a single gross score as at present.

The other main difference is that the maximum score allowed per hole for handicap purposes, is noticeably stricter in South Africa, for if we used the USGA's Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) table, handicaps would rise significantly, and there is some indication that they are a little too high already.

#### **7. Why use 100% as handicap, surely the old 85% was better?**

The USGA used to apply an 85% factor against the best 10 out of 20 differentials, but this was discarded at the beginning of 1978, as their research indicated that it was unfair to mid and high handicap golfers. It was then replaced by a 96% factor applied to the best 10 out of 20 differentials, which we will also introduce when the SAGA Handicap Server goes live later this year.

From 1978, the USGA simultaneously introduced a typical allowance factor of 90% for most team competition formats. This meant that the handicaps for Better-ball competitions were actually 90% of 96%, an effective 86.4%, which for their purposes was close enough to their original 85%. We will not be implementing this element of the USGA system as local players have demanded that no form of allowance is acceptable.

#### **8. Why is my maximum score per hole linked to the Stroking of the hole?**

When we initially moved from an 85% factor to 100% in mid-2007, it became clear that because of the increased handicaps, many players were posting increased gross scores as a result of having additional holes where they could post 2- or 3-over Par. This further increased handicaps. This was the rationale for re-introducing the maximum per hole to be linked to the handicap being used and the stroking of the hole.

#### **9. I used to be able to take 2- or 3-over Par anywhere on the course, why was it removed?**

This implementation was the result of a previous effort by SAGA to balance the handicaps of low-handicap golfers against high-handicappers. The number of these 2-overs (or 3-overs) was limited according to the handicap of the player. Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect by allowing high-handicap golfers to take even more 3-overs, including Stroke 18, 17 etc holes, which on many courses are the Par 3's, necessitating the removal of this element from our local handicap system.

#### **10. Do other countries apply a percentage of handicap for Better-ball?**

Yes, every other country does so, the figure varying from 90% (USGA) down to 75% (CONGU). The reason that they all do this is that the higher the handicap, the more likely that a player can achieve an increased number of 3-pointers (assuming that Stableford is the competition) and applying a percentage of handicap smooths the effect of these extra points on a Better-ball result, so that various combinations of handicap playing together can achieve similar results. Player performance varies and good results are typically obtained when both players play well.

#### **11. How do we eliminate manipulation of handicaps?**

1. There is no handicap system anywhere in the world that can deal with this problem. The responsibility rests with individual clubs ensuring that they monitor the performance of their club members to ensure that allocated handicaps properly reflect the inherent ability of each player.

There is also the responsibility of peer review between players. Our new system will allow easy and up-to-date review of scores entered by any player, so players can check that the exceptional score achieved by their partner or opposition has actually been entered into the system.

#### **12. Why not handicap only on competition rounds?**

The answer reflects the very social nature of golf played in this country, which is very similar to the profile of golf played in the USA and supported by the USGA system. If we were to handicap only on such rounds, we would have many players being denied a handicap, as there are a significant number of players who do not compete in club competitions, just as there are in the USA.

Many other countries have a strictly controlled approach as to which rounds may count toward handicap computation and simply ignore all other rounds played. This leads to a possible situation where a player plays poorly during the handicap qualifying rounds and then plays remarkably well in all other competitions. Both CONGU (British) and EGA (European Golf Association) have experienced this situation and are continually making small modifications to address the problem, just as we do.

#### **13. Do we need to distinction between regular club and**

**casual players?**

Probably, as this is done in some other countries. We have considered carrying a flag on our new system that distinguishes between the two kinds of player. Perhaps we could call this separation a "national" and "club only" handicap. Clubs could then use a "condition of competition" clause that restricts entry to large sponsored competitions to those carrying a "national" handicap only. The SAGA Handicap Server would be able to implement this automatically.

**14. Should there be a minimum number of rounds played per year?**

In many handicap systems elsewhere, should a player not play a minimum number of handicap qualifying competitions in any given year, the handicap lapses. We will introduce something similar when the SAGA Handicap Server is operative. Only scores recorded in the past 12 months will be eligible for handicap computation. Should the number of eligible scores drop below 5, the minimum number required for us to compute a handicap, the player's handicap will lapse until the minimum number of eligible scores is available.

**15. Why does the system not adjust scores made on difficult days?**

The 2007 system made provision for adjusting the course rating automatically to reflect poor weather conditions or difficult course setup. This is a technically difficult part of the system to implement but will be incorporated when the SAGA Handicap Server goes live. This will reduce the effect of inflated handicap differentials on days when the average nett score is substantially above Par.

By contrast, on days when most of the scores are good, the system will automatically adjust the rating downward. Both of these adjustments will typically only be made on competition days.

**16. What about 9-hole scores?**

We have recognized that there numerous instances where players only play 9-hole rounds, sometimes having 9-hole competitions and these scores never make their way into the handicap system. The current handicap manual makes provision for pairing two nine-hole scores, but includes some fairly stringent pre-requisite conditions, meaning that it is unlikely that this facility is used.

Research in other countries has shown that assuming a score for the "other" or "virtual" 9-holes, to make a complete 18-hole score for handicap purposes is effective, and we may seriously consider this for future implementation. Once again our new SAGA Handicap Server makes provision for this.