

SOUTH WEST FEDERATION OF CROQUET CLUBS

2018/9 Handicapping Workshops

Held at **Cheltenham Croquet Club,**

Budleigh Salterton Croquet Club,

Nailsea Croquet Club.

Croquet's handicapping system works fairly well overall but relies on constant monitoring and action at club level in order for it to function at its best.

The underlying principles and tasks are the same in both GC and AC.

(Short Croquet and One-ball Croquet have their own handicapping systems but they are not covered in this document).

In both games **the automatic system** works well for those club players who play in lots of matches and tournaments outside their own club and they will require little, if any, intervention from club handicappers, but the problems start when members play mostly or exclusively amongst themselves and play in only a few league matches. **Their handicaps will almost certainly be wrong.**

Amended - 2019 by RM and SC-B.

Preface.

Since the workshops, this booklet has been revised to take into account the concerns, discussions and advice given during and following our meetings. Where there was confusion, we have simplified or added further illustrations in order to make it clearer. What follows are the notes used in the workshops and direct quotes from existing published materials.

Introduction.

Being a club handicapper is not rocket science. It simply needs people who have the knowledge and experience to give them confidence to operate the system within their own club, and know they can seek the help of others whenever necessary. This workshop will mainly focus on the knowledge part of this equation. Experience and confidence will take a little longer but we will focus more on that this afternoon.

This event is deliberately called a Workshop rather than a Lecture because we want to encourage discussion and an exchange of views so we can learn from each other.

We have a wide range of experience amongst us ranging from the absolute beginner (new clubs) to the experts. If you are new to handicapping, we aim to give you what you need to become confident. We also hope that the more experienced people will give us the benefit of their wisdom but there will be some challenging questions for them, too.

Understand differing experience within clubs. We have over 40 clubs in the SW Federation and most are small. There are 24 small clubs (13 x 1 lawn clubs, 11 x 2 lawn clubs); 14 medium size clubs (3/4/5 lawns) and 2 large clubs (10+) + a few non-affiliated clubs.

Members of the larger clubs may find it difficult to appreciate just how difficult it is for small clubs to find enough volunteers to take on roles. Most clubs normally find it is the same two or three people doing all the jobs that larger clubs share out between dozens of people. While we understand that large clubs have a greater scale of work, their members usually focus on just one job and are not expected to be expert at all of the tasks, but this is usually the case for small clubs. To make it even harder, some small clubs are still in their early days and find it daunting having to learn all that needs to be done. We hope this workshop reassures you.

No-one here is in any way critical of others. All clubs have their challenges and today's focus is to support each other and learn from each other in order to ensure we all play in a framework which ensures fairness.

Croquet's handicapping system works fairly well overall but relies on constant monitoring and action at club level in order for it to function at its best.

The underlying principles and tasks are **the same in both GC and AC** and most of what we will look at today is common to both.

In both games **the automatic handicapping system** works well for those club players who play in lots of matches and tournaments outside their own club and will require little if any intervention from club handicappers. Normally, the Automatic Handicapping System (AHS) should be sufficient, but the problems start when members play mostly or exclusively amongst themselves and play in only a few league matches. Their handicaps will almost certainly be wrong.

Also, you would be amazed how many people make genuine mistakes filling in their cards (not only newer players) and regular monitoring of cards should be the norm in clubs - not to catch people out but done in a spirit of support, because it is unacceptable to be anything other than accurate.

If you want to explore the statistical rigour of the system, you should read Bill Lamb's book "The Principles of Handicapping" but today's workshop will not focus on the advanced mathematics behind the system but purely on the practical Why? What? and How?

Session 1 WHY?

Why does every club need a Club Handicapper?

Quite simply, to make sure that their club members compete fairly - "a level croquet court".

In a handicap game, both players should have a fairly equal chance of winning regardless of the ability of their opponent.

If the handicaps are equal, and you have a h/c 16 in your club who plays a h/c 16 from someone in another club from the other side of the country, they should be at the same standard. How is this going to happen?

If we are going to ensure fair play, everyone has to have the same standards. It doesn't matter whether your club is small or large, new or old, in the tip of Kent or the Islands of Scotland. The question to ask is "how can we be confident that within this Federation, we have consistency in all clubs?" We also need to ensure that this federation's clubs are on a par with all the other federations?"

So where do we start?

Someone in every club needs to make sure their members have the correct handicap and they know how and when to use their handicap card.

Beginners need to be given a handicap when they become familiar with the game and then monitored to ensure their handicap reflects their ability as they improve.

Clubs need to ensure that when members play against others outside their own club such as in league matches or tournaments, their handicaps are correct.

Eventually, the Automatic Handicapping System will kick in but this will only ever work if the member plays in lots of games (at least 10 per year) outside their own club.

If someone plays off the wrong handicap, at best it is unfair and at worst it is cheating. Such a situation is not usually the fault of the individual but **it is the fault of the club** and it is **the club** that is responsible for ensuring its members are correctly handicapped.

Also, you would be surprised by how many people make mistakes when completing handicap cards - even top players when tired at the end of a long day make mistakes - so everyone's card needs to be checked regularly (though this should always be done in an atmosphere of support rather than being overly assertive).

Most clubs are small and several are new to the game and may find the prospect of setting handicaps daunting. However, even large clubs need a new handicapper from time to time, so how can we all work together to support and encourage one other?

SHORT TASK (at the workshop) - in groups of 6 or more, discuss the problems faced by your club.

What are the current problems/issues/anxieties?

Report back to all.

Session 2 HOW does the system operate?

CA handicappers, Federation Handicappers, Club Handicappers.

CA appointed handicappers play in many tournaments and are constantly seeing the full range of handicaps and ability. In the SWF, we currently have 11 AC CA Handicappers and 5 GC CA Handicappers.

Federation Handicappers are appointed by the federation to oversee the efficiency of the system in their area.

Club handicappers are **appointed by their club** to oversee the system within their club.

The aim is that by working together, we can support and advise each other to ensure that we are well informed and able to promote fairness for all.

The differences and what each type of handicapper can do:

Who	Club		Fed	CA
		own club	any Fed member or player in Fed event	any player, even during a tournament
What AC	Min	8	same	0
	Min - 12	min 3 steps	same	same
	> 12	no restriction	same	same
What GC	Min	3	same	0
	Min - 12	min 2 steps	same	same
	> 12	no restriction	same	same

EXPLANATION OF CHANGES A CLUB HANDICAPPER CAN MAKE.

