

**Hi all golfers for NNGA.**



I along with other Exec's in the US are presented with question about scoring and posting now that we are starting to open courses. The following is a pretty detailed set of guidelines you can read or send out to your membership.

Even though this document has repeated information that is available on the NNGA website [www.nnga.org](http://www.nnga.org) I am sending it to you so that is in one central location for you to retrieve at will. We will have this on the web site and I will place links to all of the info at the bottom of this document.

We are so happy to play golf so let's keep it that way and not take play to seriously yet.

NNGA Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "SRP".

## **COVID-19 Rules and Handicapping**

**FAQs MARCH 20, 2020**

The guidance below supplements a memo released by the USGA as to how the Rules of Golf and Rules of Handicapping apply in response to questions received from golf course owners, administrators, tournament organizers and golfers. You can view that memo [here](#).

As was noted in that memo, it is not the intended purpose of the below guidance to either encourage or discourage anyone from playing the game, but rather, in our governance role, to help golf course operators, committees and golfers better understand how the Rules of Golf and Rules of Handicapping apply to the various questions we have received.

The questions received fit into four main topics. In each of the four topics below, the guidance provided serves both to directly answer the questions asked as well as cover additional considerations that might also serve useful.

### **FLAGSTICK**

May a course remove all flagsticks to minimize the possibility of exposing players to coronavirus?

May a committee introduce a code of conduct that does not allow players to remove (or even touch) the flagstick?

- The flagstick serves an important purpose in the game of golf – that is as an indicator to a player as to where the hole is located on the putting green or a target for shots.
- If a Committee decides to set-up a golf course without flagsticks, consideration should be given as to how best to support such a decision by providing players the location of each hole on the green, whether this is general guidance (such as in the right front portion) or through a detailed hole-location sheet.
- As another means of minimizing exposure to players, a Committee might decide to introduce a code of conduct that prohibits players from touching or removing the flagstick. As is authorized

under Rule 1.2b, such a code could also include penalties (such as one penalty stroke or the general penalty) if a player is in breach of its standards.

- Before a Committee decides to introduce such a restriction, it is recommended that consideration be given to the fact that removing the flagstick is an instinctual, even automated, act for many players. Drafting such a code of conduct to restrict only deliberate acts to affect the outcome of the hole would be reflective of that reality and would mean that a player who instinctually removes the flagstick would not get a penalty in doing so.
- If a Committee takes any of the above actions, it is at the discretion of the Committee whether scores would be acceptable for handicap purposes.

#### Special case for modified flagsticks

May a course use flagsticks that have movable trays, platforms or a similar attachments that have been added to help prevent touching the surface of the flagstick to retrieve the ball from the hole?

- Flagsticks with non-constrained attachments such as movable trays, platforms, or similar attachments to aid in removing a ball from the hole, whether the device is incorporated with or added to the flagstick do not meet the requirements of [Part 8, Section 1 of the Equipment Rules](#).
- However, if a committee decides to use a flagstick that does not meet the Equipment Rules to minimize the possibility of exposing players to coronavirus, a temporary measure is in place to permit scores played under this condition to be acceptable for handicapping purposes while such modifications are in use. This measure is in effect within the United States until advised otherwise by the USGA.
- Playing a round at a course where flagsticks do not meet the Equipment Rules are not normally acceptable for handicapping purposes, and use of such flagsticks after the temporary measures are no longer in effect will mean that all rounds played on a course using such flagsticks will not be valid for handicapping purposes.

#### **BUNKERS AND BUNKER RAKES**

We have removed all bunker rakes from our course to help stop the spread of coronavirus. What options do we have for players who end up in unranked areas?

- By removing rakes from the course, the Committee has various options as to how best to address the likely possibility of a player's ball coming to rest in an unmaintained area of sand and should consider which is the best approach under your unique circumstances.
- If you have limited play and most players at your course use a golf cart, the best approach might be to ask that each player takes a rake with them.
- If it is decided that no additional Rules will be put into effect to deal with these areas, it would be advisable to strongly encourage that players try their best to smooth the disturbed area with a foot or a club after playing their ball.
- An additional option includes changing the status of bunkers to be part of the general area. This would give players additional options under multiple relief rules (Rules 16 and 19) and would remove the restrictions normally in effect under Rule 12.

- Ground under repair could be used in two different manners. The first being to declare all bunkers to be ground under repair and treat them as part of the general area. This would allow players the option to take free relief outside the bunker under Rule 16.1. The second is to treat disturbed areas only as ground under repair. This would still allow a player free relief from such areas, but would require such relief to be taken elsewhere within the bunker.
- As a last resort, we have fielded questions as to whether a Committee may add a preferred lies local rule that would allow a player to place the ball elsewhere in a bunker without penalty (such as within one club length of where the ball came to rest). While that may seem like a good option in that it requires players to play from the bunker, there will be times when no effective relief would be available to a player, such as when a bunker is frequently played from and large areas are unranked. It would be recommended that the other options, such as those listed above are considered first, noting that using the ground under repair options above ensure a player will get full relief and when dropping from knee height, balls very rarely plug.
- If a Committee takes any of the above actions, it is at the discretion of the Committee whether scores would be acceptable for handicap purposes.

