HANDICAPPING

When we introduced the AHS (Automatic Handicap System) in 1991, the aim was to eliminate, as far as possible, the arbitrary and capricious decisions that used to be taken. Obviously, experienced players do not like to be beaten too often by enthusiastic, improving newcomers. But the effect of some of the swingeing handicap reductions that were made before that date merely served to dampen the natural enthusiasm of beginners. (The fatal mistake such a player made was to go to an 'away' tournament, make his first ever 5-hoop break against the local club handicapper, only to be told that he was over-handicapped and would have to return home with a reduction from, say, 18 to 12 or worse. It then probably took that player a couple of seasons to play to this new standard and have the pleasure of winning again!)

The **aim** of **any** handicap system is that, in a long succession of handicap games between any two given players, each should **notionally** win half and lose half of these games. Obviously this is never precisely achievable, but an AHS is certainly the best way of keeping handicaps roughly in balance without having to make too many arbitrary interventions.

Let us consider the results in a hypothetical case of handicap play in an American Block with 7 players. [Only wins (+) and losses (-) are recorded here, not hoop scores.]

Wins		A	B	C	D	E	F	G
3	Alan	. o	-	+	-	-	+	+
4	Beth	+	o	+	+	-	+	-
1	Carl	-	-	o	+	-	-	-
2	Dawn	+	-	-	o	-	-	+
6	Eric	+	+	+	+	o	+	+
3	Fran	-	-	+	+	-	o	+
2	Greg	-	+	+	-	-	-	o

What view would you take about Eric's performance? If E is a low-bisquer, you would almost certainly argue that his score is not all that remarkable and that the AHS may soon be making him into a 'minus' player.

Let us look at the results in a more general context. Suppose the 7 players' handicaps are as perfect as possible. Envisage them repeating this Block play numerous times. How often would there be **some** (unspecified) player who wins **all 6** matches? The answer is about once every 9 games. [The mathematical probability, in the technical sense, is 10.9 %.]

Now consider what your reaction would be if E is a high-bisquer. That he must be over-handicapped and should be brought down **below** what he might qualify for **in any case** under the AHS?

That is the sort of decision that you, when a handicapper, are called on to make. Would you let the AHS take its course, or would you feel that the evidence is strong enough to intervene? Opinions on this *may* be divided.

You might, of course, have additional evidence of Eric's recent playing results (unavailable to the club handicapper pilloried in the introduction!) that might help you to decide.

Your **first** reaction, however, should **always** be to **allow** the AHS to operate as intended and, if you do feel you **must** override it, make sure that you will not be discouraging a promising beginner.