	Handicap	Scope of changes	Action by Club Handicapper
AC	Below 8:	no changes to be made	- no intervention but monitor cards and wins.
	8-12:	3 or more steps	- but AHS should be sufficient in most cases. Monitor regularly.
	Above 12:	any size may be made	- set <u>appropriate</u> initial handicap and monitor closely adjusting when necessary.
GC	Below 3:	no changes to be made	- no intervention but monitor cards and wins.
	3-12:	2 or more steps	- but AHS should be sufficient in most cases. Monitor regularly.
	Above 12:	any size may be made	- set <u>appropriate</u> initial handicap and monitor closely adjusting when necessary.

CHANGES A FEDERATION HANDICAPPER AND A CA HANDICAPPER CAN MAKE.

The following is taken from the CA website:

Federation Handicapper may change the handicap of **any member of their own Federation or any player in their own Federation's events.**

AC Below 8: no changes to be made.
8-12: changes of a minimum of 3 steps* may be made.
Above 12: changes of any appropriate size may be made.

GC Below 3: no changes to be made.
3-12: changes of a minimum of 2 steps* may be made.
Above 12: changes of any appropriate size may be made.

CA Handicapper may change a handicap **at any time, and during any event.**

AC May make changes to handicaps 0 and above.
From 0 to 12: normally a minimum of 3 steps*.
Above 12: changes of any appropriate size may be made.

GC May make changes to handicaps 0 and above.
From 0 to 12: normally a minimum of 2 steps*.
Above 12: changes of any appropriate size may be made.

* The minimum number of steps **is to include any change that has just occurred as a result of the automatic handicapping system.**

When a change is made, the new handicap and index must be entered on the front of the player's card and be validated with a date and clearly readable name.

What a Club needs to do

All clubs should appoint a member as their Club Handicapper, who will act as the primary contact for all handicap matters. They might choose to appoint separate Club Handicappers for AC and GC or one covering both codes. All handicapping information sent out to Club Secretaries by the CA or Federations should be passed to the Club Handicapper. The name and contact details of the Club Handicapper should be recorded on the Federation and CA websites (the latter by notifying the [CA Office](#)).

Duties of the Club Handicapper

- Ensure that any player from their club who plays in an event outside that club has a current handicap and a validated handicap card that they understand how to use.
- Ensure a handicap list for all club members exists and is updated as automatic or manual changes occur.
- Authenticate new cards or changes outside the automatic system, clearly printing their name.
- Check all club handicap cards prior to each season.
- Monitor players after they have had an initial handicap set. Review after 2 months or 10 recorded games, being prepared to make changes if necessary.
- Actively encourage the regular use of handicap cards.

The role of the Club Handicapper can be seen as ensuring the whole system works as intended. See [Guidelines for Club Handicappers](#) for more details.

The CA Directory lists [Club Handicappers \(AC\)](#) and [Club Handicappers \(GC\)](#).

Authentication of Handicap Cards

Regular tournament players will have a long recorded history of results, which gives substance to their current handicap, but players just starting to play in league matches and tournaments may have little recorded history to back up their handicap. It is the duty of the Club Handicapper to see

the player's card is completed correctly and authenticated - this provides traceability should there be any problems or queries over their handicap.

Generally, a handicap card with at least ten recorded games in one season will allow the handicap and index to be carried over into the following season. But where there are fewer than ten games recorded, the Club Handicapper should consider the results carefully and decide whether to authorise or adjust the handicap for the start of the next season. This is a key goal of the annual review of all handicap cards in the club.

A Club Handicapper may not overrule a change made by a senior handicapper (CA or Federation Handicapper). However, if they believe the change is in error, the Club Handicapper should discuss the case with the senior handicapper and attempt to convince them to rescind or alter the change.

Reminder: The maximum handicap is **not a default** Initial Starting Handicap. It may be appropriate for some players to be started on a lower initial handicap.

Session 3. WHAT do we need to know? Initial (starting) Handicaps GC/AC.

This session will be delivered in two groups : AC or GC.

Session 3A. Association Croquet group.

In the South West Federation, the B league match upper limit is 24.

For CA events, the normal maximum handicap is 20, although some tournaments are set lower.

In practice, 24 is the **highest** initial handicap that is **usually** given to a new player.

Note the word “*usually*” because it must be stressed that 24 is not the ‘*default*’ starting handicap that should be given to all beginners. Fast learners with natural talent may start much lower than this.

The broad expectation is that after attending a full introductory course and playing within their club for around a month, most people should be able to play to a standard of about handicap 24. However, a few people will be better than this by that stage, sometimes quite significantly.

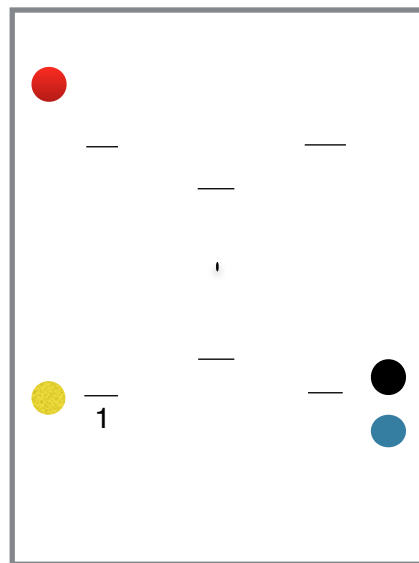
Handicap Guidelines: Setting Initial Handicaps in AC

For a Beginner - a Handicapper will have to watch the player play a number of games and ask themselves how many bisesques the player needs to win half of the games against opponents they are likely to play.

The following test *may* be used as guidance for the Handicapper. The Handicapper should set the hoops on a court according to the Tournament Regulations. The balls should be placed on court as if the standard opening had been played and the tice missed on the fourth turn. Thus, two partner balls should be placed a yard or more apart on the East boundary near hoop 4. One of the other balls should be placed in the tice position near hoop 1 on the West boundary and the final ball should be placed in corner II.

The player whose handicap is being assessed should then construct and play a four-ball break to peg, finishing with a tidy leave. Each attempt should be continued to the peg even if disaster strikes along the way.

