

# GAM COURSE RATING GUIDE

*For Club Administrators*



Dear Club Administrators,

The Golf Association of Michigan (GAM) hopes that you are well and ecstatic about everything that golf in Michigan has to offer. This short guide presents an opportunity to learn more about the course rating process in Michigan and what to expect when coordinating with GAM's Course Rating teams.

Whether a club administrator, handicap committee chair, or one of our 80,000-plus members, we believe that this resource will make you more informed about the GAM's course rating process and the implications of course rating on your participation in the World Handicap System®.

The Course Rating System™ is directly guided by the World Handicap System (WHS), under the joint direction of the United States Golf Association® (USGA®) and Royal and Ancient Golf Club® (R&A®), to establish the global application of the WHS. As an authorized association, GAM is given jurisdiction within Michigan by the USGA to exercise oversight and application of the World Handicap System. This duty as an authorized association includes the responsibility to conduct all course ratings within our jurisdiction.

GAM is proud to highlight our robust Course Rating Program, which is fueled annually by over 100 active and participating volunteers from across the state. In 2022, GAM completed 67 comprehensive course ratings. In addition to often more than ten days of on-course activity, our raters complete thorough training exercises administered by GAM in accordance with the USGA's certification requirements. Staff, Captains, and Team Leaders also attend additional training opportunities offered by the USGA.

As we encounter the 2023 season, GAM's course rating teams are prepared and eager to continue to serve Michigan's golf community. We hope that the information contained in this guide provides a better understanding of course rating and its implications for our game.

Warmest Regards,

Hunter L. Koch

Associate Director of Course Rating

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### Contact GAM

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# GAM's Course Rating Team

*Always Ready*

GAM's Course Ratings are conducted by a large, robust, and highly qualified team of staff, volunteer captains, and volunteer raters. In 2022, 126 raters participated in at least one rating; and, 45 of those raters participated in at least 10 days of rating activities.

The Course Rating Program is led by Hunter Koch, of Saginaw, as GAM's Associate Director of Course Rating. This is his second year on staff and fourth year as a course rater. You can contact the GAM Course Rating Team through Hunter at [hkoch@gam.org](mailto:hkoch@gam.org) or by phone at (248)-478-9242, Ext. 118.

The team is also assisted on staff by Elizabeth Stidham, as GAM's Member Services Manager. This is her first season on staff with GAM and can be contacted at [estidham@gam.org](mailto:estidham@gam.org) or by phone at (248)-478-9242, Ext. 114.

GAM's on-course fieldwork activities are guided by the leadership of several volunteer captains spread throughout the state. They cumulatively have 107 years of experience as a course rater (year starting rating in parenthesis):

- Mark Bultema, of Rockford (1998)
- Mike and Connie Brady, of Hudsonville (2008 & 2004)
- Laurie Puscas, of Rochester Hills (2011)
- John Aulepp, of Northville (2013)
- Mark Erickson, of Owosso (2016)
- Darrell Zavitz, of Charlevoix (2016)
- John Holden, of St. Joseph (2019)
- Erik and Carmany Thorp, of Mullett Lake (2019 & 2019)

## ***Becoming a Rater***

GAM's Course Rating Program relies heavily on the commitment of our volunteers, as well as the robust series of training and safeguards put in place to ensure our course ratings are thoroughly and accurately conducted.

New raters with GAM are required to participate and succeed in extensive training opportunities. They are asked to complete online orientations, participate in winter training sessions, attend an on-course orientation, and train/shadow with an experienced rater for several ratings before becoming independently assigned.

Returning raters are also encouraged to continue to participate in weekly sessions throughout the winter and other periodical trainings during the season. They also are regularly updated on their accuracy through online quizzes and thorough review of their Form 1's.

Advanced raters, captains, and staff, also participate in regular training sessions provided by the USGA/WHS.

