



The Lancashire Union of Golf Clubs Ltd

Patron: The Rt. Hon. THE EARL OF DERBY DL

LUGC GUIDE TO THE RATING OF COURSES TO ASSESS STANDARD SCRATCH SCORES.

Since the new USGA course rating system was introduced for men in 2014 there have been a number of enquiries from clubs in the County. In the main the enquiries have been asking how to increase the SSS, particularly when that figure is 2 or even 3 shots below par.

The first thing to say is that in such cases there will be a reason for that SSS. All clubs will already have been assessed by trained officials from the County. However, courses do change over the years which is why all Counties must visit all their affiliated courses on a rolling 10 year programme.

The County Secretary and SSS Chairman are also available to provide advice where possible but it is intended that this document will provide sufficient information based on queries already made by clubs.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SYSTEM?

Course Rating (Standard Scratch Score) is the evaluation of the playing difficulty of a course for golfers under normal course and weather conditions. It is expressed as the number of strokes taken and is based on yardage and other obstacles to the extent that they affect the scoring difficulty.

The rating process requires a study of each hole, including detailed data obtained at landing zones as laid out by England Golf and the USGA.

The process sets down specific distances that the golfer hits the ball and whilst some may disagree with the distances quoted it ensures a standard starting point for all assessors, wherever the course is situated.

WHAT IS ASSESSED?

The most significant factor in deciding a SSS is the length of the course and this will account for almost 90% of the rating. The rationale being that the longer the shot, particularly playing to greens, the harder the course.

However, it is accepted that there are other factors and the remainder is made up of what the assessors refer to as 'obstacles'. Examples of these are the existence of bunkers, rough, trees, water and out of bounds and their likely effect based on their proximity to the 'landing zones' on the fairways and centre of greens and the degree of difficulty in recovery from such obstacles.

In addition assessors must take into account slopes, exposure to wind, type of course and the effect these may have on the roll of the ball in reducing or increasing the length of a hole or taking the ball toward obstacles.

SO HOW CAN CLUBS INCREASE THE SSS?

You can probably see that the easiest way to potentially increase the SSS is to make holes and thus the course longer. For many courses that is just not possible, either because there is no additional land or the cost of building new tees is prohibitive.

All the 'obstacles' have different ratings. Fairway width at landing distances, distances to out of bounds or heavy rough and fast greens score most highly because they have most impact on a golfers score and feature on most if not all 18 holes. That said they still only add fractions to the overall scoring process but do add up and can make a difference.

However, it should be remembered that by doing any or all of the above you will be making the course harder for all golfers and particularly the average golfer. This can lead to longer rounds, slow play looking for golf balls and complaints to committees that the course is just too tough.

It should also be emphasised that putting in a new tee on one hole or a few additional bunkers around the course is highly unlikely to have any impact on the SSS.

The team in Lancashire who assess courses have invested a lot of time being trained by England Golf and are all experienced golfers. However, we would not profess to have any experience in course design and, if asked, would avoid giving clubs any specific advice in this area.

Under the current system it will take a team of 4 assessors around 5 hours to walk the course and write up their findings. It is a comprehensive system designed to ensure consistency across the County.

In order to keep on track with the 10 year rolling programme the team have to assess 14 courses each year and we are prioritising courses according to the time elapsed since they were last assessed, plus those that are hosting County Championships and events or those that have undergone major changes, such as the addition of new holes. Assessments can only be carried out during the playing season when the course is prepared in such a way that reflects normal conditions. For example, greens rolling at 10 or 11 on the stimpmeter for the club championship is not a true reflection of normal conditions and the team would be cognisant of that.

The SSS team hope that you have found the above information useful but if you still have unanswered questions about the SSS process you can find our contact details on the LUGC website.

Mike Lay

SSS and Affiliation Chairman.