The total number of bisesques used to complete this exercise should be noted and the exercise should be repeated about 5 times. The Handicapper may disregard the first two attempts if they consider that the player performed poorly due to lack of familiarity with the exercise.



To calculate the player's handicap the Handicapper averages the number of bisesques taken to complete the exercise and then subtracts one bisque. The result is then multiplied by two and rounded to the nearest multiple of 2 to give the appropriate handicap for the player.

EXAMPLE.

	<u>5 trials</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Minus 1</u>	<u>x 2</u>	<u>Result rounded to nearest handicap</u>
10					
14					
Bisques needed	15	<u>63</u> = 12.6	11.6	23.2	= Handicap 24
12	5				
12					

In All Other Cases -

A Handicapper will have to watch the player play a number of games and consider how many bisques the player needs to win half their games.

If the Handicapper is considering setting a handicap of over 8, they should ask the player to complete the above test. However, they should not adhere religiously to the test result, but should also consider factors including the player's tactical awareness and ability to hit long roquets.

Reminder: A Club Handicapper may set an initial handicap of above 8 but a CA Handicapper may set an initial handicap of 0 or above.

Returning Players -

A player returning to the sport after a break of some years should play off their previous handicap unless there are valid and compelling reasons (e.g. medical) to alter their handicap. If there are, and their handicap is to be changed, then a CA and club handicapper must jointly determine the new handicap.

NOTES. When assessing handicaps, hoops should be set to normal tournament standards as it is the tournament players who will set the benchmarks by which other players will be judged. If the hoops are too wide or slack, poor play will not be penalised and the resulting handicap will be too low. If the player later goes on to play in tournaments off a handicap which is too low, they could be disheartened by losing most of their games.

It is quite common for beginners to improve rapidly, particularly if they are encouraged to practise. It is worth them incorporating the above exercise into their normal practice routine and keeping a record for the benefit of the club handicapper.

The following is based on Don Gaunt's work from previous Handicapping Conferences:

What do handicaps 24, 22, 20 etc. look like?

What can a 20 do that a 24 cannot? When a 20 from one club plays a 20 from another, have they similar abilities? How can we be sure that we have made the correct assessment?

Handicap 24

Players should be able to demonstrate that they can play a singles game without continual supervision, (this does not imply that no rules advice can be sought, rather that the player should not be completely unable to play due to lack of knowledge).

They should be able to:

- a. strike a ball cleanly, run a hoop, play *some* reasonable croquet strokes - knowing about drive, stop, roll and take off shots even if they cannot do them very well.
- b. know how a game starts, the hoop order, what is meant by a break, how a game finishes and how bisques are used.
- c. describe verbally court etiquette (e.g. double banking).
- d. They should know when a referee should be called and the basic faults that can be committed; how a timed game finishes; what Wharrad turns are; and what a shortened game means.

This is the point at which the player may be exposed to B league matches. Progression for competent players should be fairly rapid, but they must be able to play in a match without being a burden on the team or opponents.

Beginners who have some knowledge of the game

Quite often, people join a club having had some previous knowledge of croquet. The amount and value of that knowledge will have to be assessed and an appropriate handicap given. The handicapper should not be afraid of making a realistic assessment because the AHS plus that person's performance will make the necessary adjustments if that assessment is not quite accurate.

Be careful, sometimes a person's belief in their ability is based on a version of croquet that few would recognise!

For handicaps below 24, we need to consider the following principles:

It is rather more difficult to assess ability as a person starts to play in more competitive games. Partly, this is because the various parts of more advanced play are not all learnt in the same order by different players. Similarly, tactical skill is often learnt piecemeal and is not easy to assess. Nevertheless, for small clubs, where a player might take two or three years to play enough games to trigger an automatic change, some guidance is needed. Below are some of the things for the handicapper to consider, together with their pros and cons. **Beware! The result of a single game is only an indicator of performance, despite what the loser might say or think!**

Your assessment can be based on such things as:

Number of bisques left standing

A single game is only a pointer, but if a player is regularly winning with bisques standing, then a change is indicated. **The change ought to be at least one more than the average number of bisques left.** The handicapper should not be afraid to make a fairly strong cut, because a player who is improving this fast will soon compensate for the cut.

Results

Normally, results are a matter for the AHS even if the player only plays one or two games a year. This is particularly so if the wins are not by large amounts and/or there are some losses.

Where, however, a player has had a number of really good wins, the handicapper should consider if an early reduction is warranted. Such a reduction should not be harsh, merely an early change to the next trigger point.

Observation

Normally, observation should be used as a pointer, not a trigger, for change. An exception to this is if a change has been indicated by other means and the observation is of a confirmatory character.

Another method of observation is to play a game with the person in question. This is fine if the game is in the normal run of things but if the player knows they are under observation, the result may well not be that of a normal game due to nervousness.

Comparison

It is vitally important to try and stabilise a club's handicaps. If this is not done, players who play outside the club will have a different standard to those who do not. The result will be a seesaw of handicaps as these two types of player compete at club level. Comparison of a player's results against an opponent whose handicap is known to be accurate can often be used to set the standard for other players. If a wide discrepancy exists the handicapper should consider a general raising or lowering of club-only players. The club's committee should be informed and must support the handicapper if they can prove their case.

Demonstration of ability

Ability and tactical knowledge improve piecemeal in players. Thus a person can be very good at hitting in but incapable of taking advantage of that hit in. So how can the handicapper judge whether a player of, say, 18 handicap ought to be a 16 or 14? The above will give many clues, not forgetting also that the AHS will work well in many cases.

All this is, however, of little use in a small club where perhaps most of the handicaps are incorrect, resulting in difficulties in play outside the club. (Note. This can also happen in larger clubs where a group of players who never play outside the club can drag other members up or down because they never keep cards and seldom get looked at.)

We have often heard *“He/she did a seven hoop break without bisques. A handicap 18 shouldn’t be able to do that!”* Indeed not, if that player can regularly do it.

So what can be done if all other methods have been exhausted? The handicapper can, by observation, reports or by actually running tests, make an assessment by noting what a player can or cannot do.

Indicators

The following exercise is designed to help handicappers assess a player’s ability. For each attribute, the player should be successful when undertaking it either as a test or by observation.