## ***Celebrating Success***

GAM annually presents three awards to course raters who go above and beyond to ensure the success of GAM's Course Rating Program. The 2022 winners were:

- Rater of the Year: Laurie Puscas
- Rookie of the Year: Marty Score
- Trainer of the Year: Dee Piccard

# What is a Course Rating?

## And how is it established?

No two golf courses are the same. Course Rating® and Slope Rating® are the fundamental information necessary for the World Handicap System to compensate for that fact.

Authorized associations, like GAM, are given the jurisdiction to issue Course, Bogey, and Slope Ratings in accordance with the Course Rating System™. In the United States, the term "authorized association" is generally interchangeable with the term "Allied Golf Association" (AGA).

A Course Rating reflects the difficulty of a golf course for the scratch player (a player with a Handicap Index® of 0.0) under normal course and weather conditions. A Bogey Rating reflects the difficulty of a golf course for the bogey player (a player with a Handicap Index of 20.0 for men and 24.0 for women) under normal course and weather conditions. The Slope Rating is an indication of the relative difficulty of a golf course for players who are not scratch players compared to players who are scratch players, which is calculated via the relative difference between the Course and Bogey Rating.

The Course Rating and Slope Rating establish the difficulty of a course compared to other courses. They are used as the course data in establishing handicap differentials for score posting and the calculation of a playing handicap for formal or friendly competition.

Authorized associations, like GAM, assemble qualified teams to conduct course rating activities. These teams evaluate the golf course over two days – one for measurement, and the other for rating.

At the measurement, two important sets of data are collected. The first is the measurement of each hole from each set of tees to establish hole lengths. This is conducted by either the reflector or GPS method. In the reflector method, a series of reflectors are placed on each hole, taking into account pivot points on the intended line of play, and a high-accuracy electronic measurement device (EMD) is used to measure between reflectors. In the GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) method, a high-accuracy GPS unit is used to mark waypoints at the points used in the reflector method, and software is used to tabulate the distances between those points. Both methods are approved by the USGA for measuring the length golf courses.

The second set of data on measurement day corresponds to common features of the golf course from all tees. This information is important to calibrate all raters on rating day and includes measurements such as the distance to cross penalty areas, the coverage and depth of greenside bunkers, the distance to lateral penalty areas at the green, and the size and contouring of green surfaces. Captains and team leaders also confirm certain measurements and observations for accuracy with course staff.

On rating day, course raters complete a "Form 1" sheet to collect data on both effective playing length corrections and evaluate obstacle factors. Effective playing length corrections account for example abnormal roll, forced lay-ups, and the ability or inability to cut doglegs. Obstacle factors include topography, fairway, green target, recoverability and rough, bunkers, crossings, laterals, trees, green surface, and psychological. Each obstacle is given a rating between 0 and 10 from these charts and associated adjustments. The evaluated numerical values given to these factors are produced via data and observations collected and charts found in the Course Rating System Guide that raters are trained on and use while on course.

The Course and Bogey Ratings (both establishing the Slope Rating) are formulated through the combination of a length rating and obstacle rating. The length rating, which makes up the vast majority of the formula is calculated via the effective playing length of the golf course, calculated as the measured length plus or minus the effective playing length corrections applied by rating teams. The obstacle rating is calculated via a weighting of each obstacle's cumulative values from each hole.

# The Course Rating Process

## *Start to Finish*

### ***Pre-Fieldwork***

The Course Rating Process is started by the Master Expiration List kept by GAM of the expiration date of each golf course in its jurisdiction (Michigan). Each year, the list produces 40-70 courses due for a re-rating on the year of expiration. An additional few clubs reach out to request an advanced rating and are added to the list.

Courses due for a re-rating are contacted by GAM Staff for scheduling purposes. Staff will schedule the club for two days of fieldwork, one for measuring and one for rating at a time which is mutually available for the club and GAM's course rating teams.

Once scheduled by staff, most course ratings are assigned to one or more volunteer captains who lead and oversee the days of fieldwork and data collection processes. Prior to the first day of fieldwork, the captain may contact you to confirm details and inquire about things such as changes made since the last rating, common course data, and maintenance practices.

