

# **USGA RATING**

## **PRESENTATION TO DELEGATES' MEETING BY PHILLIPA COOK, BUCKS STANDARD SCRATCH SCORE ASSESSOR**

**WEDNESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> JULY 2009**

Welcome – good to be back to one of these Delegates' Meetings after best part of two years, albeit now under the EWGA structure.

Try not to be too technical but give an insight into the USGA Course Rating System.

Questions please at the end as I may cover the various points during this short presentation.

First dispel myth that that the USGA system determines the Stroke Index – this is purely an internal Club procedure. Parameters for Stroke Index are set down, e.g. the first and last holes would not have a Stroke Index at the end of the scale e.g. 1 or 18, but within those parameters it is entirely up to the Club to determine the Stroke Index.

Before the introduction of the USGA system courses were given an LGU SSS. This was done by the County SSS Assessor who would play the course and give a subjective view re the difficulty of the course. The Bucks Assessor was Christine Watson.

Then came the USGA Course Rating System, including Slope Rating, which was implemented by the USGA on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1987. Quoting from the Introduction in "The USGA Course Rating Guide":-

"This system addresses the problem of portability handicaps by adjusting a player's Handicap Index according to the relative difficulty of the golf course being played.

Prior to the introduction of Slope Rating to the USGA Course Rating System, golf courses were rated only for the scratch golfer, with no consideration given to average or higher handicapped players. Under the USGA Course Rating System, including Slope Rating, courses are rated according to the relative difficulty for both the scratch and the bogey golfer. The USGA Course Rating System takes into account the factors that affect the playing difficulty of a course. It is designed to ensure that the rating of a course is in proper relation to the ratings of other courses – otherwise players at courses rated too low will be over-handicapped, and vice-versa.

Accuracy and consistency are the keys to effective course rating. A course must first be accurately measured, and the measured yardage must be corrected for factors that affect the playing length – roll, changes in elevation, forced lay ups, doglegs, prevailing wind, and altitude. Obstacles that affect the playing difficulty must then be evaluated in accordance with established standards, which reduce subjectivity in course rating.

A USGA Course Rating is based upon the performance of the scratch golfer, as defined in “The USGA Course Rating System Guide”. The rating is based on yardage, effective playing length corrections, and obstacles to the extent that they affect the scoring ability of a Scratch player. The system also provides procedures for determining a Bogey Rating based on the performance of the bogey golfer – this rating is used in connection with the USGA Course Rating to provide a Slope Rating.

Through the collection of data on thousands of golfers and golf holes, the factors that affect the difficulty of a golf hole have been evaluated and assigned numerical values that yield an accurate USGA Course Rating and Slope Rating when applied to the entire course.”

England decided to adopt the USGA system in approx. 2001. Bucks were fortunate that Christine Watson was involved from the outset when the USGA system was introduced into this country and she carried out a great deal of training of Assessors in the South East.

How did I become involved? The rating of courses is done per county and for each course there has to be a Rater and two Assistants, always three people present. Christine asked Sarah Mace to become the second Rater for Bucks – an Oxford Maths graduate, Sarah was the ideal choice. Sarah needed to ask someone from the north of the county to become an Assistant Rater. Having looked through the Manual and realising that it was really quite complicated, Sarah thought about who she might ask and came up with my name, knowing how much I enjoy a challenge.

I agreed to join the team and many training sessions took place – Christine & Sarah with assistants Karen Platt, Angela French, Sue Lee, myself and later Carolyn Plaistowe. Sarah then had baby number two and didn't have the time to continue, and so I took over from her. In October 2007 Christine wished to step down as main Assessor for Bucks and I assumed the role of Bucks Standard Scratch Assessor from her.

The rating has to be done in the summer months when the foliage etc. is out. After much training we rated our first course in May 2003. We started with the 9 hole courses, for the simple reason they took half the length of time! We took ages! My abiding memory of that first course was that it poured, and poured with rain – the paperwork at the end was a soggy mess, just readable.