Successful means being able to do it regularly i.e. better than 50% of the time.

A single purple patch is not a reason for change - but it should be noted.

WARNING! Being able to do just one thing from the table is not a reason for a change, the player should be able to do several (but not necessarily all). The most common example of this is a 4-ball break of a number of hoops - how often does the player do it - can they construct the break or does it only happen when the opponent gives them one?

Next task for the AC Group - see next page

TASK. In groups of 6-8, consider the following guidelines and discuss whether you agree with it as it stands or suggest amendments.

This chart is only intended to consider handicaps between 24 and 10. Below 10 the player should have reached a level where the AHS should operate without intervention. If several attributes in the table below suggest a handicap less than 10 (shown as <10) then consultation with an experienced handicapper is required.

HANDICAPPING GUIDELINES

ATTRIBUTE (<i>achieved 50% of tries</i>)	Indicator of H/C	COMMENTS
(a) Approaches a hoop in a croquet stroke and runs it	22	From in front , up to 2 yards
Makes roquets over 3 yards or more	22	
Makes more than 1 hoop in a turn with bisques	22	
Makes roquets over 5 yards or more	20	Up to length of lawn From behind , up to 2 yards
Plays accurate drive shots over different distances	20	
Approaches a hoop in a croquet stroke and runs it	20	
Makes straight rushes of 5 yards or more	18	Balls initially 18 inches apart Remember “regularly” From the side , up to 2 yards
Makes a 4-ball break of 4 hoops with up to 3 bisques	18	
(b) Approaches a hoop in a croquet stroke and runs it	18	
Plays accurate stop shots over different distances	16	Up to 20 yards Up to 15 yards Up to lawn diagonal
Plays accurate roll shots over different distances	16	
Plays accurate take-offs over different distances	16	
Makes a 4-ball break of 4 hoops without bisques	16	
Makes a 3-ball break of 4 hoops with up to 3 bisques	16	
Picks up the 4 th ball in a 3-ball break with bisques	16	
Makes a 4-ball break of 8 hoops with up to 4 bisques	14	Balls initially >1 yard apart
Makes straight rushes of 10 yards or more	14	
Achieves (a) and (b) above and gets a rush afterwards	14	
Makes cut rushes of 5 yards or more	12	Balls initially <1 yard apart
Makes a 4-ball break of 8 hoops with up to 2 bisques	12	
Makes a 3-ball break of 4 hoops without bisques	12	
Makes a 3-ball break of more than 4 hoops with bisques	12	
Makes a rover peel and finishes	10	
Makes a break of > 10 hoops with up to 2 bisques	10	
Makes a 10 hoop break or more without bisques	<10	
Picks up the 4 th ball in a 3-ball break without bisques	<10	
Regularly makes 3-ball breaks without bisques	<10	
In a 4 ball break, rushes pivot off court to use stop shot to get behind poorly placed pioneer and bring pivot back on court	<10	

Session 3B. **Golf Croquet group.**

New players joining clubs should wait to be given a handicap until they have had a full introductory course of coaching and played regularly in Club play for at least a month. At that point they should do the 3 times round the full size lawn test under supervision and be watched by the Club Handicapper for at least two games before being given their handicap. The 3 times round test is only a guide to their basic accuracy of line and distance and should not be the sole criterion for determining the initial handicap. It does not test a variety of types of shot or any tactical awareness which should determine their handicap. Any player whose handicap has not been allocated by this full method should be reassessed by the Club Handicapper.

The following is taken from the CA website.

Setting Initial Handicaps under the New System

Players New to Croquet

When a new player starts playing competitive Golf Croquet, it is essential they be given an appropriate handicap - not every beginner is the same! It is generally the task of the Club Handicapper to set the initial handicap.

Use the following test to set the initial handicap - it is quite approximate and the initial handicap must be reviewed by the Club Handicapper after the player has recorded their first five to ten results, and corrected if necessary.

The simple test for players new to croquet is known as the **Three Times Round** test. The player starts from Corner 4 and counts the number of strokes required to run Hoops 1 to 6 inclusive, completing the exercise three times. Table 3 is then used to convert the aggregate number of strokes taken for the three exercises into an initial handicap. If the player's aggregate is less than 50 the player's handicap should be separately assessed. It should not be used for players who have played Association Croquet and have AC handicaps less than 10.

Table 3: The Three-times-round Test

<i>Strokes Taken</i>	<i>Initial Handicap</i>	<i>Initial Index</i>
50-54	7	1350
55-60	8	1300
61-64	10	1200
65-70	12	1100
71-78	14	1050
>78	16	1000

The practice of setting all beginners at a handicap of 16 *must be avoided*. Most players have some natural ability which deserves a handicap less than 16 - only set a handicap as high as 16 if the Three Times Round test suggests it is necessary.

It is entirely reasonable for Clubs and Federations to set upper or lower handicap limits for players in their leagues, matches and events, such as an upper limit of 16 in league matches, for example. But a complete beginner generally won't be playing in such matches immediately, and may benefit from a first season playing within their clubs off 14 or 16, for example.

The Three Times Round test may also be used by Club Handicappers on existing high-handicap players to confirm or adjust their handicap, particularly if there is doubt about the accuracy of their existing handicap. The Club Handicapper must review the new handicap after 5 or 10 recorded games and correct it if necessary.

Existing Association Croquet Players

Table 4 suggests an initial GC handicap for an AC player who has a handicap of less than 10.

Table 4: Suggested GC Handicap for Existing AC Players

<i>AC Handicap</i>	<i>Suggested GC Handicap</i>
Less than -1	-3
-0.5 to -1	-1
0 to 0.5	0
1 to 1.5	1
2 to 3.0	2
3.5 to 5	3
6 to 7	4
8 to 9	5

Such guidance can only be approximate and a lot will depend on the tactical knowledge and skill level of the specific player. Handicappers should routinely review handicaps set on this basis after 5 or 10 games, and adjust them if necessary.

Returning Players

A player returning to the sport after a break of some years should play off their previous handicap unless there are valid and compelling reasons (e.g. medical) to alter their handicap. If there are, and their handicap is to be changed, then a CA and club handicapper must jointly determine the new handicap.

