

WAISTLINES AND HANDICAPS

-A RELATIONSHIP

Handicaps
Are Not
Bargaining Devices

This idea comes from a lady, Mrs. Edward Schultz, President of the Chicago Women's District Golf Association:

"We have discovered there is a certain feminine psychology wherein the 'gals' are extremely proud of their efforts to reduce their handicaps a stroke or more.

"It is like taking an inch or more off the waistline. When the handicaps go up, they are as unhappy as adding those unwelcome pounds to the figure!

"The women competitors in our District are simply not interested in using their handicaps as a bargaining device on the first tee every time they meet for competition."

Lest a careless reader leap to a hasty conclusion, no suggestion is hinted here of any peculiar relation between a fattish fellow and a fattish handicap. Golfers of all shapes have been known to be neglectful of turning in all their good scores, thus acquiring handicaps which do not reflect their real ability.

The point of Mrs. Schultz's remarks bears repeating again and again—your true golfer takes pride in reducing his handicap, and is unhappy when it goes up.

This idea of taking pride in having the lowest possible handicap is an old one in golf. That's the way it always has been until relatively recent years. You always tried to play as well as you could, and you always sought the right and lowest handicap as a matter of sportsmanship.

But now there has come to golf a new though minor mentality which takes a strange view—a mentality which seeks comparatively high handicaps. This attitude is not entirely confined to first generation golfers, nor is it common among all first generation golfers. Many of its more recent devotees immediately caught the ideal of sportsmanship which is the key to its code.

So whence comes this strange new view of seeking a high handicap? Mrs. Schultz

has identified its source truly in saying that the women in her district "are simply not interested in using their handicaps as a bargaining device on the first tee every time they meet."

A bargaining device. That is the leading role which a handicap plays in some golfers' calculations. A device for perhaps obtaining an advantage over the opposition. For those who use handicaps in that way, it then follows that relatively high handicaps are desirable, and so they turn in only such scores as will conduce to that end.

Fortunately, such unfairness is far from general in golf; yet there is enough of it to justify attention.

Just what is a handicap, or what should it be? The new USGA Handicap System which became effective at the start of 1958 defines it this way:

"A 'handicap' is the number of artificial strokes a player receives to adjust his scoring ability to the common level of scratch or zero-handicap golf."

The new USGA system expresses the fine old principle that, in order to win, a golfer should play well in comparison with his normal ability. The system ideally uses the best 40% of the player's latest scores (the 10 best of the last 25).

All the player has to do is turn in all his scores. The new system simplifies even this. It permits scores to be returned in total, not necessarily hole by hole, and requires that they be signed only by player, and not attested by one of his fellow-players.

Will these naive conditions place an unbearable strain on the conscience of that minority of golfers who seek unduly robust handicap waistlines?

Perhaps so. But the probability is that the long-term result will be good. The probability is that the essential sportsmanship of golf will win out.

And so, we respectfully submit, the new look in handicap waistlines will be increasingly trim.