### ***Measurement Day (Length Verification)***

The first day of on-course fieldwork will be the measurement day. GAM's standard measuring team consists of four raters, including the captain(s). For a standard 18-hole routing, the team will measure all holes sequentially as one-team starting at the designated time (generally around 8:30am). It is highly preferred that the club provide a 30-minute block to tee times behind this designated starting time to minimize impacts to your golfers. The measuring team moves around the golf course at or ahead of the pace of play and require three carts.

For measuring day, it is extremely important that the tee markers on each hole are placed on the teeing pad in which they are at for standard, normal play. For each tee, the measuring team will measure the overall hole lengths on this day from the midpoint of the pad (or its portion of the pad when more than one tee exists on a pad). If the markers are placed on pads not regularly used, a significantly longer or shorter measurement could be taken, skewing the final results. If a tee is healing or under construction at the time of the rating (and therefore cannot be used for play temporarily), please notify the captain of this for an accurate measurement to be taken.

The length measurement of the golf course is completed with precise techniques as it is the most impactful factor towards the final Course Ratings and Slope Ratings issued. Each roughly 22 yards for men, and 18 yards for women, adds one-tenth of a point to the length rating.

On this day, the team will also take common measurements which apply to all players on the course and each specific hole such as green size, bunker depths, crossing lengths, and green surface slopes. Additionally, the team will measure green speed and rough heights. If your average midseason green speed or rough height is different than what is on the course on measuring day, please pass that information along to the captain. The team captain(s) will also briefly meet with a club administrator and/or the superintendent on site at each fieldwork visit.

GAM asks that the club provide the rating team lunch following the completion of fieldwork. Following lunch, it is customary that the club provide a tee time for the team to play the golf course. During this playthrough, the team takes note of any missed observations from the morning from the vantage point of a player. If lunch or play following is not possible, please let your assigned staff and/or captain contacts know well in advance.

### ***Between Fieldwork***

Between the two days of fieldwork, captains input data from the measuring day to build the Form 1's (standard forms used to collect data on rating days) and verify accuracy of the measurement data.

## **Rating Day (Course Rating)**

The second day of on-course fieldwork will be the rating day. On rating day, each "team" of raters completes a formal evaluation of 9 holes of the golf course, starting on each nine at the designated starting time (generally about 8:30 am). On 18 and 27-hole routings, individual teams will simultaneously rate each nine. A team consists of one rater for each human-rated tee for each gender. Select tees that are extremely long or short will fall outside of the WHS-designated yardage ranges and will be rated via the duplication process, an important safeguard for data integrity and the design of the Course Rating System. Most 18-hole golf courses require 12-16 raters to complete all required evaluations.

Rating teams move approximately at the pace of play while on the course, completing nine holes in 90 to 150 minutes depending on complexity. Each rater requires their own golf cart to gather data throughout the assigned holes. Again, on rating day, it is highly preferred that the club provide a 30-minute block to tee times behind the designated starting time to minimize impacts to your golfers while on the course.

On rating days, individual members gather two important sets of data which are specific to their assigned tee and gender. The first is corrections to the effective playing length of a golf course, which can include adjustments for doglegs, lay-ups, or abnormal roll. The second is collecting the data for the assignment of obstacle values. There are ten obstacle factors evaluated, all of which require individual raters to collect several snapshots of data specific to their assignment. These data points are then entered into standardized tables and then combined with applied adjustments to create obstacle values. The effective playing length corrections and final obstacle ratings are the final data entered into the course rating database to calculate Course and Slope Ratings.

When raters return from the course, they spend several minutes calculating the individual obstacle ratings and completing their paperwork. They also perform checks over their sheets to validate accuracy, before handing them over to the captain for processing.