The New System

The New System provides a handicap for every player when they play Golf Croquet in accordance with Rule 19 on Handicap Play. The player's handicap is used to determine the number of extra turns that the more able player has to give to the less able player, so that the competition between the two is approximately evenly balanced. The system requires that players record accurately on their Handicap Card the result of every 'qualifying game' - this means all games of GC singles played under tournament conditions to level or handicap rules. The Handicap Card tracks the player's Index - a running total of points that increase when you win, and decrease when you lose. Ten index points are exchanged in all handicap singles games - the winner's index increases by 10 and the loser's decreases by 10. When a player's index reaches the 'Trigger Point' for the next handicap level, their handicap is changed. The change is not always immediate and may be held back until the end of a day's play or the end of a short tournament as defined below. The relation between index and handicap is given in Table 1 (*on the CA website*).

If a player reaches a trigger point and their handicap changes, it cannot immediately change back again as a result of the next couple of games. For example, if a 7 handicap player with an index of 1390 wins 10 points from a handicap game, his index becomes 1400, the trigger point for 6. Once the handicap has changed, that player would then have to lose 5 games in a row to have his index drop down to 1350 before he again reaches the trigger point for 7, and so became a 7 again.

Although a 'handicap' is not used when playing level games, full records of all level games are also kept as they improve the accuracy of the player's handicap for when they do venture into handicap play. The points interchanged by players after a level game are calculated on a sliding scale as shown in Table 2 (*on the CA website*). The points the better player can win are significantly reduced; alternatively should the weaker player win, they gain significantly more than 10 points.

Minus Players

As there is now a strong correlation between the lowest handicaps and their CGS Ranking grades, minus players (i.e. those with handicaps below zero) who play fewer than 10 GC handicap singles games in a year are allowed henceforth to not keep a handicap card if they so wish, but instead use their current CGS grade to find their current handicap at any time. However a minus player who enters a handicap singles fixture must bring with them a current completed handicap card.

Doubles Games

GC Rule 19.3 covers handicap doubles play and stipulates that Extra Strokes are awarded to a **particular player** rather than a side. The number of Extra Strokes given by the lower handicap player on one side, to the higher handicap player on the other side, is calculated by halving the difference in handicaps of the two players being compared. Where this calculation leaves a fraction, this is rounded to the nearest whole number (the fraction 0.5 being rounded up). The same procedure is followed for the other two players. If both players on a side have their number of Extra Strokes rounded up then one is rounded down instead.

TASK. In groups of 6-8, consider the following guidelines and discuss whether you agree with it as it stands or suggest amendments.

What skills would you expect of a Golf Croquet Player?

Handicap 16 - 18:

- 1 Has no overall concept of the structure of the game.
- 2 Can hit a single drive to the next hoop on a half lawn but struggles on a full lawn.
- 3 Needs guidance on the order of play round the hoops or the order of balls.
- 4 Is uncomfortable playing singles – i.e. having no-one to advise on their choice of shot.
- 5 Can take straight hoop shots of up to 1 yard but not reliably.
- 6 Struggles to control the mallet head direction to take hoops at an angle.
- 7 Knows what a stop shot is but has not yet mastered the technique to achieve it.
- 8 Has little or no understanding of using extra strokes properly.

Handicap 14 – 16:

1. Is comfortable taking the shorter drives between (hoops 2-3, 4-5, 5-6, 6-7, 8-9,10-11,11-12) but often needs 2 shots to cover the length of the lawn (hoops 0-1, 1-2, 3-4, 7-8, 9-10).
2. On hoop approach shots can be accurate to 5 yards in distance but line of approach is often inaccurate.
3. Knows the order of hoops and the order of balls in play.
4. Can play a stop shot occasionally but not yet clear long distances.
5. Can sometimes take hoops accurately from up to 1 yard both straight and at an angle of up to 20 degrees but is less accurate at wider angles.
6. Plays all hoop shots and clearances too gently.
7. Still assumes their shot must approach the next hoop – rarely looks for other possibilities. Needs constant tactical guidance.
8. Does not yet have any ability in using extra strokes effectively

Handicap 12 – 14

1. Can drive the length of lawn from odd to even hoops but their accuracy of length and direction is inconsistent to up to 5 yards. On occasions manages accuracy to 1 yard.
2. Knows the order of hoops and order of play of the balls.
3. Knows how to play a stop shot and does so successfully about 50% of the time.
4. Can take hoops accurately from 1 yard both straight and at an angle but tends to miss at longer ranges.
5. Tactically still needs guidance from a partner but is beginning to think for themselves.
6. Has learned a little about extra strokes and their use but is not confident in choosing for themselves when to use them.

Handicap 10 – 12

1. Knows the format of a game clearly.
2. Knows some of the types of fault that can be committed but does not always recognise when their shot may be a fault – e.g. hitting a ball close to another (double tap) or hitting a ball through a hoop by holding against the hoop wire to force it through (crush).
3. Will attempt clearances using a stop shot from up to 2 yards.
4. Has approach shots to hoops to an accuracy of 1- 4 yards.
5. Can often take hoops from up to 2 yards both straight and angled.
6. Can occasionally hit a successful split shot to remove an opponent ball.
7. Is able to explain their tactics and regularly plans their next shot.
8. Knows and can correctly choose one or two of the best ways to use extra strokes in handicap play.

Handicap 8 – 10

1. Has a clear grasp of all the basic shots – drive, hoop running, clearances – and is generally accurate in using them over up to 5 yards.
2. Can play a good stop shot from 1 – 2 yards to clear an opponent a long way.
3. Knows most of the rules of Golf Croquet including half way rules and faults. Can usually identify them and avoid occasions when they might be tempted to play a shot which would be a fault.
4. Has been shown a jump shot but not yet mastered it to have confidence to use it in matches.
5. Knows how to calculate a split shot and is growing in confidence to use it for clearances or hoop position.
6. Occasionally thinks to play a defensive placement to protect partner ball or hide from opponent ball rather than only going for hoop position or removal of an opponent ball.
7. Enjoys using extra strokes effectively.
8. Has some knowledge of how and when to call a referee.

