

2024 World Handicap System™ Revision

Key Changes FAQs - By Topic

Topic: Treatment of 9-hole Scores

How is the treatment of 9-hole scores changing under the WHS™ in 2024?

Currently, 9-hole scores must be combined with another 9-hole score to create an 18-hole Score Differential™ before they can be counted for handicap purposes. Recognizing the growing popularity of 9-hole rounds, the WHS will make it easier and quicker for those scores to be used in the 2024 revision.

Beginning January 2024, when a player posts a 9-hole score, the WHS will automatically calculate an 18-hole Score Differential for the round, based on the player's 9-hole Score Differential and their current Handicap Index®, allowing the 9-hole round to be considered in the player's Handicap Index calculation right away.

There is an important change that will be implemented as part of the 2024 revision to complement the new treatment of 9-hole scores – golfers will be required to play and post all 9 holes with a valid 9-hole Course Rating™ and Slope Rating® whereas before a minimum of 7 holes was allowed.

What are the benefits of this change?

Golfers will benefit from this change in the following ways:

- This change benefits the many golfers who regularly play and post 9-hole rounds because it is more responsive, and golfers will no longer have to wait for another 9-hole score to be posted for an 18-hole Score Differential to be created.
 - This also allows players to reach a full scoring record of 20 scores more quickly.
- It provides a better indicator of how a player will normally perform over 18 holes on a given day when compared to combining 9-hole scores.
- This new method produces a more consistent and comparable Handicap Index for those who frequently post 9-hole scores. For example, under the previous method:
 - Combining two independent 9-hole scores often resulted in more volatility and was highly dependent on the order in which scores were combined.
 - It was also common for two good 9-hole scores to be combined that produced an 18-hole Score Differential that was better than any of the player's 18-hole scores made over 18 consecutive holes. The impact was an artificially low Handicap Index.

When a 9-hole score is posted, how is the player’s expected score determined to create an 18-hole Score Differential?

Once the player’s 9-hole Score Differential has been calculated, it is combined with an expected score based on the player’s current Handicap Index to create an 18-hole Score Differential.

Because an expected score for the player is a neutral value, a good 9-hole round (relative to the player’s ability) will result in a good 18-hole Score Differential, and an average 9-hole round will result in an average 18-hole Score Differential, and so on.

It’s important to note that the expected score is based on the average Score Differential of a player with a given Handicap Index and a normal distribution of scores – so it is not specific to each player.

When a player is posting initial scores to establish a Handicap Index, how are 9-hole scores treated?

To establish a Handicap Index, a player must play and post a total of 54 holes, which can be made up of 9- and/or 18-hole scores. The use of expected score does not come into play until a golfer plays and posts 54 individual hole scores.

Once the player has posted scores from a total of 54 holes and an expected score can be determined for the player, an 18-hole Score Differential will be calculated for each 9-hole score and displayed within their scoring record. At this time the player will have established their initial Handicap Index.

How will the score-posting procedure change for a 9-hole score?

We anticipate no significant impact to the process of posting 9-hole scores, such as through an app (for example, the GHIN app), an Allied Golf Association’s website, or kiosk at the golf course. However, for a 9-hole score to be acceptable, the 9 holes played must correspond to a 9-hole Course Rating and Slope Rating.

How will a scoring record be displayed when a 9-hole score is posted?

When a 9-hole score is posted, the player’s 9-hole adjusted gross score will be displayed, along with the score type “N”. The 9-hole Course Rating and Slope Rating from the course and tees played will also be displayed. However, an 18-hole Score Differential for the round will be displayed and considered in the calculation of a Handicap Index.

What will happen to uncombined nine-hole scores when this change is implemented?

When the 2024 World Handicap System revision goes into effect, any eligible (or uncombined) 9-hole scores will receive an 18-hole Score Differential for immediate inclusion in the scoring record. This may result in a change to the Handicap Index for some players.

- This applies only to players who have an established Handicap Index at the time of the WHS revision.
- This 18-hole Score Differential will be assigned the date on which the 9 holes were played and will fit into the scoring record accordingly.

My golf course has a popular 9-hole route that features holes on both the front and back nine. Will these scores be able to be posted?

If an alternative 9-hole routing exists for players at a course, scores can be posted for handicap purposes if the club has received a 9-hole Course Rating and Slope Rating for the routing from their local [Allied Golf Association](#).

Topic: Treatment of 10-17-hole Scores

What is changing about the way 10–17-hole scores are treated in 2024?

Currently, when 10 to 13 holes are played, scores made on holes 10 through 13 are disregarded and a 9-hole score is posted. When 14-17 holes are played, net par is used for the remaining holes to allow an 18-hole score to be posted.