GAM asks that the club provide the rating team with lunch following the completion of fieldwork. Following lunch, it is customary that the club provide tee times for the team to play the golf course. The post-rating playthrough is an important part of the Course Rating System. The team takes note of any missed observations from the morning from the vantage point of a player and as needed makes modifications to their evaluations. If lunch or play following is not possible, please let your assigned staff and/or captain contacts know well in advance of the day of fieldwork so alternate arrangements can be made.

## **Processing and Publishing**

Following the completion of the on-course fieldwork, the captain agglomerates the data from the individual rating sheets. They also provide thorough review for accuracy in data and calculations. After review, the final documents are forwarded to the GAM Staff for processing.

GAM staff again perform review of the data presented, and then enter it into the USGA's course rating data portal. Each yardage, effective playing length correction, and obstacle value from each rater's Form 1 are entered for the system to calculate Course and Slope Ratings for each tee and gender. At this point, staff run various reports to ensure there are no "red flags". After running these reports, the final Course and Slope Ratings are sent to the club for review. Unless a large data discrepancy is found, these sent ratings are issued for publishing.

The club has several options in regards to when to publish. If they want the ratings made active in the current season, they may ask for immediate publishing, or for the ratings to be published at a set date in the future. The most common and default option, however, is for the ratings to be published in the next offseason to avoid confusion in regard to score posting and printed scorecards. If GAM is not notified of a preference otherwise, new ratings will be scheduled to be activated prior to the next active season (generally in March).

# Frequently Asked Questions

## *Better Understanding the System*

### ***When is a course rating necessary?***

Golf courses change subtly and dramatically over the course of time. Trees grow taller and maintenance practices are continuously improved. Changes to the golf course's playability require course ratings to be conducted periodically throughout time.

The most common periodical re-rating of an existing golf course occurs every ten years. The Rules of Handicapping establish this interval as the point at which authorized association and AGAs like GAM are required to conduct a full course rating to reevaluate the golf course. There are two reasons: (1) there are instances where golf courses have several small changes that impact a course's difficulty and (2) to re-rate the golf course according to the most updated version of the Course Rating System™ built from continuous research by the WHS (with the USGA and R&A).

New constructions are rated initially before or shortly after the course is opened, and then again within five years of its first rating. This is because golf courses mature and can change dramatically over these first several years.

Likewise, when renovation projects or natural factors change the golf course significantly, the club should request GAM to provide an opinion on whether a full or partial re-rating is necessary. Several factors, especially those that impact the length of the golf course, will have an outsized impact on playability, and will therefore prompt an increased need for a partial or full rating. If only a few holes are modified or changed, GAM may also recommend a partial rating, where a smaller team will modify the previous rating on select holes. The final factor of whether GAM would recommend a full rating is the length of time since the previous rating. If the current rating is nearing its ten-year re-rating, there is a higher probability of the course being recommended for a full re-rating in advance of when it is due.

### ***What happens if a course rating is not conducted by its due year?***

Course ratings are issued for a ten-year period from the date of the rating. For example, if a course was last rated in 2013, then its rating would expire in 2023, and be contacted to schedule a 2023 rate date. GAM uses a year of expiration rather than a specific date, meaning that those ratings expire at the end of the active season in that year -- October 31.

Unless a temporary rating extension is granted (generally due to approaching construction or course modifications), GAM is required to inactivate all expired ratings during the offseason following their expiry. When ratings are deactivated, rounds played on the course are no longer eligible for score-posting purposes. If a lapse in an active course rating occurs, when a re-rate is scheduled and payments (if required) are complete, a temporary rating may be put back into effect until the new rating is completed.

### ***Is there a cost for a course rating?***

Existing GAM Member Handicapping Clubs and Member Golf Courses in good standing receive full course rating services at no charge at each WHS-required interval. Charges for additional non-required ratings or because of a major change are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

New GAM Member Clubs and Courses are required to pay a new member course rating fee and prepay two years of club/course membership dues.

GAM does ask that the club provide a modest lunch for the raters who volunteer their time and the necessary golf course access required to complete the rating process.

