

Nineteenth Hole Golf Association (NIHGA) Rules

5 December 2021

Membership

Membership is open throughout the season to individuals aged 18 years or older. New NIHGA members shall complete and submit a NIHGA Membership Registration Form. Annual dues are due to the Team Captains by the first outing following registration. If dues are not paid by the third outing, members will be ineligible for individual and team competitions until the dues are paid.

NIHGA Board of Directors

NIHGA is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of the Team Captains, Treasurer, Handicapper, and Scheduler. A Webmaster assists the Board by posting information on the official NIHGA website. The Board of Directors collectively manages all aspects of the association including but not limited to membership, tournaments, outings, handicapping, finances, policies, rules, guidelines, and awards.

Teams

NIHGA teams shall have at least 12 but no more than 25 members. The Board of Directors may increase the upper limit beyond 25 or establish new teams at the season start to accommodate increased membership.

Conduct

The use of any golf course is a privilege. Conduct of the NIHGA members, therefore, must be beyond reproach and the rules of the game and the course must be fully observed. Members shall replace or seed all divots, rake bunkers, repair ball marks, and keep riding and pull carts well away from the putting greens, sand traps and tees. The Board of Directors may discipline members for misconduct with disqualification or suspension from one or more outings.

Guests

NIHGA members may invite guests to play in stroke play and scramble tournaments. Members must play with their guests and be responsible for their guest's conduct. No guests may play in the match play tournament. Each guest may play in a maximum of two stroke play outings per year.

Rules of Play

All play shall be in accordance with the [USGA Rules of Golf](#), except as amended by the local rules of the course being played and NIHGA Amended Rules (see Appendix A). Members are responsible for familiarizing themselves with all rules as well as tournament information provided by the team captains and handicapper prior to the outing. Members shall apply the rules within their foursome to the best of their ability and in a timely manner. Players deliberately violating or ignoring the rules shall be disqualified. If an unusual situation arises and application of the rules is unclear, members must play on and report the issue to the Board of Directors after the outing.

Tee Selection

NIHGA offers three tee selections for its members: middle, senior, or forward tees. Men normally play from the middle tees. However, men aged 60 and older at the start of the season are eligible to play from the senior tees. Women normally play from the forward tees, but may elect to play from any of the three tees. The Board of Directors may grant exceptions to tee eligibility criteria on a case-by-case basis as a means of reasonable accommodation.

Members shall choose a tee prior to the first outing, and must play from that tee for the entire season including match play and scramble tournaments. Since there are no standard colors for tees, the color of markers associated NIHGA will use for each tee is provided in the outing flyer and handicap report. Members shall not rely of course staff to tell them which color of tee to use. Penalties for playing from the wrong tee include disqualification of scores and nonparticipation in individual and team competitions for that outing.

NIHGA Handicaps

The NIHGA Handicapper calculates and publishes official NIHGA handicap indexes and playing handicaps for all members. The handicap index represents the player's potential scoring ability on any course. The playing handicap defines how many strokes a player will give or receive during an actual round.

New members shall receive a NIHGA handicap index after turning in two scorecards from NIHGA stroke play outings. NIHGA accepts USGA handicap indexes from a golf club or internet handicap provider for a new member's first two outings. If the new member does not have a USGA handicap index, he/she will have no handicap for his/her first two rounds. If a new member played as a guest within the last two seasons in a NIHGA stroke play outing(s) prior to becoming a member and turned in an 18-hole scorecard for the outing(s), the Handicapper shall use the guest score(s) toward the Handicap Index calculation.

All active, inactive and returning members retain their NIHGA stroke play scores for a period of two seasons. These scores continue to be part of the NIHGA handicap index calculation if they are among the last 6 scores on record. If an inactive or returning member has not submitted two stroke play outing scores in the past two years, they must re-establish their handicap index as if they were a new member.

The Handicapper uses only stroke play tournament scores to calculate the NIHGA handicap index for each player. No scores from match play tournaments or non-league play are used in calculating NIHGA handicap indexes. The NIHGA handicap indexes are then used to calculate playing handicaps using the formulas and handicap allowances in Appendix B - NIHGA Handicap Calculations.

Handicap indexes and playing handicaps are published prior to each stroke play outing. Each player shall use the playing handicap to determine the maximum strokes for each hole that he/she will take on the course. See the Appendix for the Maximum Score Per Hole rule. The handicapper also uses playing handicaps to determine the net score winners for each flight of the stroke play outings.

