

Golf League Formats and How to Run Them

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Running a Golf League

Joining a golf league is a great way to make sure you get out of the house and hit the links every week. But what about running a golf league? How are they set up, what kind of formats can you play, how much work is it, and what about weekly contests?

Starting your Golf League

To start your league you'll have to gather a number of players, and contact golf courses in your area to see what time slots they have available and for what price. Some courses have specials for league play, either with green's fees or perhaps food or drink specials if you socialize at the course after play.

Most golf leagues are based on a set schedule that the league plays each week at the same time. They reserve a block of time from the golf course, have a set roster of players, have a standard format and scoring rules, a set length (12-24 weeks), and a league champion at the end of the year. Dues for the year are usually paid ahead of time to the course, so you pay whether you show up or not. Most leagues are 9 holes since most take place after normal work hours, but 18 hole leagues are available as well.

Collect from your players up front if your course requires it, otherwise you may be stuck with the bill!

The Players

A golf league consists of a set roster of regular players, typically 16-24, but I've seen some leagues with as many as 60 players. Each player has a handicap which Golf League Tracker calculates, and a schedule of who they play against each week. Ideally you want to spread out the competitions so that everyone plays against everyone else an equal number of times, or at least as close as possible. Golf League Tracker takes the drudgery out of creating a schedule. Enter your players, set up your teams, and click one button to create the schedule for the year.

League Format

There are endless formats that you can set up for your golf league, but I'll talk about the ones that Golf League Tracker supports. Golf League Tracker will support individual play and 2-person teams. With individual play, you play against another player each week for points.

With team play, the team is broken into flights, named "Flight A", and "Flight B". Flights are based on the player's handicap, the lower handicapped player being in the "A" flight. Then the team plays against another team, with the "A" flight players matched up against each other, and the "B" flight players matched up against each other. They can play for points within their individual match or points a number of team options.

If your league is 14 weeks or more, I recommend breaking the league into 2 halves. At the end of each half, the points the player or team has accumulated are reset to zero. This allows players who are at the bottom of the standings at the end of the first half to have a chance in the second half. This keeps everyone interested in the league throughout the season. After you have your two half winners, they would play a championship match at the end of the season to determine the league champion.



Points

There is no right or wrong with how you set your league up for points, but I'll explain the typical league. Any of these settings can be adjusted in Golf League Tracker.

Match Play

Match play is where one player plays directly against his opponent on a hole by hole basis. It's a great way to organize your league because a player can have a bad hole without completely ruining his chances at winning his match.

Points Per hole

Each player plays for a set number of points for each hole. Whoever wins the hole (i.e. whoever has the lowest score on a hole) wins the points for that hole. The points won are totaled for the player for the week, and are added to his season or half totals. Typically leagues will play for 2 points per hole.

Points per match

The player's net score is compared to his opponent's net score, and whoever has the lowest net score wins the points for the match.

Additional options

Golf League Tracker gives you a number of options for scoring your match, from adjusting the points per hole and points per match, to allowing you to set it so that the winner of the match gets a set amount for winning.

2-Player Teams

If you have 2-player teams, you have additional point options.

Points per hole, team match

This is where the team's total for the hole is compared to the opponent's total, and points are awarded for winning the hole.

Points per team match

Like the points per match for the individual, you can award points for the lowest net team total for the match.

Additional team options

Golf League Tracker gives you the ability to override the points that the system calculates in case your league has a special rule that isn't built into the system.

Stableford Play

Stableford is a new scoring option in Golf League Tracker for 2014. With Stableford, you're not playing directly against a single player, but playing against everyone else at the same time, called "The Field". In match play, your opponent's score directly influences whether you win points are not. But with Stableford, you're awarded points based on how you score relative to par on each hole. The number of points awarded are defined by the R&A and USGA, and can be found <u>here</u>. The concept is simple: the lower you shoot, the more points you win.

Those points are then accumulated each week for the players to determine the leaders. While there is a defined list of points, you can adjust those point values in Golf League Tracker if so desired.



If you have 2-player teams with Stableford, each player's points are added together for a team point total.