Handicaps 6 – 8

1. Accuracy of line and length on hoop approaches is between 1 – 2 yards.
2. Knows how to do a jump shot but only uses it occasionally. Is more confident with straight rather than angled jumps at hoop.
3. Can do accurate clearance shots from 4 - 7 yards away.
4. Can do good stop clearances of up to 10 – 15 yards.
5. Can do split shots to place both opponent and own ball accurately over short distances.
6. Is confident, though not always successful, in taking hoops from up to 5 yards away either straight or at an angle up to approx 30 degrees.
7. Has a good understanding of all the Golf Croquet Rules and calls a referee when necessary.
8. Has a growing tactical awareness of where to place their ball against a better opponent.
9. Has an understanding of how to defend against a player with lots of extra strokes.

Practical issues

Players' duties concerning results

Points to note for any player when completing their card after a match:

1. In GC Handicap games check all index changes are –10, 0 or +10, and in GC Level play games check ALL index changes against the table provided.
2. Check any reaching of trigger points.
3. Check that any consequent change of handicap is recorded at the appropriate end of match/day's play and signed by a handicapper.

- 4 In tournaments record **all** best of 3 games against the same opponent. Do not change handicap part way through a best of 3 match. Follow the tournament director's advice on when a handicap change should be made in a tournament lasting several days.
- 5 At end of match always have your opponent check your card and you check theirs. This avoids results being recorded differently for the same match.

Club Handicapper's duties

1. **For new players:** arrange the 3 times round the lawn test and either play with or watch a new player in a game to assess their first handicap.
Reassess any rapidly improving players every 2 – 3 months and correct as necessary.
Bear in mind that the 3 times round test gives no assessment of tactical skills. It is preferable to wait until the new player has completed any basic coaching course and played in some doubles games with a more experienced partner so is beginning to have some understanding of how to use their shots to best advantage. Then the Club Handicapper can play with them in a doubles game after they have done their 3 times round test and combine both aspects of their assessment in order to assign the initial handicap to the player.
2. **Handicap assessment** to be done regularly for all club members.
For each player:
 - a) Adjust any index changes affected by any error found.
 - b) Then recheck for any reaching of a trigger point.
 - c) Check when any change in handicap should have occurred.
 - d) Alter the front of the card with date and the CA or Club Handicapper's name and corrected index and handicap to ratify the change.
 - e) Inform each player of any changes.
 - f) Inform opponent's club of any matches affected by any errors found.

TASK. Individually or in very small groups, look at the separate sheet showing specimen handicap cards and check for errors.

What else would be helpful to Club Handicappers?

Should cards be kept in the Clubhouse so the Club Handicappers can check them? Should Club Handicappers call in the cards at least once a year to be checked?

This is best done by a small group of 2 or 3 Club members with the Club Handicapper to ensure no errors are missed.

GC - Topic 3 - Discussion Sections

- 1 What a Club Handicapper needs to do.
- 2 GC Handicap Levels
- 3 GC Handicap Cards

What a Club Handicapper needs to do

Ensure that all club members know how to complete a handicap card and check that they do so.

Take special note of any player who loses or wins a long succession of games.

Inform players if their handicaps change by the AHS or are changed by the handicapper.

Inform team captains of any errors that affect past matches.

Set Initial Handicaps

Beginners

1 month's play / coaching

3 times round test

(continued over)

- 2 observed games
- Review after 5 – 10 games
- AC to GC conversions
 - For AC handicaps greater than 10, as for beginners
 - For AC handicaps < 10 use the table but review soon
- Returning players
 - Use previous handicap but review soon

Doubles players

The AHS (*Automatic Handicapping System*) being based only on Singles play can cause problems. Consider the possible solutions to these two issues.

1. Club players who exclusively play doubles may be improving their game without this improvement being reflected in their handicaps, which will be too high.
2. Players may have a high handicap, despite their skill, because their use of Extra Strokes is poor when playing singles. They may be much better in doubles when they have the guidance of a low handicap partner. Is there any way round this problem?

Skills at GC Handicap Levels

Discuss each of the handicap ranges shown on the list and decide whether you agree with the attached descriptions of the expected skills.

Handicap Cards

It is essential that cards are kept up-to-date and are accurate. The points exchanged in a Level play game can be corrected afterwards but the number of Extra Strokes awarded cannot.

Discuss what you think should happen if a player wins a game using too many Extra Strokes.

Check through the specimen handicap card:

Identify the types of errors.

Identify the actual errors.

Identify when the player was playing off the wrong handicap and the effect it had.

Decide what the player's index and handicap should be at the end.

Common errors

- Games missed out / included
- Failing to enter a game
- Including social or coached games
- Excluding friendly matches
- Excluding internal competitions
- Recording errors
 - Date
 - Opponent's handicap wrong (affects Level play)

(Common Errors continued)

Calculation

Arithmetic

Adding instead of subtracting; vice versa

Handicap changes

Changing handicap at a wrong trigger point (e.g. 1450)

Changing handicap after a game instead of after a day or tournament

Changing handicap back when the same trigger point is crossed

Other Issues

How often should the handicapper check the cards?

Should they be kept in the clubhouse?

Using sticks or beads; which is better?

Session 4. Issues common to both AC and GC.

Qualifying Games are the games which must be recorded on handicap cards.

Qualifying games are all singles games in CA Calendar Fixtures, Federation Leagues, inter-club contests (including friendlies which have been arranged in advance) and internal club competitions played in accordance with the rules of the game. **Friendly internal club games, walkovers and abandoned games are specifically excluded from the system.**

The automatic handicapping system is based on full games played on full-sized courts (or near full-size courts).

Handicap Limits

These are sometimes set to help organise entrants to competitions into meaningful groups. It is entirely reasonable for Clubs and Federations to set upper or lower handicap limits for players in their leagues, matches and events, such as an upper limit of 16 in GC league matches or 20 in AC tournaments, for example. But a complete beginner generally won't be playing in such matches immediately, and may benefit from a first season playing within their clubs off higher handicaps.

Changing Handicap

Handicap changes do not necessarily become effective immediately. They only become effective at the end of the tournament if it is a CA Calendar Fixture or any other tournament lasting no more than four days. In all other cases handicap changes become effective at the end of the day. If a player's index goes through a trigger point and then goes back through the same trigger point during the tournament or day, their handicap does not change.

