

LIBERTY CORNER, N.J., USA and ST. ANDREWS, Scotland (Nov. 8, 2023) – The USGA and The R&A today announced the first update to the World Handicap System™ (WHS™) as part of an ongoing review of the Rules of Handicapping™ and Course Rating System™ with a continued emphasis on accuracy, consistency and equity. The latest revisions will go into effect beginning January 1, 2024.

Many countries have seen significant increases in the number of scores being submitted for handicapping purposes since the WHS was introduced in January 2020, reflecting golf's broadening appeal. More than 100 million scores have been posted each year, unifying millions of golfers through a standard measure of playing ability. The 2024 update leverages the performance data gathered from around the world, in addition to feedback received from many of the 125 countries now using the system.

Significant updates to the WHS include:

- **Inclusion of Shorter-Length Golf Courses Within the Course Rating System:** The overall length requirements for Course Rating in the WHS will be significantly reduced. A set of tees on an 18-hole course may be as short as 1,500 yards [1,370 meters] to be eligible for a Course Rating and Slope Rating®, and a set of tees on a 9-hole course may be as short as 750 yards [685 meters]. This change is intended to expand the WHS to thousands of shorter length courses, including par-3 courses, and enable more golfers to obtain and use a Handicap Index.
- **Use of an Expected Score for a Hole Not Played:** Improvements have been made to the method used to handle holes not played, which will now be based on a player's expected score rather than a score of net par. This new method will produce a 9-hole or 18-hole Score Differential that more accurately reflects a player's ability. As golfers across the world are playing more 9-hole rounds, an expected score can also be used to convert a 9-hole round into an 18-hole Score Differential. For some countries, this means that 9-hole scores will be considered in the calculation of a player's Handicap Index immediately after the day of play, rather than waiting to combine with another 9-hole score.
- **Playing Conditions Calculation Adjustments Made More Frequent:** The Playing Conditions Calculation (PCC) has been modified to increase the likelihood of an adjustment for abnormal playing conditions. National associations were given discretion, beginning in July 2022, to introduce this revision in their computation platforms, which will be complete by April 1, 2024.
- **Enhanced Guidance on Conducting a Handicap Review:** The role of the Handicap Committee is vital to the success of the WHS and the Rules recommend that a Handicap Review is conducted regularly, or at least once a year to ensure a Handicap Index® remains reflective of a player's ability. New reporting tools have been developed that national associations can incorporate into their handicapping software to assist Committees in conducting the review process effectively and consistently.

Since its inception, the WHS has embraced the many ways golf is played around the world by giving national associations flexibility to apply regional discretionary items, with the objective for greater alignment over time. For this reason, the governing bodies expect countries to continue to shift the way they calculate Course Handicaps so that they are relative to par, making a golfer's target score to "play to handicap" more intuitive.

Golfers are encouraged to visit their national association's website to learn more about the discretionary items that apply to their region. Contact details for national associations can be found on the WHS website here: <https://www.whs.com/#association>.

The USGA and The R&A have also recently launched a new WHS Software Accreditation and Interoperability Programme to help ensure that there is consistency and accuracy in the calculation of handicaps worldwide, and to assist with the retrieval of a Handicap Index and the return of away scores

from country to country.

Steve Edmondson, Managing Director – Handicapping & Course Rating at the USGA said, “The game of golf continues to evolve and the WHS has embraced those changes in a dynamic way to help all golfers, everywhere they play. It is a monumental time in golf, and improving both the accessibility of obtaining a Handicap Index and leveraging powerful data and technology to easily and accurately track performance is a great step forward.”

Claire Bates, Director – Handicapping at The R&A said, “We have made good progress in the early stages of WHS but we know there are always areas that can be improved as we gather more data and information on the system from around the world. Conducting a regular review process is important in terms of good governance and enables us to examine some of the key areas in which we have received feedback. We will continue to work with the handicapping bodies and national associations around the world to ensure that the WHS is providing golfers with a system that provides a sensible balance between inclusivity and integrity, making it as easy as possible to get a Handicap Index, subject to meaningful safeguards.”

The USGA and The R&A jointly launched and govern the WHS to provide a modern and responsive system, that gives an accurate reflection of a player’s demonstrated ability. It is calculated by incorporating the Rules of Handicapping and the Course Rating System and is administered by a range of handicapping bodies and national associations around the world.

The more flexible and accessible nature of the system has led to the introduction of successful initiatives from a number of national associations aimed at making it easier to obtain a Handicap Index and be part of the WHS.

Mirroring the review processes of other areas of governance in golf, including the Rules of Golf and the Rules of Amateur Status, reviews of the WHS will continue to be conducted at regular intervals, taking into consideration performance data and feedback to help identify areas for improvement.

To learn more about the World Handicap System, please visit www.WHS.com or (in the U.S.) www.usga.org/whs.

<https://mediacenter.usga.org/press-releases?item=123050>