Substitutes

In Golf League Tracker, you can add as many subs as you wish to the player list. The sub's score counts for the player he's subbing for, and whatever points he wins are transferred to the regular player. There are settings in Golf League Tracker to limit the number of points a sub can win if so desired.

In an individual play league, if a player is absent, his opponent plays against "The course" by comparing his score to the par of the course. If you have team play, you have the choice of having the absent player's teammate play for him, or to have his opponent play against the course.

Often a league will collect a fee from subs, because the tee time is already paid for in advance by the regular player. I like the nice round number of \$10 for 9 holes. This money can be placed into a separate fund for prizes or a year-end bash.

Requesting a Substitute

Golf League Tracker has a "Request a Sub" feature which allows your players to log in and request a sub for a date they know they won't be available. The system will send an e-mail to the players on your sub list, and the first to respond to the request by clicking a confirmation link in the e-mail will automatically be reserved, and the original player will be notified that a sub has been found.

A league secretary can also manually add a sub reservation to the system. This is useful because you can use the Print Scorecards feature on the site which will print your matchups with each player's name and handicap, including the sub's information if they have reserved a spot.

Handicaps

Let's face it, we're not all scratch golfers. The beauty of golf is that different skill levels can compete against each other using a handicap. A handicap tries to level the playing field by awarding strokes to players based on past performance.

There are an infinite ways to calculate handicaps, but with my experience, I've determine a good range of settings for the typical league that makes it fair to everyone. The basic formula is to take a rolling average of the player's scores compared to par. There are additional options that you can institute, such as "Equitable Stroke Control" which limit how many strokes a player can take on a hole to prevent them from artificially increasing their handicap, called "Sandbagging".

Typically a league will take the last 4-6 scores to use in their handicap calculation. Many times a percentage is taken of that average, such as 90%, when calculating the player's handicap. This gives a slight advantage to the better players, and gives an incentive for a player to improve.

New Players

If you have new players on your league, or are new to Golf League Tracker, there won't be a scoring history for the player in which to use to calculate his handicap. You have several options in Golf League Tracker to solve this problem:



Enter a scoring history

If you have a history of scores for a player from the previous season you can now easily add them to the player's history, and those scores will be used in calculating the handicap.

Set a Minimum # of Scores

The system needs to know how many scores are required before a handicap is established. I set this to "1" for my leagues, and that way the first night of play the player's score will count. This is also useful for subs that are new to your league, as they get a handicap immediately, and won't feel like they didn't count.

Set a Starting Handicap

The starting handicap can be set for your players, and if an option called "Handicap padding" is turned on, that starting handicap will be used to establish a fictitious scoring history for the player. See my post called "<u>Handicap Padding</u>" on the Golf League Tracker Discussion forum for a detail explanation on how this works.

The Course

You can add as many courses to Golf League Tracker as you wish. Just enter the information off the scorecard or from the course's website, paying special attention to the Par and Handicap of each hole, as those values will affect the scoring outcome.



League Secretary Duties

In using Golf League Tracker, the time you spend on weekly maintenance is reduced dramatically.

Setting Your League Up

Setting up your league consists of signing up on Golf League Tracker to tell it all of your league settings, from user id to number of players to handicap calculation. There are a large number of options available, but I've made it easy if you don't want to go through all of those options by choosing the "One Click" setup, which will default your league to the most common scoring and handicap settings. Those settings can be adjusted at a later time if you wish.

After your initial sign up, you can enter your players, golf course, and set your starting date and time for your league. Then you can create teams (even in 1-player leagues that player is considered a "team") from the players entered, and with just a couple of clicks, you can have the system create a schedule for you.

Your league settings and players carry over from season to season with Golf League Tracker, and don't need to be touched again unless you want something changed. The only requirement on a new season is to set your new starting date, and a couple of clicks to create your schedule.

Weekly Maintenance

There are just a few steps necessary in Golf League Tracker for your weekly maintenance duties.

Printing Scorecards

Before your round is played, you may want to print your own scorecards from the system. This will automatically print the player's name and handicap, as well as substitute information on the card, and mark which holes the players get strokes on in your matches.

I recommend using regular heavy card stock and then you can cut them out once printed. You should be able to fit 2 scorecards on a page in this manner.