Beginning in 2024, when a player with a Handicap Index plays 10-17 holes, a Score Differential value will be created based on the holes played, and the player's expected score for the remaining holes not played is added to that value to produce an 18-hole Score Differential.

To facilitate this change, when a player plays between 10-17 holes, they will be required to post their scores hole-by-hole so the appropriate Score Differential can be calculated from the holes that were played to combine with the expected score for the holes not played.

What are the benefits of this change?

Although 10–17-hole rounds are uncommon for most players and are typically a result of circumstances such as darkness, inclement weather, or match play where players do not finish the round after the match has been decided, this change will result in more flexibility in terms of posting scores and more accurate Score Differentials. Here's why:

- Today, scores made on holes 10-13 are disregarded if fewer than 14 holes are played, and this change will add flexibility by allowing scores made on those holes to be used to create an 18-hole Score Differential.
- Currently, when 14-17 holes are played, net par is used on any remaining holes not played. By replacing net par with the use of expected score to produce an 18-hole Score Differential, players will see more equity and consistency – since the expected score is not course-specific or reliant upon the course's stroke index allocation.
 - Net par will still be available for limited use where practical, and at the discretion of the Handicap or Competition Committee, however, the expected score will be used as the default position for holes not played.

How will this change impact the score-posting procedure?

Beginning in 2024, when posting a score, players will have the option to post a 9-hole score, 18-hole score, or 10-17-hole score. Score posting products will notify the player that if they are posting a score in which 10-17 holes were played, the player will be required to post as a hole-by-hole score. This will allow USGA® Centralized Computation to produce an expected score for the player for the holes that were not played.

Note that score posting products will require a minimum of 9 individual hole scores that correspond to a 9-hole Course Rating and Slope Rating for a score to be posted.

How will a player's score be displayed in their scoring record when a 10–17-hole score is posted?

When 10-17 holes are played and a score is posted, the total number of strokes taken will be displayed, with the number of holes played denoted in parenthesis. For example, if the player plays 14 holes and takes 62 total strokes, their score will be displayed as **62 (14)**. Players will also see the 18-hole Course Rating and Slope Rating for the tees played, along with the 18-hole Score Differential that was created using the player's expected score for the holes not played.

If someone plays 10-17 holes, will it count as 18 holes for the purposes of establishing a Handicap Index?

When establishing a Handicap Index, or building up to 54 holes played and posted, if a player plays between 10 and 17 holes, the score made on the 9 holes with a 9-hole Course Rating and Slope Rating would be posted for handicap purposes. Any remaining holes would be disregarded.

Will the Handicap Committee at the golf club be able to revise scores for 10–17-hole rounds?

Yes, the Handicap Committee will be able to edit 10–17-hole scores.

Will a Score Differential most likely be lower, higher, or the same as it was using the net par method?

Whether a Score Differential would be lower, higher, or the same using expected score as opposed to the net par method depends on the stroke index allocation of the course being played. The USGA's position is moving away from this variability is a positive. Another important point is that a Score Differential value is calculated for the holes played. Then, expected score is used for the holes not played. As the final step, these values are added to determine the 18-hole Score Differential.

Topic: Reduced Minimum Course Length

What will the new minimum length requirement be for a course and/or set of tees to be issued a Course Rating and Slope Rating?

The World Handicap System has approved a low-end limit for courses to be issued a Course Rating and Slope Rating of 1,500 yards for 18-holes or 750 yards for 9-holes. This is a reduction from the current minimums of 3,000 yards for 18-holes and 1,500 yards for 9-holes.

As a result, more than 600 additional golf courses (mostly par-3 courses) will qualify for a Course Rating and Slope Rating if desired.

What are the benefits of this change?

The WHS continues to be more inclusive and portable, which is supported by the following:

- Scores will be acceptable for handicap purposes at shorter length golf courses and the Handicap Index can be used to determine a Course Handicap™/Playing Handicap™ for both casual rounds and competitive events at these shorter courses.
- As these courses are often played by either beginners or players looking to extend their golfing experience as their hitting distance decreases, it provides these players with an opportunity to enjoy the game more with the use of a Handicap Index.
- There is a current trend in golf where more short courses are being built and shorter tees are being added at full length courses to accommodate more players based on their ability and looking to get in quick rounds with flexible work schedules.

There are over 600 courses that will qualify for a Course Rating and Slope Rating in 2024. What is a realistic timeline for them to be rated?

Golf courses are issued a Course Rating and Slope Rating by the [Allied Golf Association](#) with jurisdiction in their area. Many AGAs have already begun scheduling rating visits with par-3 courses for inclusion in the WHS in 2024, but it will ultimately depend on the AGAs bandwidth, schedule, etc.

How does a course that is now eligible get scheduled for a rating visit?