1. All experienced players whose handicap has remained static for a full season should be checked by the Club Handicapper. If they have played insufficient games for their handicap to have had a chance to alter they should be reassessed.
2. A fast improving player should be reassessed by the Club Handicapper regularly through the season and their handicap adjusted if it is out by 2 or more steps. A simple adjustment by 1 step should be allowed to occur naturally if sufficient games are being recorded.
3. Handicaps should be set using full or near-full size courts set to tournament standards. The system has been devised using robust statistical evidence and it relies on consistency of application. Although there is a move for beginners and B League matches to be played on half-courts, **setting of handicaps should always be made on full or near full-size courts.** (Note - *For the benefit of handicapping, clubs with undersize courts should conduct the tests as if they had full-size courts but it is recommended that this be drawn to the attention of the federation handicapper.*)

CA Standard Members and Premium Members now have the responsibility to update their handicaps on the CA website themselves. To do this:

Immediately after logging into the CA website, click "update my details", or if already logged in, go to the Members' Area - CA Directory and click on "My Details" - then, on the Details tab, click the Edit button. Page through your details using the "Next" button until you see your handicap and change it - continue with "Next" until you see the confirm screen, then click "Confirm" to save your changes.

Other members' handicap changes must be entered onto the CA website by their club secretary.

Rapid Improvers or Bandits? They are NOT the same thing.

The first is commendable, the other is a cheat.

A Rapid Improver will often develop skill quickly and the handicap system will never work in this instance - nor was it intended to. It is for the Club Handicapper to correct this situation.

A “Bandit” is someone whose skill is known to be better than their handicap suggests but the club has failed to do anything about it.

In every sport, new talent is sought, encouraged and celebrated. New players are **not** responsible for the handicaps they have been given and their handicap will not be corrected by the Automatic Handicapping System until they play regularly in games, matches and tournaments including many outside their own club. **It is the club that is responsible for ensuring its members are correctly handicapped.** This is fine for larger clubs with experienced people who see enough competitive play on the circuit to be able to make these assessments confidently, but what of the smaller clubs where few members play in league matches? or in new clubs where a small number of people are learning everything as they go along?

A word of caution:

Be aware that players can be erratic – a purple patch may not indicate a permanent improvement.

To summarise, the factors common to AC and GC:

- maintaining accurate handicap cards
 - errors that affect the handicap can't be corrected and may change a match result
- having cards checked regularly
 - we all make mistakes and a second opinion is important, particularly if a handicap adjustment may be required
- how trigger points work
 - reaching the trigger point causes a change; criss-crossing it does not
- the way that handicap games and level play games differ
 - 10 index points per handicap game and a sliding scale for level play
- the qualifying games
 - these are the same for both codes, though the level play tables differ
- the need to have club handicapper(s) for each code
 - a team that can discuss individual cases is better so that one individual doesn't bear all the responsibility
- players returning after time away from the game
 - the handicap for a returning player can be changed if there is a good health reason
- bandits and fast improvers
 - actually, bandits are very rare and fast improvers are what a club needs most

Session 5. Managing the system.

The Automatic Handicap System (AHS) is based on AVERAGE PERFORMANCE. All players have good and bad days with a varying level of inconsistency so although a handicap 10 player will usually play at level 10, there will be times when they play better than that and others when they play worse. This is why the system is devised for +/- 50 points to the next trigger point.

With AC, we also need to be aware of the reasoning behind the two differences concerning high and low handicap numbers. Above 12, handicap steps are in twos. This acknowledges that higher handicap players have a greater level of inconsistency and so each handicap step gives a 2 bisque difference.

At the other end of the handicap scale, below scratch, there are “Notional Steps” for minus players. This was introduced to give greater fairness when a high and low handicap player play each other to restore the probability of a 50% chance of winning. This is the area of probably the biggest cause of mistakes made in players mis-calculating their index change on handicap cards.

Bill Lamb explained that *“A handicap is not defined more precisely than +/- one step, and there is no point in handicappers making adjustments of this magnitude. The AHS also requires players in the system to play many games (at least 10) and against different opponents. The more games a player plays, the better the chance of finding the correct level in the system. The system works best, therefore, for players who do play regularly and competitively. It is no use at all in standardising handicaps for closed communities of players with no contact outside their immediate circle, although it will provide comparative handicaps for them. It cannot cope with rapidly improving players and was never intended to.”*

The other common error found on handicap cards is when the AHS triggers a handicap change downward and the player then loses the next match, this does not send the handicap back again. That player would need an overall net loss of 5 games to get back to the trigger point for that to happen.

That is one reason why club handicappers need to be pro-active checking for misunderstanding and errors.

The AHS will usually cope with players who play at least ten competitive games per season. Please note that friendly games are specifically EXCLUDED from the AHS and players may not take them into account for automatic handicap changes.

Active Management of Handicaps

Before a match, Team Captains should check all team members' handicap cards are up to date. Players must always take their handicap cards to matches and tournaments and it is increasingly common for them to be handed in and checked at the beginning of events. An official is entitled to ask to see it at any time. In league matches, this should now be considered the norm.

Players are responsible for recording their own results, calculating their own index and determining any handicap changes. Failure to do so may result in playing off an incorrect handicap possibly resulting in disqualification from the tournament.

The accuracy (and fairness) of the system relies upon the correct recording of all competitive games by every player.

Although the Handicap System is described as automatic, it requires active management and occasional manual intervention by handicappers. Appropriate initial handicaps must be set and records kept.

It is now the players and clubs responsibility to update their handicap on the CA database as explained on page 18.

Non-Automatic Changes to Handicaps

Handicappers may correct an inappropriate handicap within the constraints described earlier. This may be because the player is a rapid improver or perhaps the handicap was incorrectly set in the first case.

The Handicapper should always ensure there is a genuine need before they take any action. If a player's handicap card contains a reasonable number of recent games, these should be considered and weighed against a direct viewing of their performance. However, when there is little evidence on the handicap card, a Handicapper may have to make a decision based purely on witnessing actual play. Changes must be based on match results and never on the assessment of mallet skills alone. In GC, the way a player uses extra turns can alter the correct handicap by as much as three steps, especially in the higher handicap range. And similarly in AC, tactics and temperament can both influence overall performance as much as mallet skills - the right handicap reflects all these aspects.

In a match or tournament, Non-Automatic Changes in handicap may only be made by an officially appointed Handicapper, within constraints depending on the grade of the Handicapper. In all cases, changes take effect in the player's next game.

