

# USGA Rules of Golf

## Handicapping

When a **player starts a hole but does not hole out** for a valid reason, subject to other provisions set out within the *Rules of Handicapping*, **the player must record their *most likely score or net double bogey, whichever is lower***, as appropriate for the situation and depending on the format of play.

### 3.3 When a Hole is Started But Player Does Not Hole Out

There are various circumstances that might result in a player starting a hole but not holing out. For example, when:

- The result of the hole has already been decided,
- A hole has been conceded in match play,
- A player's partner has already posted a better score in a Four-Ball format and the player picks up, or
- A player has already reached their *net double bogey* limit on a specific hole.

When a player starts a hole but does not hole out for a valid reason, subject to other provisions set out within the *Rules of Handicapping*, the player must record their *most likely score or net double bogey*, whichever is lower, as appropriate for the situation and depending on the format of play.

The *most likely score* is:

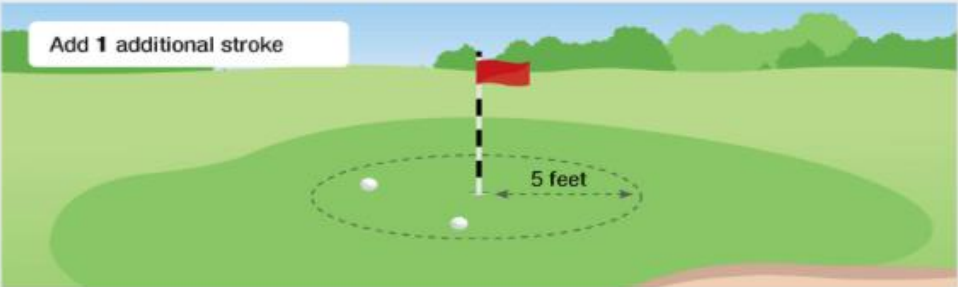
- The number of strokes already taken to reach a position on a hole, plus
- The number of strokes the player would most likely require to complete the hole from that position, plus
- Any penalty strokes incurred during play of the hole.

*Most likely scores* should be determined on any hole in accordance with the following guidelines:

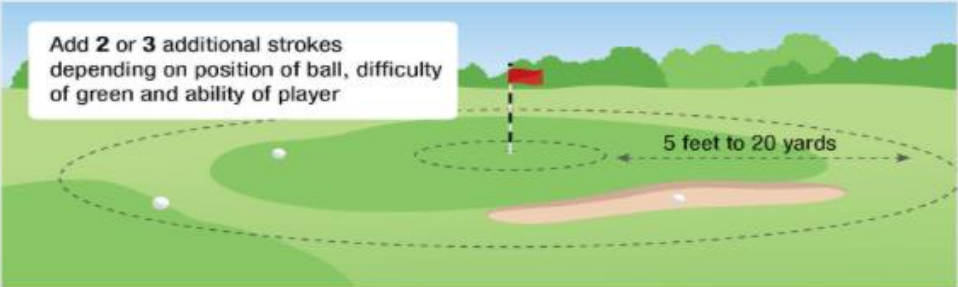
Position of the Ball	Strokes to be Added
If the ball lies on the putting green, and is no more than 5 feet (1.5 metres) from the hole:	Add one additional stroke.
If the ball lies between 5 feet (1.5 metres) and 20 yards (20 metres) from the hole:	Add 2 or 3 additional strokes, depending on the position of the ball, the difficulty of the green and the ability of the player.
If the ball lies more than 20 yards (20 metres) from the hole:	Add 3 or 4 additional strokes, depending on the position of the ball, the difficulty of the green and the ability of the player.

**DIAGRAM 3.3: MOST LIKELY SCORE WHEN A HOLE IS STARTED BUT PLAYER DOES NOT HOLE OUT**

▼ If the ball lies on the putting green, no more than 5 feet (1.5 metres) from the hole.



▼ If the ball lies between 5 feet (1.5 metres) and 20 yards (20 metres) from the hole.



▼ If the ball lies more than 20 yards (20 metres) from the hole.



## Notes:

1. There is no limit to the number of *most likely scores* that can be recorded within a player's *adjusted gross score*, provided that the failure to hole out is for a valid reason and not for the purpose of gaining an unfair scoring advantage.
2. For players with an established *Handicap Index*, the *most likely score* on any hole cannot exceed *net double bogey* for handicap purposes.
3. When a player is submitting scores for an initial *Handicap Index*, the *most likely score* on any hole cannot exceed *par* plus 5 strokes.
4. If the format of play does not allow a player to pick up their ball before holing out, for example an individual gross score or net score stroke-play competition, the player will be disqualified from the competition (see ).
5. In a Maximum Score format of stroke play, there may be situations where a player has not reached their *net double bogey* score before reaching the maximum score as determined by the Terms of the Competition. In such cases, the player should record either a *most likely score* or *net double bogey*, whichever is the lower score (see [Rules of Golf, Rule 21.2](#) <sup>2</sup>).

### Rule 3.3 Clarifications:

#### 3.3/1 - Clarification of the Meaning of Most Likely Score for Handicap Posting and When It Should Be Used

A *most likely score* is used to record a player's probable score on a hole, when the hole has been started but the player did not hole out their ball. It should be a reasonable assessment of the number of strokes needed to complete the hole.

For example, in a Four-Ball match-play competition, a player's partner holes their ball from off the putting green for three. The player's ball lies 15 yards (14 metres) away from the hole in four strokes and the score for the side cannot be improved. To save time, the player may pick up and record a *most likely score* for handicap purposes.

Based on the *most likely score* guidelines, the player would record a score of six or seven for handicap purposes (four strokes taken plus two or three additional strokes).