

All About Slope.

In the following example, three golf courses, A B & C, have the same Slope rating of 125. All appear to have the same level of difficulty, but this would be wrong for several reasons.

To determine the level of difficulty of any golf course, we first need to know the Course Rating (SSS in old money). Imagine that course A has a Course Rating (CR) of 68.7, Course B 71.2, and Course C 73.1.

As with SSS, the Course Rating is the scratch golfers performance playing the course under ideal conditions. CR tells the scratch player the level of course difficulty.

The harder course is C, when compared to A. Under the current UHS system, it tells the bogey player very little. Other than how more difficult each course is. The other problem with UHS for bogey players is that their handicaps are against their performance on their home course and seldom translates with any accuracy to other golf courses.

Under the World Handicap System(WHS), Slope rating resolves this issue.

How then do all three courses end up with the same Slope Rating?

Slope rating is the difference in difficulty between the scratch golfers performance and the performance of the bogey player on a given course. The example above shows a difference in Course Rating with the Slope Rating the same on all three golf courses, but the level of difficulty is different. Slope ranges from 55 to 155.

Obstacles and penalty areas on a golf course affect how the golf course plays. These will impact the bogey players score more than the scratch player players score.

Obstacles are the elements on a course that impede play. These include penalty areas, out of bounds, ditches, ponds, rivers, roads and paths, rough, bunkers, trees and other assorted obstructions. Some obstacles can present unavoidable challenges to golfers. More so when a player has to cross a penalty area that sits across the fairway.

An obstacle across the line play will increase the level of difficulty of the hole for either one or the other, and sometimes both if crossings are in a landing zone (See shots table below).

If the obstacle, such as a water-filled ditch or stream, sits across the landing zone, players would probably lay up short to avoid the hazard and the risk of a penalty. With the penalty area at or around the scratch landing zone, this clearly would not affect the bogey player as they would be well short of this area. A ditch in the bogey player landing zone wouldn't trouble the scratch player as they would be able to clear the obstacle with plenty to spare. This example shows how obstructions, course layout and topography impact players scoring ability and ultimately the Slope Rating for the course.

Longer courses generally have higher course ratings (CR) than shorter ones.

On shorter courses, scratch players have less opportunity to use their length of shot to gain an advantage over the bogey player. The resultant Slope Rating is likely to be on the low side. On longer courses, the reverse is often the case. Yardage is the main contributor to course rating assessment. Slope Rating is not as clear cut, as golf courses vary considerably and no two golf

courses are alike. A long golf course with wide-open fairways and few obstacles may well have a lower slope rating than a shorter golf course with many more obstacles to negotiate.

Chiltern Forest is a course of 5687 yards off the back tees with a CR of 69. It has fewer obstacles than most golf courses. There are few if any crossings and very few bunkers, 9 in total and whilst it has a lot of trees, most are well back from the fairway edges, with many in the rough or in the out of bounds or penalty areas.

Bunkers are either green-side, those within 10 yards of the green, or fairway bunkers. The latter can be on the line of play or in landing zones. Eight of the CFGC 9 bunkers are on the front nine. Five are on the line play or in a landing zone with only four green-side bunkers.

Shot Lengths (Yds)	Tee Shots	Fairway
Scratch Men	250	220
Bogey Men	200	170
Scratch Women	210	190
Bogey Women	150	130

Course Rating uses a handicap of 20 for Bogey Men and 24 for Bogey Women.
Shot distances are for tee shots and fairway shots only. Chipping and putting are the same for all.

More examples of disparity under UHS/SSS.

Two courses; A with an SSS 69.0 and B with an SSS of 72.0. Two players, one from each club, both with handicaps of 16. The player from Course B under UHS would have an advantage playing their opponent on course A. In theory, player B is the better golfer.

Under the WHS/Slope system, this disparity no longer applies. With Slope tables posted in every golf club, players using their Handicap Index will be able to see what their course handicap is against the Slope rating for each tee before they play. In this example, 115 for course A and 130 for course B. The Handicap Indexes are 16.0 for the player from course A and 14.0 for the course B player, both players playing off course handicaps of 16 at the respective home courses.

The visiting player's Course Handicap is reduced to 14 when playing at course A while the home player stays the same. In the reverse fixture, the visitor from golf course A has their course handicap increased to 18 to cope with the increased level of difficulty with the home player again remaining unchanged.

Conclusion

A Slope Rating is a differential between the performance of the scratch golfer and the bogey golfer on the same course. Slope Rating is not a reliable comparison of one golf course to another. The Slope is a product of the obstacles on the golf course and how they affect both the bogey player relative to the scratch player. The Slope System is a fairer system for all players that play off a handicap.

Author: Andy Thomas, Bucks Course Rating Assessor. September 2020