

# April Showers Bring Handicap Questions

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Every spring, the passionate golfers of Canada retrieve their clubs from the basement and head to their home club or their favourite public course, confident that a long winter of golf instruction articles and waggles in front of the mirror are going to lower their Handicap Factor. All this optimism is met with the reality that the course they last saw in the fall has turned into a muddy mess with at least a few greens out of play. This is no reason for tempered enthusiasm (it's better than a foot of snow), but it does raise some important questions:

1. How do early spring conditions affect your Handicap Factor?
2. How do you post scores when temporary greens are in place?

There is no doubt that Handicap Factors, in general, tend to rise slightly in the springtime. This is partly due to golfers shaking off months of rust, but the condition of the golf course also plays a significant role.

When a golf course undergoes the course rating procedure to determine its difficulty, the course is always rated on its effective playing length and its playing difficulty under *normal* conditions. Soft, spring conditions can significantly alter the effective playing length of a course, causing the course rating to be unreflective of the difficulty of the course at that particular time. An overall difference in effective playing length of 22 yards for men and 18 yards for women will change the course rating 0.1 of a stroke. Normal course rating conditions consider roll on a tee shot to be 20 yards, so it's easy to understand the effect that little or no roll has on the course rating.

To ensure that Handicap Factors do not get artificially inflated, the club handicap committee should seek the cooperation of the club green committee in maintaining the normal playing difficulty of the golf course. The easiest and most effective way of doing this is to simply move the tee markers to the front half of the teeing ground to the extent necessary to achieve normal playing length.

The dreaded temporary green Along with soft and slow playing conditions, spring golf often brings the dreaded temporary green into play. Our offices are always inundated at this time with calls from golfers wondering how they can post a score for handicap purposes when a green or several greens are out of play at their course. Many simply assume that scores cannot be posted when temporary greens are in play because the temporary greens almost always make the hole shorter and the condition of the temporary green is generally of a much lower standard than the regular green. On the contrary, a hole with a temporary green should be considered 'not played' for handicap purposes, in which case we refer to Section 4-2 of the RCGA Handicap Manual, which explains how to post a score for a hole 'not played'. The score for handicap purposes for a hole 'not played' must be the par for the hole, plus any handicap strokes a player

is entitled to receive on that hole according to the stroke hole allocations on the scorecard. For example, a player with a 10 handicap receives a stroke on the first 10 allocated stroke-holes. If that player were to play a par 4 that has a temporary green, and that hole is handicap strokehole number six, the player must record a score of par, plus the one handicap stroke they would receive on that hole for a total of 5. The player can go ahead and play the hole in as many strokes as it takes to hole the ball, but for handicap purposes the player must record a score of 5.