

The South West Federation Handicapping Conference 2008

Held at Taunton 9th March 2008

The Conference was very well attended with almost all clubs in the SWF being represented. A welcome guest was Ian Parkinson, the Chairman of the CA Handicap Co-ordination Committee (HCC).



The proceedings were opened by Roger Buckley, the Chairman of the SWF, who introduced Ian, Cliff Jones (past Chairman of the HCC) and Don Gaunt, the SWF Handicap Co-ordination officer for the SWF and Chairman of the meeting.

Ian then spoke, saying that he was pleased to be invited and expected to get considerable feedback to take to the HCC.

Don began by reiterating and expanding on the major points that had been highlighted by the first meeting two years ago. These are shown in summary at the end of this report.



The conference was then formed into small syndicates and asked to consider a handicapping situation where one player had won all six games in a block, while another had only won a single game. The exercise had been devised by Roger Wheeler of Cheltenham and was deliberately written to provoke discussion. In the main, people felt that the winner would be sufficiently served by the automatic system, but knowledge of past performance and lawn conditions might alter that opinion. Also, if this block was the only event in a small club's calendar, more weight

might well be given to the results. It was pointed out that the winner would not necessarily get an automatic change in handicap because it would depend on his/her index at the start of the event. This allowed a useful exchange, highlighting that when a player's index reached a trigger point which changed his/her handicap, no further change would occur until that player's index reached the next trigger point up (or down).



During the discussions, the subject of timed games came up. Cliff pointed out that the automatic system was based on full, untimed, games. A general dislike of timing was evident.

Ian would take this point back to the HCC.

Continuing with syndicates, Don then gave out an exercise that he had devised. This was the fictitious results of a player over a season. The exercise was to determine the player's final handicap. Quite a few people struggled, particularly with the level play results, but were helped by the experienced handicappers present. Overall this was felt to have been a very useful learning experience.

After an excellent lunch, Golf Croquet handicapping was discussed. Don said that he had discussed this with Bill Arliss, who had confirmed that the rules and guidelines for GC were essentially the same as for AC. Ian then explained the recent change in the range of handicaps for GC. The new range was from 0 to 12. Everyone's GC HC had risen by 4; however, their index remains the same. During this discussion, as on a number of other occasions regarding AC, people raised the subject of players not having a handicap card. In one case it was believed that a club did not even have a handicapper. Roger said that the SWF were going to look at this situation and discuss it in committee. Ian said that the problem was more prevalent in GC, but this should reduce as people became used to the new handicap system. Don pointed out that the first point of call would be the handicappers themselves as they had the right to set handicaps. He reminded delegates that he was available if problems could not be resolved, although Roger made the point that the SWF had a list of handicappers available who could often help and might well be closer than Don would be.

The next topic was that of deciding what abilities a player should possess;

- To start at 28
- To progress to 24
- To progress to 24 and play in, say, the B league.

Although there was much animated discussion, few really concrete proposals emerged. Part of the problem for this was that there were those who did not agree with the 28 starting handicap. This, of course, made it difficult for them to contribute. Although not strictly relevant to the question, there was agreement that playing doubles with an experienced partner was a good way to learn, also this partner would be in a good position to assess the ability of the beginner. Nevertheless, several people expressed agreement that some sort of guidelines would be useful although it was not too clear what those guidelines should be. Here is a compilation of those who did attempt an answer.

1. To be given a starting handicap and play games at the club he/she should know

Hoop order, what a turn was and what it consisted of, start and finish, on and off court, simple breaks, bisques.

2. To progress to 26

All of 1 plus, be able to play a complete game with minimal supervision, understand court etiquette, start to grasp tactics such as safety play. This progression should be fairly rapid for those showing any aptitude for the game.

3. To be able to play competitively

All of 1 and 2 plus, understand timed and shortened games, understand wiring lifts, know about basic faults and errors, know when to call a referee.

Cliff then gave a short presentation of his suggestion for a different type of handicapping. This method uses a player's index rather than handicap to calculate bisques. Calculation is made using a circular slide rule. He described some of the advantages of his system that included ease of calculation, the more rapid response to improving players and the better handling of bandits. At the end of his presentation a straw poll showed overwhelming support for his idea.

The meeting then had a short discussion on small club handicap problems. This was something that had been discussed at the last conference. There was a split in opinion regarding the use of two cards, one club and one tournament. Other conclusions were much as before, namely;

- Small club handicappers could use those players who play away as "markers".
- Handicappers should not be afraid of "grasping the nettle" and reviewing the entire club's handicap level.
- Advice can be sought from Don or a nearby experienced handicapper.

The idea that the CA should consider a course on being a handicapper received a lot of support. Ian agreed to take this to the HC and thanked the meeting for providing many useful ideas.

Finally Roger closed the meeting by thanking Julie for organising the room, meals and attendance, Don, for organising the programme, Cliff and Ian for their contributions and Faith Gaunt for acting as meeting secretary.

Don Gaunt

March 2008

Some points from the 2005 Conference.

Don made the point that there is no such thing as a perfect system. However, almost any system that rewarded success and penalised failure would eventually balance out ability. The main problem was how quickly it would do that. Too fast and it could be discouraging, too slow and it could lead to banditry. The CA automatic system is a compromise and like all compromises it has problem areas. This is why handicappers still play a vital role in ensuring that handicaps are adjusted when such problems arise. He made the interesting observation that if the perfect system existed and player's ability could be completely matched, the result of any game would be solely due to chance, not skill! Although such a system could not exist it did mean that the better a system was, the more effect chance had on the result.

What should a club handicapper know? This considered what knowledge a club handicapper should possess in terms of how to assess ability, limits of responsibility and monitoring duties.

There were a number of points on which all syndicates were agreed.

- Handicappers should have a good working knowledge of the game (but not necessarily the ability to play it!).
- Read and fully understood the current issue of the CA guidelines. Completely understand how handicap cards are filled in (including advanced and 14 point games).
- Wherever possible, the club handicapper should be someone who regularly goes to the club. He/she should be readily accessible.

There was considerable support for a book of games played and results to be kept.

Other points raised by one or more syndicates were;

- A good knowledge of beginners and their progress, particularly potential bandits.
- How to devise tests to establish ability.
- Regular checking of cards.
- The ability to be tactful when changing handicaps.
- Be aware that players can be erratic – a purple patch may not indicate a permanent improvement.

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