We then progressed to the shorter 18 hole courses and then, when we were more proficient, we tackled the courses that are known as the “County Greens”. The time it takes us to rate a course has reduced tremendously (it now takes about 4 hours). This has been helped by:

- The Measuring Wheel supplied to us by ELGA was in yards not feet. We don't play the course, merely measure it – this is complicated enough without converting feet to yards. When I became a Main Rater I sourced a yardage wheel and bought it. Shortly after ELGA replaced all the wheels in feet for yardage ones.
- Use of an Altimeter – there had been much discussion as opinions differed hugely, on visual estimate of change in elevation from tee to green, or approach shot to green.
- Rangefinder to cut down the walking to measure distances to obstacles – more later. (First thing in training was to check that our steps were the correct length, each step to measure a yard).

Forms that we complete – Record data that we measure on the course onto the Form – one per hole. After finish at the course then there is much paperwork for the Main Rater to complete and calculations to do, using the Manual. Then the Forms are sent to the Area Assessor to be checked, then they go to EWGA for the data to be put into the computer. This is done in the winter months and the new figure comes out for the SSS. This is sent to the clubs ready for the new playing season and the new SSS is operative immediately on its arrival at the club.

As mentioned the data is collected for the Bogey golfer in order to collect the information required to calculate the Slope Rating, ready for the time when the decision is taken to adopt the Slope System. This can only be done when all courses are USGA rated. Then the Unions will decide whether they wish to adopt the system.

The Scots, Welsh & Irish men and all the Ladies are using the USGA Rating system and will therefore be in a position to have the slope rating – the English Men however have refused to go the global route and are using their own rating system. They will therefore not be able to use the Slope Rating even if in time all the other British Unions vote for it.

Dealing now in more detail with the actual assessing of the course.

Firstly the measurement of the course. The overall length of the course has a huge affect, which is why it is so important that there is a Measurement Certificate available to verify the yardage per hole and total yardage of the course. We measure the total length of each hole and check this against the Certificate. There are set distances that the Scratch and Bogey golfer is said to hit the ball, which gives Landing Zones: See Table below:-

## SHOT LENGTH (Yards incl. 20 yds Roll)

	<u>Scratch:</u>	<u>Bogey:</u>
<b>TEE SHOT</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>150</b>
<i>(L.Z.)</i>	<i>(210)</i>	<i>(150)</i>
<b>2nd. SHOT</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>130</b>
<i>(L.Z.)</i>	<i>* (400)</i>	<i>(280)</i>
<b>3rd. SHOT</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>130</b>
<i>(L.Z.)</i>	<i>(Green)</i>	<i>* (410)</i>
<b>4th. SHOT</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>130</b>
<i>(L.Z.)</i>		<i>(Green)</i>

N.B. After two shots for Scratch the Landing Zone at \* 400  
is similar to the Bogey Third Shot Landing Zone at \* 410

N.B. The Bogey golfer is said to be a player with a handicap of 24. When assessing the shot, it is assumed that it is a Scratch golfer making the shot – it goes straight every time!!

There are factors to take into account, which means that the ball may not go these set distances and the Landing Zones have to be adjusted accordingly:-

- is there fairway watering, for example? Firm or soft fairways mean the shots may go shorter or further than the norm.

- Elevation has an effect – that is why we use the altimeter to measure the change in elevation from tee to green, and from the approach Landing Zone to the green. There is a table to check the change in height figure, which gives an adjustment to be included on the Form.

If there is a dogleg the Landing Zones may vary so that the player does not run out of room – a lay-up may be required. Similarly if there is say, a water hazard across the fairway, the ball has to be able to carry the water by 10 yards which may result in a lay-up. The shots to these Landing Zones will therefore be different length from normal – and the position of subsequent Landing Zones will be similarly adjusted. Now, you might understand why I didn't like the wheel in feet, trying to work out where the next Landing Zone will be, having taken into account all these adjustments.

At each Landing Zone each of the possible Obstacles has to be considered, distances to the nearest of each of the obstacles measured and factors entered from the book onto the Form. Also the lay-up situation is considered.