## ***How is eligibility determined for a course rating?***

### ***What is coming from the WHS regarding short courses?***

Under the current *Rules of Handicapping*, a course (or tee) must be greater than 1,500 yards for nine holes and have at least one hole of greater than 250 yards to be eligible for a course rating.

GAM was thrilled to participate with two of our member clubs in testing courses shorter than 1,500 yards last season for the short course integration and portability study that was conducted with the USGA and WHS. The USGA has confirmed to GAM and the AGA community that short courses will be eligible for a course rating and inclusion into the World Handicap System in the 2024 revisions to the *Rules of Handicapping*.

While players will not be able to post scores towards their Handicap Index® from short courses until January 1, 2024, GAM will be permitted to begin to pre-rate qualifying courses beginning in late summer or early fall 2023. Scores from these courses rated in the 2023 season will then be able to be posted, beginning for rounds played after the start of the 2024 active score posting season.

### ***What about 9- and 27-hole courses?***

Much of this guide specifically discusses the activity at a standard 18-hole golf course. Thirty-six or greater hole facilities are broken up into separate 9-, 18-, or 27-hole segments.

Twenty-seven-hole courses have a similar rating process to an 18-hole facility, with the exception of requiring more raters to be present. On measuring day, generally, two teams will complete 13 and 14 holes respectively with about 6 to 8 total raters to split between the teams. On rating day, three teams will rate the golf course, one on each nine. As a result, a typical 27-hole course rating could require up to 18-24 raters.

Nine-hole courses work substantially differently as the measuring and rating process is completed from start to finish in one day. A team of 4-8 raters will conduct the measurement first in the morning and then come to the clubhouse to do data entry and print rating documents for the course rating to be conducted. The team will then rate the golf course in the late morning followed by lunch and golf.

### ***What do captains discuss with club administrators and/or the superintendent?***

Captains will be in contact with club administrators and the superintendent about a range of topics. The first is the schedule of the day in which the captain will confirm times and communicate with the club about any conflicts or issues that arise.

The second is to ensure that the rough height and green speed measurements to be used are accurate for everyday play. Incorrect measurements in these two factors have an outsized impact on the final rating values.

Finally, captains want to ensure that the rating process is done comprehensively. They will often ask questions regarding certain elements of the golf course to better understand how the club and its members treat certain obstacles and challenges presented. One key factor of the entire rating process is to standardly ensure that the golf course is rated for not only mid-season conditions but also the way the golf course is played daily.

### ***Can I observe the process?***

Club administrators and members are welcome to observe both days of fieldwork in a mutually beneficial way, both for the club to learn more about the system, and for the teams to better understand the golf course. We do ask that the number of individuals is limited, however, for the efficiency and timeliness of the process.

## ***Is course rating objective or subjective?***

More than 99 percent of the overall Course and Slope Rating of a golf course is entirely calculated from objective data measurements taken and refined into standardized rating values throughout the process. All subjective elements (comprising less than one percent of the final ratings) are gathered through rating team consensus and with stringent criteria defined in the Course Rating System.

## ***How is the golf course measured for gross length?***

As previously inferred, golf courses are measured with two different pieces of technology (GPS or EMD) which use the same methodology to complete a length verification or gross length measurement. This gross measurement of each hole from each tee set is the length of the golf course's individual holes and is included in the final rating materials. Please feel free to use these official measurements to update your scorecards or other materials at your discretion.

Each hole measurement begins at the teeing pads. Each tee set is measured from the midpoint of its teeing area. For example, if a tee pad only has one tee set on it, then the starting point for the hole is at the midpoint of that pad. If two sets were present on that pad, then each set would get its own half of the pad, and then the midpoint of each respective section would be used for the corresponding tee set. When the tee markers are placed identically together, the hole is measured for both tees from the same midpoint.