Entering/Review Scores

Of course, you have to enter scores! Golf League Tracker makes it easy, as it keeps the order of the players the same as what was printed on the scorecard if you printed them out ahead of time. When entering scores, you can choose if a sub played, or if you need to modify a player's handicap just for that round for whatever reason. Golf League Tracker will show you which tee times you've entered scores for, and will walk you through step by step through each tee time.

Once they're entered, you can review them all on one screen if you wish before you continue.

Calculating Handicaps

Golf League Tracker calculates your handicaps for you automatically. You just need to click on the "Calculate Handicaps" link and in just a few seconds all of your player's handicaps will be updated using the settings provided when you signed up.



Record Results

Recording results allows you to apply the points a player or team based on the settings for your league. It also gives you the opportunity to adjust any points for any special rules you may have for your league. For example, a league might award an extra 2 points to someone who had the long drive on a hole.

Depending on the size of your league, your weekly duties might take anywhere from 5-10 minutes. Once your scores are entered and points recorded, your players can log in using the player password to see the standings, pull up dozens of statistics, and even post on your league comment section!

Games People Play

Beside your league matches, many leagues have additional games, usually played for a few dollars, as weekly contests. With some contests, players will put money aside to buy prizes for the winners, such as a sleeve of golf balls.

Skins

"Skins" is one of the most popular games for leagues. It consists of players putting a set amount of money into a pot each week (it could be as small as \$1 per player).

Gross Skins

For each player in the game, their actual (gross) scores are compared on a hole by hole basis. If a single player has the lowest score on a hole out of all of the others, he wins a "skin". Those players who win a skin divide the pot up amongst themselves based on how many skins they won. For example, 10 players at \$5 each has a \$50 pot. If one player wins 2 skins, and 2 other players each win 1 skin, there's a total of 4 skins, each worth \$12.50. The player that won 2 skins gets \$25, while the other 2 players get \$12.50 each.

Net Skins

Net skins works just like gross skins, except that instead of using the player's actual score, the system uses their net score for each hole. The net score take into account their handicap. For example, if a player is a 7 handicap, he will get 1 shot on each of the hardest 7 holes. How are those holes determined? By the hole handicap as noted on the score card.

Net Skin Options

Golf League Tracker has a number of options available when calculating net skins, from disallowing strokes to be applied on par 3s, to using a percentage of the player's handicap, as well as "half strokes" for each hole. Read the post "<u>Skins Options</u>" on our discussion forum for more details.

Golf League Tracker handles all of these calculations automatically. When you enter the player information, you enter the number of dollars each week that they are putting in the pot. You don't even need to have everyone put in an equal amount. The stats section will even tell you how much each player owes, and how much they've won to make your book keeping even easier!

Closest to the Pin

Closest to the pin is a contest which is played on Par 3s, where a marker is placed on the green anytime a player hits his tee shot on the green in 1 shot. The marker indicates who is currently closest to the pin with their tee shot, and only is



moved when another player hits his shot closer than the marker. The marker is usually a metal stake that has a piece of paper on it in which to write the player's name. The game starts with the marker being placed just off of the green.

When the round is finished, the markers are gathered (usually by the last group), and the winners tallied.

Longest Drive

Longest drive is also played with a marker, in which a player who hits the longest drive with their tee shot into the fairway win. The marker is moved each time a player hits it past the marker, and the player's name is written on it. Make sure you play this contest on a straight long hole. You don't want your players hitting the longest drive of their life only to hit it through the fairway right down the middle!

Straightest Drive

Not common in golf leagues because it requires a line to be placed down the middle of a fairway before the round begins, this contest evens the playing field of games by awarding the player who hits it closest to the line the prize.

Low Putts

Some leagues will have the players count their putts in addition to their score, and award a prize to the player who had the least number of putts. A shot is considered a putt when the player plays his first shot from the green surface, until he holes out. Using a putter from off the green is not considered a putt, unless a previous shot was hit from the green surface on the same hole.

Low Net

This prize is award to the player who has the lowest score with handicap, otherwise known as "Net score", for the week.

Custom Contests

With Golf League Tracker, you can set up a custom contest in which to track the results for closest to the pin, long drive, and low putts.