

Handicap

Decoding Course and Slope Rating

A GREAT DEAL OF CONSIDERATION IS GIVEN TO THE COURSE AND SLOPE RATING OF YOUR GOLF COURSE BY MATT MACKAY, RCGA HANDICAP & COURSE RATING COORDINATOR

The most common question the RCGA gets regarding Course Rating is: Why are the Course and Slope ratings for my course lower/higher than the ratings for a neighbouring course, even though I find my course much more difficult/easy? You can rest assured that these course ratings are not just pulled out of thin air; they are the result of a finely tuned system and countless hours of work put in by a highly trained group of volunteers across Canada. The process of establishing Course and Slope Ratings begins with extensive training that our volunteers undergo each year, both new raters and seasoned veterans. These sessions combine theoretical learning in the classroom with practical experience on the golf course; giving the raters a thorough understanding of the complex procedures involved. Raters are also trained to use the various tools of the trade, such as altimeters to measure elevation, laser guides to measure distance and stimpmeters to measure green speed. If you are interested in becoming a course rater, contact your provincial golf association.

Courses require rating for one of the following three reasons: it is a new course, in which case it will be rated every three years for the first nine years of its existence; 10 years have passed since the course was last rated; or significant changes have been made to the course.

Technology has certainly had an effect on the latter reason, as courses are commonly maxing out their yardage and beefing up their hazards in an effort to combat the onslaught of space age equip-

ment and golf balls.

A Course and Slope rating is based on the evaluation of obstacle factors that come into play and the effective playing length of the golf course being rated. Obstacle factors are determined on a scale of 1 to 10 for each hole with both the scratch and bogey golfer in mind. They are as follows:

1. Effective Playing Length
2. Topography
3. Fairway
4. Green Target
5. Recoverability and Rough
6. Bunkers
7. Out of Bounds/Extreme Rough
8. Water Hazards
9. Trees
10. Green Surface
11. Psychological Elements

Once all the data has been recorded on the course rating forms, we arrive at two figures: the scratch rating and the bogey rating. The scratch rating (or Course rating) is the number of strokes a scratch player would be expected to take under normal playing conditions. The bogey rating is the number of strokes a bogey player would be expected to take under normal conditions. By taking the difference between the scratch and bogey rating and multiplying by predetermined factors of 5.381 for men and 4.24 for women, we generate a Slope rating.

Course Rating FAQ

Q: What does a Slope rating indicate and why do we use it?

A: A Slope rating indicates the relative difficulty of a course for players who are not scratch golfers compared with the difficulty of the course for scratch players. The higher the Slope rating, the greater the expected difference there will be between the bogey golfer's score and the scratch golfer's score. The most significant factors involved in determining Slope are length, trees, rough, and water hazards. Because they possess a wider shot dispersion, these obstacles will penalize bogey golfers more than a scratch player, creating a greater difference in score and resulting in a higher Slope rating. The advantage of the Slope rating is that it is based on a sliding scale, allowing golfers of all handicaps to accurately convert their Handicap Factor

to a specific Course Handicap by referring to the Slope Conversion Charts provided at RCGA Member Clubs.

Q: Does a higher Slope rating mean a more difficult golf course?

A: No. A golf course's Course rating is the core evaluation of its difficulty. A high Slope rating simply means that the scores of scratch golfers and non-scratch players tend to spread out more than on a course with a lower Slope rating.

Q: Does par have anything to do with Course and Slope ratings?

A: Par is irrelevant. Courses are rated to determine the number of strokes a golfer would be expected to take, regardless of the par of the golf course.

Q: How can a Slope rating from two different sets of tees be the same or very similar?

A: One might assume that a set of tees that plays longer than another would automatically have a higher Slope rating. This is not always the case, as occasionally by playing a longer set of tees a golfer will take some of the obstacles out of play that would otherwise affect their score. Length alone does not determine Slope rating.



Royal Canadian Golf Association | Association Royale de Golf du Canada



Thank you to those RCGA Member Clubs that have signed and returned the RCGA Member Club License Agreement. By signing the agreement, these clubs have confirmed their compliance with the RCGA Handicap System® and will continue to have the ability to issue RCGA Handicap Factors® to their members. Contact officials at your club, the RCGA or your provincial golf association to find out if your club has signed the agreement.