While one measurer is evaluating the midpoint locations for each tee set, other measurers are selecting pivot points along the hole and placing reflectors (in the GPS method, pivot waypoints are determined in the same locations as the team progresses down the hole). These pivot points are the natural turns or doglegs designed into the layout of a hole. They follow where the designed line of play exists. One or more pivot points may be placed on a hole (for par-3's there are generally no pivot points). Finally, the team places a reflector at the green front -- this spot is the origin point for measuring green dimensions.

Each individual segment of the hole (from each tee to the first pivot, pivot to pivot, and pivot to green) is measured independently (or computed from GPS waypoints). Half of the green depth is also added for the green front to green center measurement. All of these segments are added up through our data worksheets and totaled for use on the Form 1's on rating day.

## ***How is effective playing length evaluated?***

Effective Playing Length is equivalent to the measured length of the golf course, plus or minus corrections made by the rating team.

**Roll** occurs when the ball, once it comes out of the air in the landing zone, will roll less than or greater than the average 15-25 yards on a full shot.

**Elevation** considers the playability and length effect changes because of tee-to-green elevation change on the hole and adjusts the effective playing length accordingly.

**Dogleg** corrections occur when the scratch or bogey player can cut across a corner with a measured pivot point (reducing the effective playing length) or is obstructed from doing so and is therefore not able to hit a full shot (increasing the effective playing length). Subsequently, a **Forced Lay-up** also occurs when the scratch or bogey player is not able to hit a full shot (increasing effective playing length), due to a crossing or punitive obstacle.

**Wind** adjustment is determined by the average daytime wind speed during the midseason; this data is maintained by the GAM in cooperation with data from the National Weather Service.

**Altitude** is considered for courses greater than 2,000 feet above sea level; in Michigan, no courses qualify for this correction.



## ***How are obstacle factors evaluated?***

Each obstacle factor requires several data measurements on the golf course which are then calculated into an obstacle value via the standardized tables and adjustments found in the Course Rating System. Each obstacle is thus assigned a value of 0 to 10 for both the scratch and bogey players on each hole based on these criteria.

**Topography** is an evaluation of the impact of terrain on play. It is calculated from an evaluation of the stance and lies in the landing zones and the elevation change of the approach shot.

**Fairway** is an evaluation of the difficulty of keeping the ball in the fairway from tee to green. It is calculated by the width of the fairway in the landing zones and the length of the hole. A longer hole has more shots and longer shots with greater dispersion and therefore has more probability of missing the fairway.

**Green Target** is an evaluation of the difficulty of hitting the green with the approach shot. It is calculated from the size of the green measured as an "Effective Green Diameter" (EGD) and the length of the approach shot. The EGD is more or less the average diameter of the green surface, with safeguards and adjustments in place for narrow, oddly shaped, or highly sloping green surfaces. False fronts and sides are also not included in a green's dimensions for EGD purposes. Longer approach shots have greater dispersion, causing higher values.

**Recoverability and Rough (R&R)** is an evaluation of the probability of missing the fairway landing zones and the green, and the difficulty of recovering if any are missed. It is calculated by the Green Target obstacle value (to see how difficult it is to hit the green) and the average rough height throughout the golf course. This measurement is taken on measuring day and captains will confer with club staff and/or the superintendent to ensure midseason accuracy. Adjustments are made for things such as mounding and abnormal rough heights.

**Bunkers** is an evaluation of how bunkers come into play and how difficult they are to recover from. It is calculated from the green target value (of how difficult it is to hit the green) and the portion of the green's circumference that is closely bordered by bunkers. Adjustments are made for bunker depth, as well as factors relating to fairway bunkers along the line of play.

**Crossing Obstacles** consist of penalty areas, extreme rough (including desert), and out-of-bounds which are carried to play the hole. Crossings require the measuring and rating teams to establish a point at which the player(s) safely carry a crossing obstacle, standardized as ten yards past the obstacle. The distance from the tee or landing zone preceding the crossing to the safe carry point is measured or calculated from pre-recorded data and input to the tables.