### **SCORECARDS AND SCORING**

We are holding a competition, but want to limit how scorecards are exchanged both between players and after the round to the Committee. Do you have any recommendations?

- The Rules already allow numerous options to address these concerns noting that certifying a score does not require a physical signature, nor does it require a physical scorecard.
- If a Committee wishes to run a competition using a form of electronic scoring, this could come in many forms, such as asking that each marker send an email to the Committee and the player he or she is marking for, including the player's hole-by-hole scores. The player can then reply to verify the accuracy of the card.
- When electronic methods are used, such as the email example above or similar methods that involve text messaging, the Committee should decide when a scorecard would be considered to have been returned. For example, this could be when the player responds certifying that the scores are correct or some other action that the Committee might consider more appropriate.
- A Committee might also wish to employ the above method but also combine these with a physical scorecard by having the marker take a picture of the completed scorecard and either email or text it to the Committee using the same process described above.
- If physical scorecards are the preferred method, a Committee may wish to have the player and marker not exchange cards but rather verbally communicate the hole-by-hole scores to the Committee in the scoring area. Additionally, verbal confirmation could be a substitute for the physical signature. As with the electronic scoring methods described above, the Committee should be diligent to clearly define when a scorecard has been returned, such as when a player leaves the golf shop if that is where the process takes place.
- If a Committee takes any of the above actions, it is at the discretion of the Committee whether scores would be acceptable for handicap purposes.

### **MODIFICATIONS TO THE HOLE; NOT REQUIRING THAT PLAYERS HOLE OUT (most likely score)**

A number of questions have been received that relate to modifying the hole so that players no longer need to reach into the hole to remove a ball to minimize the possibility of exposing golfers to coronavirus.

These have included some courses setting holes so that the hole liner remains an inch or two above the surface of the green while others have placed various objects into the hole or around the flagstick (such as foam pool noodles or plastic piping) so that a ball is unable to fall to the bottom.

While in some of these instances, the ball is not holed per the Rules of Golf (Rule 3.3c), a round played under these conditions will result in an acceptable score for handicap purposes using the most likely score guidelines (see [Rule 3.3 of the Rules of Handicapping](#)).

While the most likely score procedure is intended to support certain formats of play where the player is not required to hole out (such as in match play when the player's next stroke is conceded or in four-ball stroke play when a partner picks up), it is also temporarily in effect where the above described safety measures are being used.

When using most likely score, the player should consider the number of strokes most likely required to complete the hole, and determine whether the ball would have been holed or not. Most likely score is at the player's best judgment and should not be used to gain an unfair advantage.

### 3.3 When a Hole is Started But Player Does Not Hole Out

There are various circumstances that might result in a player starting a hole but not holing out. For example, when:

The result of the hole has already been decided,

A hole has been conceded in match play,

A player's partner has already posted a better score in a Four-Ball format and the player picks up, or

A player has already reached their net double bogey limit on a specific hole.

When a player starts a hole but does not hole out for a valid reason, subject to other provisions set out within the Rules of Handicapping, the player must record their most likely score or net double bogey, whichever is lower, as appropriate for the situation and depending on the format of play.

The most likely score is:

The number of strokes already taken to reach a position on a hole, plus

The number of strokes the player would most likely require to complete the hole from that position, plus