Playing handicaps are used to prepare personalized scorecards for each match play outing. The NIHGA Handicapper shall determine playing handicaps for all match play participants. The player in each group with the lowest handicap shall play scratch and receive no strokes. All other players in the that group shall receive the difference between their handicap and the lowest handicap. The NIHGA Handicapper applies the received strokes against the appropriate holes on the scorecard. The scorecard may be used to informally track the results of each hole, but no scorecard is turned in at the end of the match.

For the scramble tournament, a team handicap is calculated by averaging the playing handicaps of all players on the team. The team handicap is only used to place teams in flights so teams are competing against other teams of comparable ability. The Handicapper shall use official USGA handicap indexes provided by a golf club or online handicap provider to calculate playing handicaps for guests. If a guest does not have an official USGA handicap index, the handicapper will make a best effort to estimate the player's handicap index.

Outings and Tournaments

All stroke play, match play, and scramble tournaments are 18-hole outings. All scheduled events shall be played unless cancelled by the NIHGA Board of Directors or the host course.

Stroke Play Outings: The Board of Directors approves the stroke play schedule before the season starts. Team Captains take turns hosting each stroke play outing. Playing handicaps, tee times, and a tournament flyer are provided to each member and posted to NIHGA.org in advance of each outing. All stroke play outings are flighted and individuals compete for low gross and low net scores within their flight. They also compete for long drive for their tee selection and closest to the pin on par 3 holes. In addition to tournament contests, anyone getting a hole-in-one at an NIHGA outing will receive a prize. Guests may play in the stroke play outings but are ineligible for individual and team competitions and prizes.

NIHGA teams compete for points based on the aggregate score of the five lowest net scores from their team. Teams receive 8, 6, and 4 points for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place, respectively. In the case of ties, the teams shall split the total points earned. For example, if two teams tie for 1st place, they split the total points earned for 1st and 2nd place teams (14 points) and receive 7 points each.

Team points from each outing are accumulated throughout the year and the team with the most points at the end of the stroke play season wins the Stroke Play Championship. Ties will be broken in a playoff between six members of each team. The team with the best five low net scores wins. If still tied, a card match of aggregated net scores from each team starting with the first hole will determine the winner.

Within each tee time group, the scores of all players in the group will be recorded on one scorecard. After completion of play and before leaving the course, scorecards shall be totaled and the players of the group shall agree to the scores. Members are not required to sign scorecards, but members playing together are collectively responsible for ensuring scores are accurately recorded and totaled. The card shall email the scorecard to the handicapper by the end of the day.

The group playing in the last tee time shall collect all contest markers (closest to pin and long drive) and email photos of the contest cards to the handicapper.

The handicapper determines winners and publishes results for each outing. Team Captains issue prizes to winners at their earliest convenience.

Match Play Tournament: NIHGA hosts one match play tournament at the end of the stroke play season where NIHGA Teams compete in head-to-head matches for the Match Play Championship. Only those NIHGA members who have official NIHGA handicaps and have competed in three or more stroke play outings will be eligible for the match play tournament. No guests are permitted to play.

One of the Team Captains is designated as the tournament coordinator and manages all aspects of the tournament. The exact match play tournament format is determined by the level of interest among members to participate in the tournament as well as availability of golf course(s) to host the event.

Players shall use the same tee they selected at the beginning of the season during match play tournaments. All golfers play their own balls throughout the round. Each hole is won by the team whose member has the lowest net score. If the lowest net scores from each team are tied, no one wins that hole. A team wins a match when the team leads their opponent by more holes than remain to be played, the opponent concedes the match, or the opponent is disqualified. If a match is tied after the final hole and there is no clear team winner for the round based on the winners of the other matches, the match goes into sudden death starting with hole #1 and playing one hole at a time until there is a winner. The results of the match shall be emailed to the tournament coordinator. A report showing the match play competitors and winners for each round shall be posted to NIHGA.org. The Match Play Championship is awarded to the team whose players win the final competition in the match play tournament.

Scramble Tournament: An end-of-year scramble tournament and luncheon is the last outing of the season. The scramble teams ordinarily consist of four players. On an exception basis, teams of three players are permitted. Scramble foursomes may be comprised of members from multiple NIHGA teams. The scramble tournament uses a shotgun start and is flighted based on the average of the team members' handicap indexes. Guests may play in this tournament and are eligible for individual and team contests. A best effort is made to approximate the handicap index of each guest who does not have an official USGA handicap index so their foursome is placed in the most appropriate flight.

