

The Dreaded **R**

It's a beautiful Friday afternoon; to your delight the office is quiet and you're able to escape early to catch up with friends for a round of golf at your club. As you are exiting the city, you begin to think about the match with your friends and remember that today is the day your handicap gets revised. You start to feel a little disappointed because you know that your golf game has been slipping and you suspect that your Handicap Index will go up a few strokes. But your mood begins to change as you start to think about the golf match; suddenly you're becoming excited by the prospect of receiving a few extra strokes from your pals, giving you a better chance to win a few nickels on the golf course today.

When you arrive at the club, you're early and have time to loosen up while hitting golf balls. You get changed immediately, but before you head out to the practice range you take a quick gander at the locker room handicap computer to look over the handicaps of your playing partners along with your own. Through the computer's 'Member Lookup' field, you've reviewed the handicaps of your partners and you see that they haven't changed much. 'Finally', you think to yourself you'll be the guy receiving strokes and then as you click on your name you see that your handicap hasn't increased at all, in fact it has fallen three strokes.

Your heart skips a beat, you become confused, soon your confusion turns to anger, and you think to yourself, "How can this be, I'm playing awful, my scores are awful, what in the world does this 'R' stand for, who's responsible for this calculation, and what could they be thinking?"

Instead of hitting balls you head directly to the pro shop to discuss this matter with one of the golf professionals and ask the first pro that will listen "How is this possible? How can it be that my handicap has gone down when every score I posted this season has been much higher than normal?"

In this instance, without the proper player information, the golf professional can only speculate, so he asks you for your patience in allowing for a few minutes to research your problem.

After he's reviewed your golfer information, he has an answer for you, "Your handicap has been reduced due to posting exceptional tournament scores."

Your response is, "That makes no sense, I haven't played in any tournaments this year."

The pro replies, "That could be, however, once a tournament score is posted, it is held in a separate T-score file for one year. The scores that are affecting your handicap were posted for tournaments you played in last August and September".

“I have played plenty of golf since then, why should these scores have any effect on my handicap?”

The pro continues to explain, “The purpose of the USGA Handicap Index is to measure a golfer’s scoring potential. Scores made in tournaments carry more weight in predicting your scoring potential, which is why these scores hold for one year and why they are marked as ‘T’ scores. Section 10-3 of [The USGA Handicap System](#) describes the procedure and the formula that will take place if your second lowest tournament score differential posted within one-year is at least three strokes lower than your USGA Handicap Index. The software program that calculates your Handicap Index automatically determines whether a reduction should occur to your Handicap Index at each revision.”

“Okay, but why would the tournament scores suddenly lower my handicap now and not back when I posted the scores, shouldn’t this reduction have been there all along?”

The pro replies “That’s a good question, the reason you were not reduced until this point is the difference between your Handicap Index and your second lowest tournament score differential has not been more than three strokes.”

You reply, “So now that I have two T-score differentials which are more than three strokes below my Handicap Index, I get hit with the reduction.”

“That’s right.” The pro replies, “However, there are other variables involved, such as the number of tournament scores you have posted during the past season along with a formula and a table that determines whether or not the handicap will be reduced. All of which is covered in Section 10-3 of the [USGA Handicap System](#).”

“Alright, I’m beginning to understand the process and why it takes place, but I still think this reduction is unfair. There’s no way I can compete with anyone using this handicap. What are my options, if any?”

Right around this time is when the Director of Handicapping of the local golf association gets a call from your Handicap Chairperson or local golf professional. Indeed, a golfer with a Reduced Handicap Index does have a few options. The first is obvious, which is to play at the reduced handicap and hope that you either start playing better so that the gap between your second lowest T-score differential and USGA Handicap Index closes to under three strokes or that the tournament scores reducing your handicap expire (after one year). Your other option is to appeal to your Handicap Committee, by either writing a letter to the Handicap Chairperson or making an in person request to the Committee. In this case, if the Handicap Committee decides that the reduced handicap does not reflect your scoring potential, the reduced index may be lifted.

Keep in mind, as stated by the local golf professional, the purpose of a golfer's Handicap Index is to reflect a player's scoring potential. By placing reductions on Handicap Indexes due to (two) exceptional tournament scores, the USGA is protecting the field in handicapped (Net) events from golfers that have the potential ability to do exceptionally well (much better than what their handicap indicates) in tournaments.

Also, it is important to understand that the procedure for a reduction is impartial. The handicapping software reads the scores that are entered and makes an automatic adjustment to the Handicap Index when needed. This alleviates the Handicap Committee of the responsibility of maintaining a constant watch on both Inter-club and Intra-club tournaments in which their fellow members will play. In the case of Tournament scores the main responsibilities of the Handicap Committee are to designate which tournaments should be posted as tournament scores, review the list of golfers that have had their Handicap Indexes reduced, and decide whether further action should to take place (i.e, lifting or removing the reduction from the player's record).

If you would like more info regarding handicap reductions, you can refer to Section 10-3 of The USGA Handicap System manual. Anyone can order a copy of The USGA Handicap System through the USGA Publications department by calling 1-800-336-4446 or via the internet at www.usgapubs.com. The USGA website, www.USGA.org, provides information regarding Handicapping including links to research and other Handicap related material.

Rich Kennedy
NJSGA Director of Handicapping