Any golf course interested in obtaining a Course Rating and Slope Rating is encouraged to contact their local [Allied Golf Association](#). A facility is not required to have an [authorized golf club](#) for its course to be rated. If the course has frequent play by golfers with a Handicap Index, then it should be rated by the AGA.

Can a traditional length course add shorter tees that qualify based on the new minimum length and get those tees rated?

From a USGA perspective, the initial priority is to rate par 3/short courses that were previously not eligible for Ratings, as these courses may not currently have an option for players to post scores or maintain a Handicap Index. However, if a facility with a traditional length course would like to obtain a Course Rating and Slope Rating for an additional forward set of tees, the club is encouraged to contact their local [Allied Golf Association](#) to check their availability and determine next steps.

Will a player's Handicap Index be accurate if they consistently play par-3 courses.

For a player who consistently plays par-3 courses, the Handicap Index will be reflective of the scores the player shot on those courses and has shown to produce good portability when playing longer tees/courses.

Is the 750-yard lower limit supported by research?

Research by extracting par-3-hole scoring data from "regulation" courses indicated good correlation between the Handicap Index and hole scores down to the 750-yard lower limit.

What if some people who primarily play these short courses are not accustomed to posting?

We see this as an opportunity to encourage new players (or players who play shorter length courses) to establish a Handicap Index. Lowering the minimum length for a course to be rated means there will be more opportunities for players to easily post scores through technology such as a mobile app or web site.

Will the Short Course Rating process be the same, using the same Course Rating System™ Guide?

Yes, Course Ratings performed by the Allied Golf Associations is expected to involve the same on-course procedure, however the formulas used to calculate the Course Rating and Slope Rating will be adjusted to account for the shorter length of these courses.

Topic: Handicap Review

What are the new Handicap Review tools that will be made available to clubs beginning in 2024?

Along with the introduction of additional reporting tools, USGA handicap administration software will include enhanced capabilities including the ability for the software to produce recommend actions for the Handicap Committee to consider. The enhanced handicap review tools will:

- Identify potential abnormalities within a player's scoring record, including the ability to identify players who are frequently scoring above, or below, their expected scoring range, and
- Make a recommended adjustment to the Handicap Index of each player that has been identified.
 - The minimum adjustment recommended will be 1 stroke, up or down.
 - An adjustment above 3 strokes should only be made under unusual circumstances, such as injury or illness.

Any recommended adjustment will be applied only at the discretion of the Handicap Committee, based on any other knowledge or evidence that they have about the player and their demonstrated ability.

What specifically does the tool evaluate to identify players who may require an adjustment to their Handicap Index?

The handicap review reporting tools compare a player's Handicap Index, individual scores and scoring patterns against expectations using the following:

- The player's expected score in their next round,
- The expected standard deviation of the player's Score Differentials,
- The player's expected scoring range, and
- The frequency and trend of scores posted.

The number of abnormal scores in the player's scoring record as a percentage of the total number will also be considered. The larger the number of scores in a player's scoring record, the more scores above or below their expected scoring range are required for the player to be flagged for a handicap review.

How will clubs be expected to utilize these tools?

Handicap review is a core responsibility of the Handicap Committee, and these tools are intended to assist with that process.

If a player is flagged with a recommended Handicap Index adjustment, then the Handicap Committee must provide notice of the pending adjustment with an option to appeal. After consultation with the player, the Handicap Committee is strongly encouraged to use that information along with any other knowledge about the player to determine whether to:

- Accept the recommended adjustment,
- Increase or decrease the adjustment, or
- Not make the adjustment.

Regardless of the outcome, the player must be informed of the final decision.

How will members of a USGA/AGA GC be impacted by this change?

Allied Golf Associations are encouraged to provide playing opportunities for members of their respective USGA/AGA GC to facilitate engagement and peer review, as well as maintain the integrity of the WHS. However, due to the size of the club's territory and volume of membership, the Handicap Committee at the AGA will often have limited knowledge about the player's demonstrated ability outside of what is recommended by the handicap review tools.

If a player is flagged with a recommended Handicap Index adjustment, then the AGA must provide notice of the pending adjustment with an option to appeal. After consultation with the player, AGAs are encouraged to either accept the recommended Handicap Index adjustment and continue to review the player's score posting activity, or not make an adjustment. In either case, the player must be informed of the final decision.

Can a Handicap Committee make a Handicap Index adjustment if not recommended by the review tools?

Yes, any Handicap Index adjustment is ultimately at the discretion of the Handicap Committee. In the decision-making process, the Handicap Committee should consider any other knowledge or evidence that they have about the player and their demonstrated ability. A detailed list of considerations can be found in Appendix D of the Rules of Handicapping.