NIHGA members will use the same tee that they selected at the beginning of the season. Guests will adhere to the same eligibility requirements for tees as NIHGA members. A complete set of rules will be provided on the day of the scramble tournament. Teams will compete for low gross score within their flight. Ties will be broken in accordance with the hosting golf course tie breaking process. Individual contests are also held for Long Drives and Closest to the Pin. Prizes are issued to the winners immediately after the tournament. A report showing all scramble teams and winners shall be posted to NIHGA.org.

Tee Times

For stroke play and scramble tournaments, members sign up themselves and guests for tee times using [SignUpGenius](#). A minimum of two NIHGA members must play in each tee time. After the SignUp cutoff date, the team captain organizing the event may make final adjustments to the tee sheet to fill gaps or complete foursomes. The final tee sheet serves a contract with the course, and members who have signed up are expected to play. Cancellations or changes to the tee sheet should be minimal. If a member must cancel due to unforeseen circumstances, he/she must notify the course and their team captain of the cancellation as soon as possible. No-shows and/or members canceling with less than 24 hours' notice may be charged for the round.

Pace of Play

Members are responsible for maintaining the pace of play stated by the golf course. NIHGA uses “ready golf” to keep pace with the foursome in front of you. In stroke play, NIHGA establishes a maximum score for each hole based on the member’s course handicap (see Appendix). In match play, members shall pick up their balls and move to the next hole as soon as the outcome of the hole is determined. At the end-of-year scramble tournament, NIHGA establishes a maximum team score for each hole. Once the maximum score is reached, the players pick up their balls and record the maximum score on the scorecard. If a course marshal directs members to pick up and move to the next hole, they shall take the maximum score for that hole in stroke play and scramble outings or “halve” the hole in match play.

Annual Awards

The Board of Directors presents the following awards at the end-of-year luncheon.

Stroke Play Champions – Awarded to participating members of the team with the most stroke play points at the end of the season.

Match Play Champions – Awarded to participating members of the winning team of the Match Play tournament.

Director’s Cup – Awarded to the member who has the lowest average gross score in his/her six best stroke play outings. First-year members are not eligible for this award. Ties are broken by averaging additional lowest gross/net scores until the tie is broken. In the process of considering additional scores, if one or more of the tied players has no additional scores to average, they are no longer in contention for the award.

Gregg Chicca Cup – This award is named in honor of Greg Chicca, a member who distinguished himself through his long-term leadership and dedication to the league. The Greg Chicca Cup is awarded to the member who has the lowest average net score in his/her six best stroke play outings. The winner of the Director’s Cup and first-year members are not eligible for this award. Ties are broken using the same methodology as the Director’s Cup tiebreaker.

Rookie of the Year - Awarded to the first-year member who has the lowest average net score in his/her six best stroke play outings. A minimum of five first-year members is required to issue this award. Ties are broken using the same methodology as the Director's Cup tiebreaker.

APPENDIX A – NIHGA AMENDED RULES

Maximum Score Per Hole: In order to maintain pace of play, NIHGA imposes a maximum score a player may take on any hole in stroke play. Upon reaching the maximum score, the player shall pick up his/her ball and record their maximum number as the score for that hole. The maximum score is based on a player's playing handicap as depicted below.

Playing Handicap	Maximum Score per Hole
Less than 10	Double bogey
10-19	7
20-29	8
30-39	9
40+	10
No handicap	9

Moving or Lifting a Ball in Play: “Winter rules” or “preferred lies” will be permitted during all play. Winter rules shall permit a player to improve his/her lie by moving his/her ball *in the player’s own fairway* providing the ball is not moved closer to the hole or more than six inches in any other direction. The ball may be moved by a clubhead or it may be lifted by hand, cleaned (if desired) and placed in its new position. No ball which lies in a rough or hazard shall be moved at any time except as permitted by USGA rules. Players may change balls on the green without declaring the ball unplayable.

Tee Time Groups: Every NIHGA member shall play with at least one other NIHGA member. Breach of this rule will result in disqualification from any prizes and from the team competition.

Lost Ball and Ball out of Bounds: This rule does not apply to a ball lost in a red or yellow penalty area. When your ball is suspected to be lost or out-of-bounds, you have two options. The first option is to hit a provisional ball under penalty of stroke and distance before you advance to look for the ball. If the ball is indeed lost or out-of-bounds, you must play your provisional ball. The second option is to advance to look for your ball without hitting a provisional ball. If you choose this option and your ball is indeed lost or out-of-bounds, you must follow the [2019 USGA new local rule](#). First estimate the spot where your ball was lost or went out-of-bounds and then find the nearest fairway edge that is not nearer the hole than the estimated spot. For two penalty strokes, drop a ball in the fairway within two club-lengths of that fairway edge point, or anywhere between there and the estimated spot where your ball is lost or went out-of-bounds. You cannot use this option if you already hit a provisional ball.

