

Handicapped for Success: Using Your Handicap – The Real Fun Begins!



You've been dutifully posting all your scores (including the ugly ones) to establish a handicap and you are now the proud owner of a USGA **Handicap Index**. But what do you do with it?? Here's where the fun comes in!

Of course, your **Index** can be used to track your improvement over time. You can also use your **Index** to set a target score for your rounds of golf by converting it to a **Course Handicap** ([click here to read our article about Course Handicaps and ESC](#)).

But, perhaps the most fun way to use your **Index** is in competition. Whether it's a casual game with friends to see who will buy lunch or an organized tournament with trophies for the winners, handicaps level the playing field making it possible for players of all skill levels to compete fairly with one another.

You may have heard people refer to "giving" or "getting" strokes during an outing. Just what does this mean? Put simply, giving or getting strokes is based on your **Course Handicap**. If your **Course Handicap** is higher than another player's, then that player will be "giving" you strokes and you will be "getting" or "receiving" strokes. How the strokes you "give" or "get" are applied to the round depends on the type of format you are playing. Let's examine the stroke play format.

In *individual* stroke play, you are competing against all of the other golfers in the field and the overall winner is the player with the lowest *gross score*. Your *gross score* is total number of strokes you score for the round. Stroke play events may also award a prize for the *low net score*. Your *net score* is determined by subtracting your **Course Handicap** from your total *gross score*. In this type of format, your **Course Handicap** acts like a giant eraser!

Tournaments often arrange players of like skills into "flights", a golf term that refers to a group, and award *low gross* and *low net* in each flight. The EWGA Championship is a national competition of this type. In this format your **Course Handicap represents the number of strokes you will "get" or "receive"** and those strokes are "taken" at the end of the round.

Here's an example from a previous EWGA Championship Semi-Final:

Player	Hdcp Index	Gross Score	Course Hdcp	Net Score	Place
Lynn	32.4	111	35	76	
Linda	34.3	118	37	81	
Holly	35.7	119	39	80	
Jean	36.6	117	40	77	
Elaine	37.5	106	41	65	1 st Low Gross
Patricia	37.7	117	41	76	
Janice	38.5	112	42	70	1 st Low Net
Course Rating = 67.7; Slope Rating = 123					

Elaine was fired up that day and came in with a *low gross score* of 106. How well did she play? She beat her "personal par" by nearly 3 strokes! Her personal par is calculated by adding her **Course Handicap** to the **Course Rating** ($41 + 67.7 = 108.7$). Janice, the player with the highest handicap in the group, also had a good day and was the *Low Net* player with a *net score* of 70 ($112 - 42 = 70$). While Elaine had a lower net score than Janice, since she had already won Low Gross, she was not eligible for Low Net honors.

It just goes to show you, on any given day, *anyone* can be a winner! Kind of makes you want to give stroke play competition a try - doesn't it? Well, we've just scratched the surface on using your Handicap in competition. Join us next time when we explore the match play format.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about establishing or using a handicap, e-mail [EWGA Handicap Services Representative Jeanne Biggerstaff](#).