Summary of Obstacles. Below is a list of the various obstacles with some of the points that have to be considered at each Landing Zone:-

- (1). TOPOGRAPHY: Degree of difficulty of stance, ranging from “Minor Problem” to “Extremely Awkward”
- (2). FAIRWAY: Width – the factor used is dependent upon the length of the hole
- (3). GREEN TARGET: the diameter of the green / length of the approach shot
- (4). ROUGH & RECOVERABILITY: length of carry to the fairway / height of rough at the green and along the fairway
- (5). BUNKERS: length of carry / depth / fraction of green bordered
- (6). OUT OF BOUNDS / EXTREME ROUGH: distance from centre of the Landing Zone / shot length
- (7). WATER HAZARDS: distance from centre of the Landing Zone / shot length / carry
- (8). TREES: chute / distance from Landing Zone / estimated percentage of recovery
- (9). GREEN SURFACE: Stimpmeter reading / Relatively Flat to Moderately Contoured

N.B.

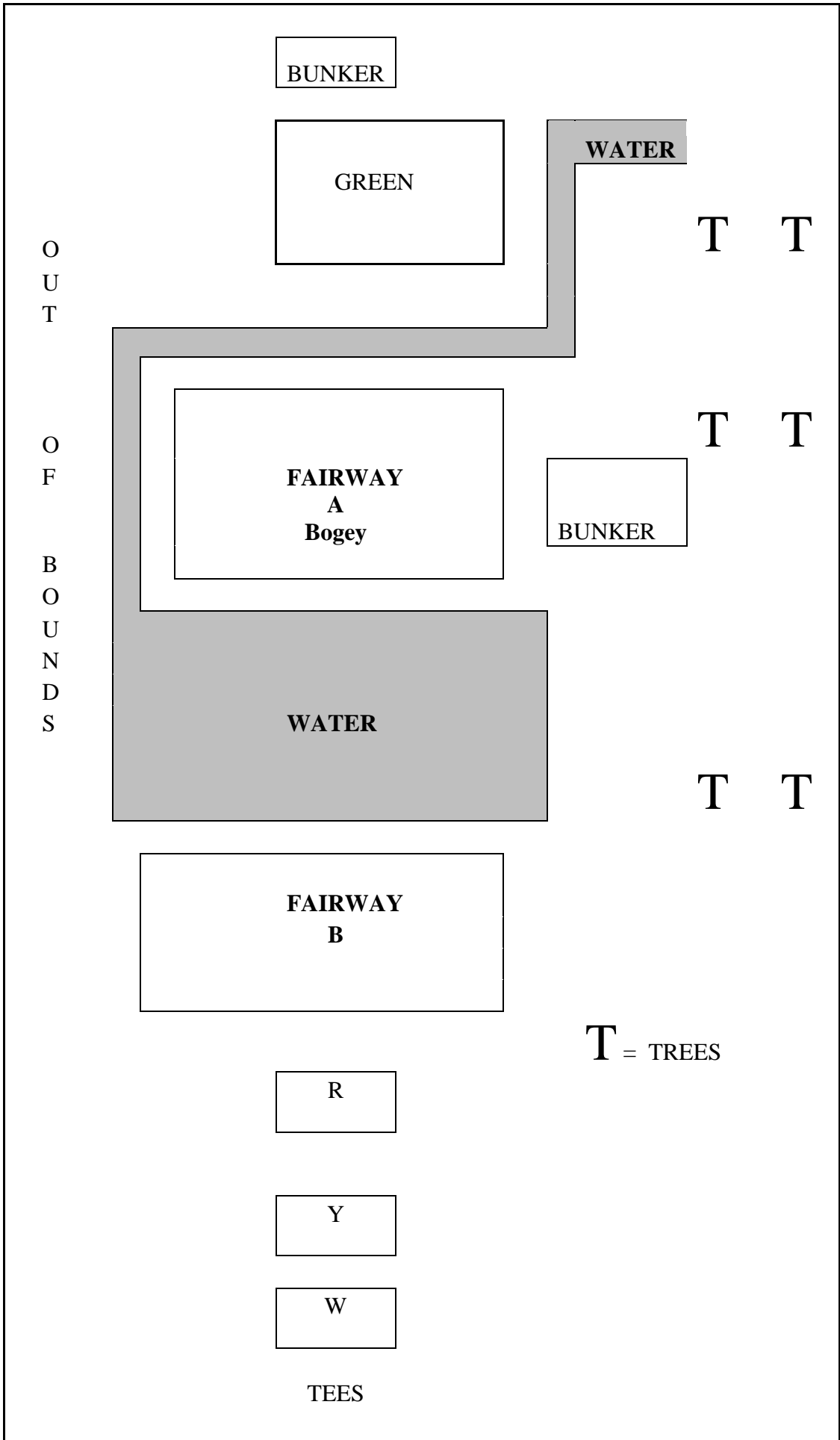
- i). An obstacle has to be within 50 yards of the centre of the fairway to count.
- ii). Clubs are asked in advance of the rating day to give details of the stimpmeter reading (speed of greens) and the height of rough, as per their Club Policy document.