Ball in Penalty Area: You may play a ball as it lies in a red or yellow penalty area without penalty or play a ball from outside the penalty area by taking penalty relief with one stroke penalty. To maintain pace of play, NIHGA does not permit a player to take stroke-and-distance relief from a penalty area. If a ball is in a yellow penalty area, the player must take back-on-the-line relief based on a reference line going straight back from the hole and through the point where the ball crossed into the penalty area. If a ball is in a red penalty area, a player has two options: (1) he/she may take lateral relief of two club lengths from where the ball

crossed into the penalty area, or (2) he/she may take back-on-the-line relief based on a reference line going straight back from the hole through the point where the ball crossed into the penalty area.

Late Arrival: Out of respect for other NIHGA members, players shall arrive at the course at least 15 minutes prior to their assigned tee time. This gives the player time to pay greens fees and report to the starter ready to play before the starter sends his/her group out. In the event that a player arrives late, the format of the outing will determine their course of action.

Stroke Play: A late player may catch up with his/her group and take his/her maximum score for any missed holes. Once a late player's group has left the teeing area, the late player catching up with his/her group must wait until the next hole to join the group. Alternatively, the late player may join a NIHGA twosome or threesome that has not yet teed off if one exists.

Match Play: A late player may catch up with his/her partner and will not play any missed holes. Once a late player's group has left the teeing area, the late player catching up with his/her partner must wait until the next hole to join the group. The partner plays solo on any holes the late player misses.

Scramble: A late player may catch up with his/her team and will not play any missed holes. The late player catching up with his/her team may begin playing as soon as he/she joins the group. The other members of the scramble team will take turns playing as if they were the late player by taking turns playing an extra ball on the holes the late player misses.

Incomplete Round Waiver: Under ordinary circumstances, a player failing to complete 18 holes is ineligible to compete for the team competition and individual low gross and low net prizes. However, if an individual or group of players had to leave the course prematurely due to dangerous weather, unplayable conditions, or serious illness/injury and was unable to resume the round on that day the players completing at least 14 holes may request a waiver from the Board of Directors. The waiver request must be submitted to their Team Captain and handicapper via email on the day of the outing, and should outline the reasons for not finishing the round. If the Board approves the waiver, the Handicapper shall complete the scorecard according to [USGA Handicapping Rule 3.2](#), by recording par plus any handicap strokes that the player is entitled to receive on the holes they have not played. The completed scorecard is then counted for team competition and individual low gross and low net prizes. Players with incomplete rounds are eligible for Closest to the Pin and Long Drive prizes for the holes they played.

APPENDIX B - NIHGA HANDICAP CALCULATIONS

NIHGA shall use an approximation of the USGA's 2020 [World Handicap System](#) (WHS) to establish and maintain member handicap indexes and playing handicaps.

The handicap index is calculated using the 3 best of your last 6 scores. The handicap index will be calculated with as few as 2 scores when the player has fewer than 6 scores.

A handicap differential is calculated from the hole-by-hole scores on the scorecards submitted by the players. The gross score is automatically adjusted by the handicapping app if the score on any hole exceeds the WHS limit of net double bogey. Net double bogey is defined as double bogey plus the handicap strokes received on the hole. If a handicap index has not yet been established, the adjustment is par + 5. The differential is then calculated using this formula:

$$\text{Handicap Differential} = (\text{Adjusted Gross Score} - \text{USGA Course Rating}) * 113 / \text{Slope Rating}$$

The Handicap Index is finally calculated by averaging the eligible differentials up to a Maximum Handicap index of 54.0.

When a round is to be played, the Playing Handicap is calculated by first getting the Course Handicap using the formula:

$$\text{Course Handicap} = \text{Handicap Index} * (\text{Slope Rating} / 113) + (\text{Course Rating} - \text{par})$$

This result is then multiplied by the [handicap allowance](#) to come up with the Playing Handicap that will be used to determine strokes received for the round. NIHGA uses the USGA recommended Handicap Allowance of 95% for individual stroke play and 90% for four-ball Match Play. If a course has different pars for the different tees that NIHGA uses, the Playing Handicap is adjusted by the difference in pars.

$$\text{Playing Handicap} = \text{Handicap Allowance} * \text{Course Handicap} + \text{Difference in Pars}$$

NIHGA does not use the Playing Conditions Calculation (PCC), Soft/Hard caps on handicap movement, or exceptional score adjustments.