**Lateral Obstacles** consist of penalty areas, extreme rough (including desert), and out-of-bounds when they come into play laterally on the hole. It is calculated from the distance from the center of the landing zone or green to the obstacle and the distance of the hole segment preceding the landing zone. Again, shot dispersion is a critical component of the table design. Adjustments are made for playability, bounces towards and away, and stroke and distance situations.

**Trees** are an evaluation of the overall impact of the trees, and their recoverability, on the play of the hole. They are evaluated through seven factors that measure the impact of trees on scoring and adjustments are made for obstructions and chutes.

**Green Surface** is an evaluation of the difficulty of chipping and putting on each hole. It is calculated through a measured average green speed on the golf course and the slope, contouring, and tilt of each green. The measurement of green speeds with a stimpmeter is taken on measuring day and captains will confer with club staff and/or the superintendent to ensure midseason accuracy.

**Psychological** is an evaluation of the cumulative effect of obstacles on a player's score. This obstacle value is calculated by the computation software following data entry and is comprised of the cumulative impact when three or more obstacle values of five or greater exist throughout the other nine obstacles.

# After the Rating

*Making the next score count, accurately.*

*by Mike Brady, GAM Course Rating Captain*

***Will your GAM/USGA/WHS issued Course Rating remain relevant?***

***Will your golfers' Handicap Indexes travel accurately?***

When a course is rated by a GAM rating team using the WHS Course Rating System™, there are important things to remember about how this rating works, and how it will impact golfers at your club. The purpose of the rating was to measure the difficulty of the course under normal playing conditions in order to determine a Course Rating and Slope Rating unique to your course. Course Ratings are meant to be effective for 10 years (new courses have a five-year rating).

Before doing the fieldwork for your rating, we ask that the course be set up as it would be on an average day of play. This principally applies to tee locations but also may include course conditions such as; Fairway Width, Green Size and Speed, Rough Height, and Bunkers. These are the fundamental attributes your Course Rating is based on. If the usual conditions of the course during the midseason are inconsistent with what is present on measurement or rating day, the captain of the rate must know so they can make appropriate adjustments for what the course plays like during standard midseason conditions.

Per the *Rules of Handicapping*, it is the responsibility of the Handicap Committee and management at every golf course to: "Maintain their golf course in a manner consistent with the Course Rating..."

When golfers' Handicap Indexes "don't travel well" it is often due to changes to the golf course such that it no longer plays as it was rated. If changes are made to the golf course that makes it more difficult and the Course Rating goes unchanged, the golfer's handicap may be overstated. Contrarily if the changes make the golf course less difficult the golfer's handicap may be understated.

The practices of your maintenance staff can have a significant impact on your Course Rating. Increasing green speeds or rough height can adversely affect the accuracy of your Course Rating. For example, increasing the green speed from 9'5" to 10'5" will increase the Course Rating by .2 strokes and the Slope Rating by one point. Increasing rough height from 2 ½" to 3 ½" on all 18 holes can add .7 strokes to the Course Rating and 5 points to the Slope Rating.

Ultimately, the most critical component of your Course Rating is the effective playing length of your golf course as was measured for each tee location on rating day. Tee locations should be balanced day-to-day as is reasonably available from a maintenance standpoint and overall yardage should remain as consistent as possible. Failing to do so can impact your golfers' handicaps. For example, placing tee markers 10-yards behind the measured location on each hole adds 180 yards to the effective playing length and would in turn increase the Course Rating by up to .8 for men (1.0 for Women) and can raise the Slope Rating by 3 points. Greater increases in yardage will have an even larger impact. It is most important to maintain the effective playing length of your golf course to maintain the accuracy of your Course Rating and your golfers' handicaps.

Changes to the golf course and/or its setup may adversely affect the Handicap Indexes of your golfers. If you are in doubt as to the impact of course changes to your Course Rating you are strongly advised to contact GAM staff (Hunter Koch - hkoch@gam.org) to assess the need and/or options for a full or partial re-rating.