

The "X" Factor (USGA)

How to post a score when you pick up, are conceded a putt, do not finish 18 holes, do not play by the rules, etc.

Douglas spent the winter dreaming of the special day when his course opens with its ice-breaker tournament. The harsh memory of mornings spent shoveling the overnight snowfall would melt with that first drive of the new season.

This year, thanks to months of anticipation, Douglas played far worse than the 18.8 Handicap Index with which he'd finished last season. He picked up on seven holes when his better-ball partner, Roger, played like a champ. On top of that, the group only finished 16 holes before dark. Although the day was not a total loss - Douglas and Roger placed third - a scorecard with seven Xes left Douglas despondent that he not only held the team back, but could not post the round as the committee expected.

Fortunately, Roger knew better and informed Douglas that the USGA Handicap System™ provisions allow any player the opportunity to post a score almost any time he tees it up. That's especially useful to a player who is out of a hole and picks up to speed up play.

Section 4-1 USGA Handicap System states "If a player starts but does not complete a hole or is conceded a stroke, he shall record for handicap purposes the score he most likely would have made. The most likely score consists of the number of strokes already taken plus, in his best judgment, the number of strokes that the player would need to complete the hole from that position more than half the time. The most likely score should be preceded by an 'X.' "

Section 4 deals with three types of postings:

Incomplete holes. Douglas was 15 feet from the hole in two at the par-3 fourth when Roger holed out from a bunker for birdie. As he pocketed his ball, Douglas determined that he probably would have two-putted at least half of the time, so he replaced that X with an X-4.

Shortened rounds. According to Section 4-2, "If a player does not play a hole or plays it other than under the Rules of Golf (except for preferred lies), his score for that hole for handicap purposes shall be par plus any handicap strokes he is entitled to receive on the hole." Using the allocation of handicap strokes from the scorecard, his Course Handicap of 21 and each hole's par meant Douglas replaced those last Xes with X-6 and X-5.

Although not happy with a 113, Douglas could post it. He realized the two-step process was simple - determine his most likely score on a hole, then see if it exceeded his **Equitable Stroke Control** maximum. If there was a lesson, it was that going into his pocket didn't necessarily mean posting a big number.

Roger pointed out a nearby bulletin board with a USGA Handigram, a poster of frequently asked questions to assist those uncertain of how to apply the procedures. Douglas left the course proud of the few holes where he had contributed to the team, and vowing that the next time his play proved less than satisfactory he would still post a proper score.