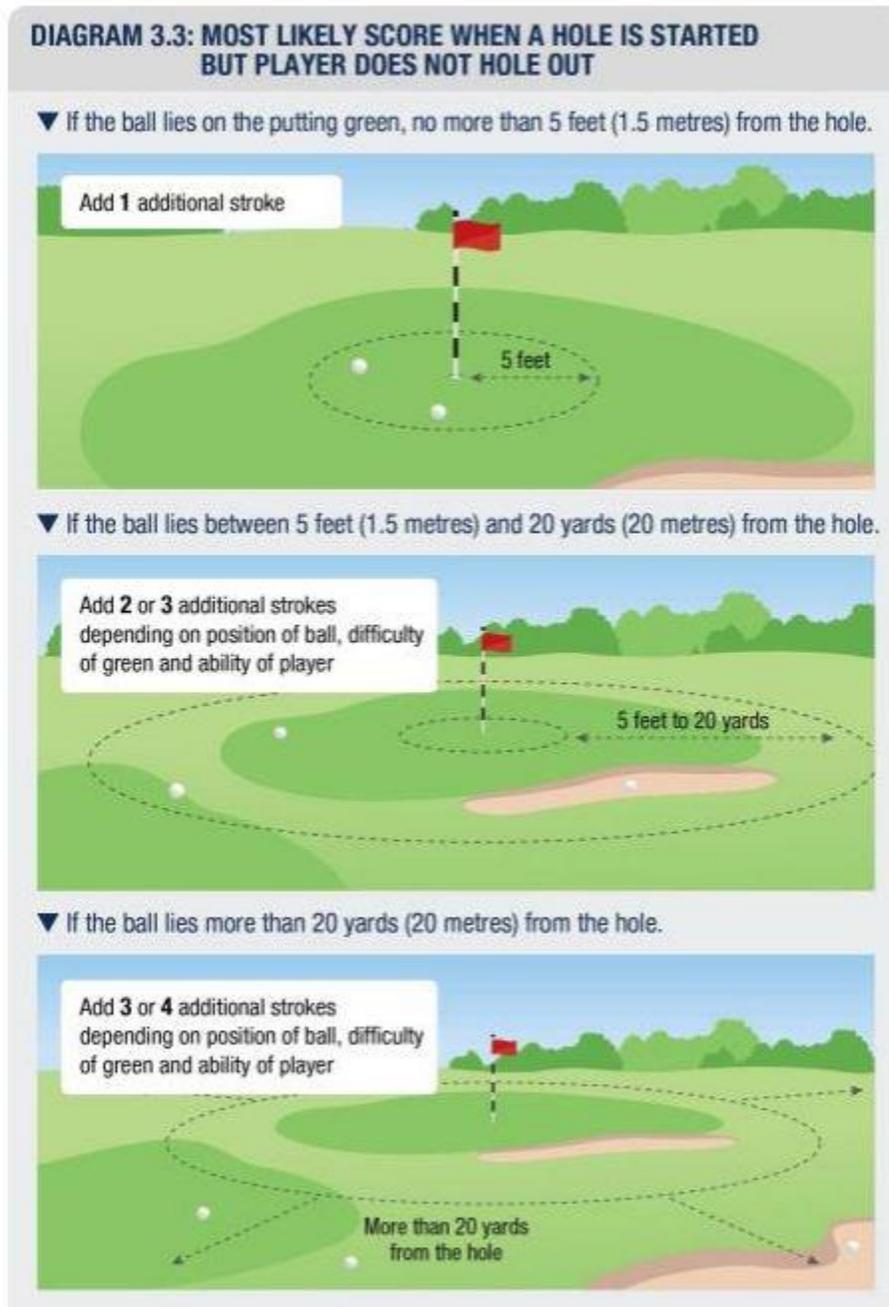
Any penalty strokes incurred during play of the hole.

Most likely scores should be determined on any hole in accordance with the following guidelines:

Most likely scores should be determined on any hole in accordance with the following guidelines:

Position of the Ball	Strokes to be Added
If the ball lies on the putting green, and is no more than 5 feet (1.5 metres) from the hole:	Add one additional stroke.
If the ball lies between 5 feet (1.5 metres) and 20 yards (20 metres) from the hole:	Add 2 or 3 additional strokes, depending on the position of the ball, the difficulty of the green and the ability of the player.
If the ball lies more than 20 yards (20 metres) from the hole:	Add 3 or 4 additional strokes, depending on the position of the ball, the difficulty of the green and the ability of the player.

(See Diagram 3.3.)



Notes:

There is no limit to the number of most likely scores that can be recorded within a player's adjusted gross score, provided that the failure to hole out is for a valid reason and not for the purpose of gaining an unfair scoring advantage.

For players with an established Handicap Index, the most likely score on any hole cannot exceed net double bogey for handicap purposes.

When a player is submitting scores for an initial Handicap Index, the most likely score on any hole cannot exceed par plus 5 strokes.

In a Maximum Score format of stroke play, there may be situations where a player has not reached their net double bogey score before reaching the maximum score as determined by the Terms of the Competition. In such cases, the player should record either a most likely score or net double bogey, whichever is the lower score (see Rules of Golf, Rule 21.2).

Rule 3.3 Interpretations:

### **3.3/1 – Clarification of the Meaning of Most Likely Score for Handicap Posting and When It Should Be used**

A most likely score is used to record a player's probable score on a hole, when the hole has been started but the player did not hole out their ball. It should be a reasonable assessment of the number of strokes needed to complete the hole.

For example, in a Four-Ball match-play competition, a player's partner holes their ball from off the putting green for three. The player's ball lies 15 feet (5 metres) away from the hole in four strokes and the score for the side cannot be improved. To save time, the player may pick up and record a most likely score for handicap purposes.

Based on the most likely score guidelines, the player would record a score of six or seven for handicap purposes (four strokes taken plus two or three additional strokes).

Last but not least is a video about MLS

<https://www.coloradogolf.org/rules-videos-2/> Video demonstration

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/articles/2020/03/covid-19-rules-guidance-statement.html>

<https://www.usga.org/handicapping/roh/2020-rules-of-handicapping.html>