The procedure for rating a hole.

On the tee the altimeter will be checked and the figure noted. One of the Assistant Raters will use the measuring wheel and walk from the tee to the first Landing Zone, noting the length of the carry of the rough from the tee to the start of the Fairway. Then they would continue to the subsequent Landing Zones and eventually arrive at the Green, noting down the yardage from the tee to the start of the Green. The wheel will then be used to measure the width and depth of the Green.

At each Landing Zone the fairway will be paced to measure the width and the figure noted. The range finder will be used to measure the distance from the centre of the fairway to each of the objects that exists. Each object will be assessed as per the notes in the section above “Summary of Objects”. A similar procedure takes place at the Green. The altimeter reading is taken at the Scratch and Bogey Landing Zone from where the approach shot is taken and the Green.

As an example, below is a rough outline of a Hole (not to scale!):-



On the above hole if Fairway A is too far for the Bogey golfer to carry the water, the Bogey 1 Landing Zone would be a lay-up on Fairway B. If the second lot of water is then in reach for the Bogey 2 shot, then there would be a second lay-up so that Bogey 2 Landing Zone would be on Fairway A. The shot distances would therefore not be the norm of 150 yards followed by 130 yards – the adjusted shot lengths would be recorded on the Form. Consideration would also be given as to whether the Scratch golfer may decide not to take the driver and to lay-up on Fairway A in order to avoid the second lot of water – any adjustment to shot length would be recorded on the Form.

At each Landing Zone the Fairway width would be measured and the distance to each obstacle recorded. The carry to the Fairway from the tee, and the carry over the water for each shot would be measured and recorded. The various points mentioned in the “Summary of Obstacles” section above would also be considered at each Landing Zone.

The current position..... All courses over 4000 yards are eligible for a USGA SSS, provided that the club is affiliated to EWGA and the County Association. In Bucks there are 42 clubs with a total of 49 courses - rating of these courses is virtually complete. Apart from sorting out the outstanding paperwork for a couple of courses, it is now a quiet time for the Rating Team. A number of counties have finished rating their courses but some counties are a long way behind – hence it will be some time before all courses will be rated and the vote taken re Slope Rating.

Even when the paperwork is ready to be sent off to EWGA it is not possible to know what the SSS will come out at – you can have a guess but nothing more than that. A number of the courses in the county have had their SSS changed, usually by only 1 up or down from Par or LGU SSS, but sometimes by 2 and occasionally, but not in Bucks, by 3. If the SSS changes then that is a good time to take the decision re any changes to the Stroke Index – and make all changes to the card at the same time. If the SSS goes up by 1, some Clubs prefer to change a Par 4 to a Par 5 so that the Par = SSS. The important thing to remember is that if such changes are going to be made, this will require new Tee furniture, which can incur a substantial cost.

Each course has to be rated again within 10 years and so there will now be a couple of years before we re-visit any of the courses. However if there are any significant changes to any of the holes on a course whether regarding distance or obstacles, then I need to be informed and an immediate review of the rating of the effected holes will be arranged.

I trust that you have a little more knowledge about how your SSS is calculated. N.B. A Question and Answer session was held – the various points raised have been included at the relevant point in the above text.

Any queries re USGA Rating contact Phillipa Cook:-  
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