

HANDICAP INFORMATION 1 - THE BASICS

How do I obtain a handicap?

An official handicap (CONGU® Unified Handicap) can be allotted only to a member of a golf club that is affiliated, as defined, to the Malta Golf Association. To obtain a handicap a player is required to submit a number of cards over 18 holes at his home club (preferably over a measured course), in such a manner as his home club specifies, but not less than three. A responsible person acceptable to the Handicap Committee must sign each card.

Any score of 2 over par for men and 3 over par for ladies shall be amended to 2 [3] over par respectively. After these adjustments have been made an exact handicap (whole number) should be allotted equivalent to the number of strokes by which the best of the submitted cards differs from the standard scratch score.

What is the maximum handicap that can be allotted?

The maximum CONGU® handicap that can be allotted is 28 for men and 36 for ladies (maximum exact handicap 28.0 and 36.0 respectively).

Why does golf have a handicap system?

In amateur golf, unlike many sports, the majority of competitions cater for players who have a wide range of golfing ability. If no allowance were made for this variation then the relatively small number of high-ability players would be successful in all competitions.

The dictionary definition of a handicap in a sport is "the advantage, or disadvantage, given to competitors in an attempt to equalise their chances".

Throughout the world a golf handicap is recognised as representing the number of strokes that need to be deducted from the players actual (gross) score so that, when he plays to his average ability, his nett score equals a "standard score". The amount deducted (the players "handicap") is calculated so as to be related to the player's ability at the time he plays in the competition.

Are all handicap systems the same throughout the world?

No, there are four main handicap systems used by golfing authorities or governing bodies. The system used in Malta, is the Council of National Golfing Unions (CONGU®) Unified Handicapping System (UHS). Apart from Malta, clubs affiliated to the golf unions of England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Gambia, North Cyprus, Tanzania and United Arab Emirates use the CONGU® UHS. The handicapping system used in most European countries is that from the European Golf Association. However, in stroke play, all systems use the principle of deducting from the gross score to produce a nett score.

What are the objectives of the CONGU® Unified Handicapping System?

The objectives are:

- To make sure, as far as is possible, that players' handicaps are allotted and adjusted in such a way that they reflect each player's ability relative to other players;
- To standardise the conditions under which the scores are obtained and the way that each club administers handicaps so that handicaps obtained at one club equally apply at other clubs.

How does the CONGU® Handicapping System do this?

The CONGU® System uses scores returned by the player from competitions that are held on courses where a standard score (the Standard Scratch Score or SSS) has been determined and which have been set up in a standard manner. Each course at an affiliated club is allocated an SSS according to its length and degree of difficulty measured using a common method of assessment known as course rating.

Every score returned by the player in competitions held under the strictly controlled conditions is then used to adjust the player's handicap. When a player's score, after deduction of his handicap (the nett score), is below the SSS his handicap is reduced. The amount of reduction depends on how many shots under the SSS his nett score is and what his handicap is at the time. When a player's nett score is the same as the SSS or very slightly above it he has played to his handicap. This is known as playing within the "buffer zone" and no change is made to his handicap. When the nett score is over the buffer zone an increase of 0.1 is applied to the player's Exact Handicap.

Each player has two handicaps, an exact handicap e.g. 13.5 and a playing handicap e.g. 14. The latter is an arithmetical rounding of the exact handicap (13.5 rounded to 14 - the nearest whole number). The playing handicap is that used to determine the nett score from the gross score played.

Examples of arithmetical rounding are:

Any exact handicap between 11.5 and 12.4 rounds to 12 playing;

Any exact handicap between 32.5 and 33.4 rounds to 33 playing.