Session 6. How do you know you are getting it right?

Perhaps a better question would be “**How do other clubs know you are getting it right?**”

The answer as I see it, is summed up as a determination to be fair and this comes in 3 parts:

1. **THE CLUB** must have a clear policy in place;
2. **THE HANDICAPPER** needs to develop experience and, most importantly of all, be proactive;
3. **ALL MEMBERS** must know how to complete a handicap card, be diligent in filling it in, and **always** have it with them when playing in any match or tournament.

I want to explain the 3 parts in more detail.

1. A club that has a clear policy on handicapping is going to be taken seriously: not only by their own members but also by other clubs.

It will also make the handicapper's life much easier. At its worst, a handicapper can feel isolated but when a club is demonstratively supportive of the handicapper, any issues are much easier to settle. The club committee must always give the handicapper full support.

So, every club should appoint a club handicapper, and preferably one for GC and one for AC - and maybe have one or two in reserve.

Some clubs have handicap committees who take in its members cards once or twice a year for monitoring and checking and to discuss whether any handicap changes are necessary.

2. When new handicappers are appointed, ideally, they should play regularly in handicap tournaments so they regularly see how players from other clubs perform. In the early stages, experience can be gained by attending tournaments as an observer, seeking the help of others - and we hope that such help would be easy to come by and happen in an atmosphere of supportive encouragement.

Rather than waiting for problems to appear, handicappers should be proactive by monitoring cards regularly and discussing handicaps with their members. That should help develop a culture of support.

Handicappers can work with the club coach and team captains all of whom will have been monitoring their colleagues and can give valued opinions.

Pay particular attention to members who play in fewer than 10 external games a year.

Avoid the temptation to make a change following just one outstanding win as it may be a fluke - and always beware the protestations of the losing opponent as they are always convinced they lost because of wrong handicaps! A spectacular win should be noted, but can they repeat it?

3. Club members will be less “prickly” if card monitoring is a regular part of a club's culture and it is always done in a supportive manner. Many handicappers discuss handicap changes with their members rather than announcing a change “out of the blue” which can sometimes appear draconian. Members should view such discussion as a natural step in their progress.

When they go to another club for a match players will be confident that their handicap is correct, their cards are correct, and so they should not be embarrassed because any errors will have been corrected in the privacy of their own club.

One thing we can be sure of is that it is going to be increasingly common to have to produce cards at the beginning of a match day and have them scrutinised.

There are some contentious issues over the keeping and administration of handicap cards, with many people wanting a more assertive approach. Some people want the process to be much tighter. Others view this as an affront, so we need to be diplomatic.

Alerts: If your club wins or loses a South West Federation AC handicap match by a 7-0 margin (or a similar score in GC), this is an alert that your club handicaps may have drifted out of line.

Though this will happen by chance about 1% of the time, this equates to four or five times in the

whole SWF over a year. If it happens to your club twice in a year, your club handicaps are almost certainly out of line.

If your club does not play league matches, but you have one or two players who play regularly in tournaments, it will usually be best to consider their handicaps to be right and adjust the handicaps of those who do not play outside the club accordingly.

At the end of the playing season, the league secretary and SWF committee will consider all the results. Since a very large number of games are played in these matches, any serious drift of a particular club's handicaps is likely to come to light.

The next step.

There is no “magic wand” in achieving a perfect handicapping system. It relies on individuals, clubs, the federation and the CA working together in a spirit of mutual support and continual improvement.

At the workshop, we have explored much of the theory behind handicapping and being an effective club handicapper. However, a one-day workshop will not make you an experienced and confident handicapper. That will take time and there is nothing better than experience gained under the guidance of a colleague.

So where do we start? The information you have received today and in this pack is already on the SWF website. What we need to do now is put all this into practice.

There is no substitute for experience and the following ideas have proved to be successful. You may like to arrange some of the following:

Learning from others via:

- on-court experience with an experienced handicapper and some club volunteers;

- attending H/C tournaments and discussing handicaps with other handicappers;

- Inviting a handicapper to visit your club to observe/advise/help you set handicaps.

You may like to arrange something like that for yourself - or offer it to a neighbouring club.

During the course of the workshop, you will have met other people with varying levels of expertise and varying needs. Ideally, we would like you to establish partnerships with other clubs and make contact with the CA Handicapper who lives closest to you. There are not enough CA handicappers to ensure every club gets as much one-to-one help as they may wish so we need to rely on the goodwill of clubs and those with more experience to offer help.

We hope that everyone:

- will have a partner club to work with;

- will know and have spoken to their closest CA Handicapper;

- will have a plan as to what is going to happen next.

If there are any remaining issues, concerns or comments, we need to know.

So before you leave, please complete the evaluation sheet and leave it with us. This will also be used to check every club is supported.

We will issue attendance certificates to those of you who are not currently club handicappers which may be of help to you when your club's committee is next seeking a new Club Handicapper.

SWF CA Handicappers (2019)		- AC/GC	
Stephen Custance-Baker	Taunton Deane	AC	GC
Kevin Ham	Dyffryn		GC
Roger Hayes	Bath	AC	
Sarah Hayes	Cheltenham	AC	
Ros Key-Pugh	Camerton+Peasedown		GC
Peter Moore	Budleigh	AC	GC
Robert Moss	Bears, Budleigh	AC	
Ray Ransom	Bristol	AC	
Klim Seabright	Cheltenham	AC	GC
Brian Shorney	Cheltenham, Eardsley	AC	
Carol Smith	Cheltenham	AC	
Chris Williams	Dyffryn	AC	
Adam Wimshurst	Budleigh, Exeter	AC	

Further reading.

On the CA website, there are also pages on
 Handicap Guidelines for:
 Automatic Changes to Handicaps (the AHS);
 Short Croquet;
 Bises and lawn size;
 Playing in your First Tournament.
 How to fill in handicap cards.

Bill Lamb's book - Principles of Handicapping £2.50 from the CA shop

This Workshop Booklet will be kept up to date and posted on the SWF website.

Acknowledgements.

Nearly all of the material presented at these workshops and in these notes has been taken from or influenced by -

- the Handicapping area on the CA website;
- the SWF website - particularly material from Don Gaunt's handicapping conferences in 2005 and 2008;
- "Principles of Handicapping" by Bill Lamb.

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