

A USGA Handicap doesn't come without strings

I cannot tell you how many phone calls, e-mails and inquiries I've received over the years that go something like this: "All I want is a handicap. I don't want to join a club."

It seems that many golfers are interested in a handicap with "no strings attached."

Well, I'm here to tell you there's no such thing. There always have and hopefully always will be "strings" with regard to handicapping. Simply put, without such strings all you have is a number, not an official, verifiable, defensible USGA Handicap Index. Lately, every time you turn around, another website is popping up offering golfers an opportunity to get a USGA Handicap. It's easy, they say. Just pay the price and start posting scores.

What does a club bring to the equation that these web-based companies do not? Try integrity and validity.

Only in a club atmosphere can you have the critical kinds of checks and balances that transform some rather ordinary mathematical calculations into an extraordinary and universally-accepted USGA Handicap Index. Checks and balances such as a Handicap Committee headed by a fellow member to oversee all handicapping activities and, most importantly, the concept of "peer review," whereby fellow members have the opportunity to play golf with each other and to confirm that scores have been posted and posted correctly and that the Handicap Index



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reflects that.

Many of the websites that take your credit card, let you post scores indiscriminately and spit out a number a couple of times a month, fall into the trap of trying to offer a handicap with no strings attached. In many instances the golfers are completely unknown to each other, may live practically anywhere, never play golf with each other and are in no position whatsoever to confirm or refute the accuracy of the so-called handicap being issued. Beware of the



empty promises of such sites.

That is not to say that the Internet and websites are evil in the real world of handicapping.

The USGA, to its credit, has taken a number of steps to make it easier for more golfers to establish and maintain a USGA Handicap Index. The combining of consecutive 9-hole rounds is one such example as it paved the way for after-work golfers to obtain a Handicap Index. The latest and boldest step by far, involves the Internet.

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While both groups may start off with a membership of complete strangers, the USGA-approved Internet club is distinct in that stringent score-posting requirements designed to develop and promote peer review are in place. Namely, each member of such a club is required to post a minimum of three rounds per year with a fellow member, including a minimum of one round in a club-sponsored event. Such play will bring about a sense of cohesion and enable this band of strangers to evolve into a bonafide club.

The organizers or sponsors of web-based clubs cannot just sit back idly and continue to churn out numbers. They must step to the plate and both organize and conduct golf activities if they wish to receive a seal of approval. It is no small task and will separate the pretenders from the real deal.

The path for web-based services has been provided by the USGA. The jury is still out as to whether most will take it.