

Using Your Handicap – Match Play Format

We've learned how your **Handicap Index** is converted to a **Course Handicap** and applied to your **Gross Score** to arrive at your **Net Score** for Stroke Play competitions. And now you know that anyone can be a winner! Let's add to the fun by exploring the head to head competition of Match Play.

Did you know that Match Play is the original format of golf? It wasn't until golf was televised that Stroke Play became the dominant format. If you've watched the Ryder or Solheim Cups, you've no doubt noticed that the scoring is a bit different. They don't post the hole scores for each player, instead they only report whether a player is "up" or "down" relative to their opponent. That's because Match Play is scored hole by hole. The player with the lowest score for a hole wins that hole. If both players have the same score on a hole, then they "halve" the hole. The current "winner" can change from hole to hole.

Of course, the professionals play without handicaps; but as amateurs, we use our **Course Handicap** to determine who has won or lost a hole. First, you have to determine how many strokes you will "give" or "get". If your **Course Handicap** is higher than your opponent's, you "get" (or receive) the difference between your handicaps in number of strokes. If your **Course Handicap** is lower than your opponent's, then you will be "giving" strokes. If your **Course Handicaps** are the same, then there will be no strokes given or received. You will both "play to scratch" and the player with the lowest score on a hole wins that hole. The person who wins the most holes wins the match!

But how do you know where you will receive your strokes? Each hole has a handicap stroke allocation number. The hole with the handicap number “1” is the hole where you are most likely to need a stroke; the hole with the handicap number “18” is the hole where you are least likely to need a stroke.

Let's look at a sample scorecard to see how match play would be scored. In this example, Janice, with a Course Handicap of 30 is playing against Debbie whose Course Handicap is 32. In this case, Janice must "give" Debbie 2 strokes ($32-30=2$). Debbie will receive her strokes on the 2 lowest handicap holes – the holes with handicap numbers "1" and "2". The scorecard below shows how their match was scored.

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	OUT	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	IN	TOTAL
Yards	295	255	307	317	323	446	170	314	222	2649	362	434	305	133	120	319	383	145	483	2684	5333
Par	4	4	4	4	4	5	3	4	4	36	4	5	4	3	3	4	4	3	5	35	71
Handicap	11	17	7	1	13	3	5	9	15		2	12	8	14	18	10	6	16	4		TOTAL
Janice	CH 30	5	5	5	6	5	8	4	5	6	3	13	6	5	5	5	6	7	8		
Debbie	CH 32	5	3	6	6*	5	7	5	6	6	8*	12	6	3	3	5	6	8	8		
Status of Match		AS	-1	AS	-1	-1	-2	-1	AS	AS	+1	AS	AS	-1	-2	-2	-2	-1	-1		Debbie wins 1 Up

Notice the line on the scorecard labeled "Handicap". This is the line used to determine where you get or give strokes. Debbie will get her two strokes on the 4th and 9th holes because they are the #1 and #2 handicap holes. The line labeled "Status of Match" is where the players keep track of who is winning the match. It's traditional to record the position of the lower handicap player, in our case Janice.

- Hole #1: They both scored the same on the first hole so the match is considered “All Square” (AS). Sometimes this is also referred to as being “even”.
- Hole #2: Debbie wins the second hole so now Janice is “1 Down” to Debbie (Debbie is considered “1 Up”).
- Hole #3: Janice wins so now the match is AS again.
- Hole #4: They both score six, but since Debbie “gets” a stroke here, she gets a net 5 to win the hole and Janice is once again “1 Down”.
- Hole #5-9: After losing Hole #6, Janice wins the next two holes to bring the match back to AS. They “halve” (tie) #9 to finish the front AS.

- Hole #10: Debbie is entitled to a stroke here, but her net 7 isn't enough to beat Janice's 3 so Janice takes command for the first time in the match and is now "1 Up".
- Hole #11: This was a tough hole for both of them, but Debbie's 12 bested Janice's 13 so the match is AS again. This is one of the great things about match play, you can have a bad hole and still win it!
- Hole #12-13: Debbie takes command again by winning #13. Janice is once again "1 Down".
- Hole #14-16: Janice loses Hole #14 to go "2 Down". At the end of Hole #16, the match is described as "Dormie" which means that Janice is down the same number holes that are remaining to play. Even if she wins the last two holes, the best she can do is tie. If she's playing in a team competition where points are given for wins or ties, she can at least earn something for her team.
- Hole #17: Janice wins and forces the match to continue to the 18th hole. They halve the last hole so the match ends with Debbie winning "1 Up"!

Whew! That was a close match. It could have gone either way at any time. This is what makes match play such a fantastic format for all skill levels. Lose a hole? No worries. Get it back on the next one! Score a big number on a hole? Can't hurt you if it's smaller than your opponent's score! And here's another a great thing about match play – you can play it any time against anyone. Give it a try at one of your next Chapter outings and get a feel for the original format of golf.