Handicapped for Success: Using Your Handicap – Stroke Play Format

You've been dutifully posting all your scores (including the ugly ones) to establish a handicap and you are now the proud owner of a USGA **Handicap Index**. But what do you do with it?? Here's where the fun comes in!

Of course, your **Index** can be used to track your improvement over time. You can also use your **Index** to set a target score for your rounds of golf by converting it to a **Course Handicap**

But, perhaps the most fun way to use your **Index** is in competition. Whether it's a casual game with friends to see who will buy lunch or an organized tournament with trophies for the winners, handicaps level the playing field making it possible for players of all skill levels to compete fairly with one another.

You may have heard people refer to "giving" or "getting" strokes during an outing. Just what does this mean? Put simply, giving or getting strokes is based on your **Course Handicap.** If your **Course Handicap** is higher than another players, then that player will be "giving" you strokes and you will be "getting" or "receiving" strokes. How the strokes you "give" or "get" are applied to the round depends on the type of format you are playing. Let's examine the stroke play format.

In _individual_ stroke play*,* you are competing against all of the other golfers in the field and the overall winner is the player with the lowest *gross score.* Your *gross score* is total number of strokes you score for the round*.* Stroke play events may also award a prize for the *low net score.* Your *net* score is determined by subtracting your **Course Handicap** from your total *gross score.* In this type format, your **Course Handicap** acts like a giant eraser!

Tournaments often arrange players of like skills into "flights", a golf term that refers to a group, and award *low gross* and *low net* in each flight**.** The EWGA Championship is a national competition of this type. In this format your **Course Handicap represents the number of strokes you will "get" or "receive"** and those strokes are "taken" at the end of the round**.**