What’s Involved in Rating a Golf Course?

In 2020, with the advent of the World Handicap System (WHS), the USGA’s Course Rating System (CRS) became the worldwide standard for evaluating golf courses.

What’s involved? Using the Course Rating Guide published by the USGA and R&A, golf course are evaluated for playing difficulty by qualified rating teams under direction of the local authority. In the States, that’s the local Allied Golf Association. The Toledo District Golf Association insures that members of the rating teams are trained and qualified to evaluate on course obstacles so that we create consistent ratings across not only the TDGA, but in synch with other rating organizations around the world.

So how does it work?

- Golf courses must be rated at least once every 10 years (5 years for new courses) or after undergoing significant change. The TDGA tracks this information for courses within our area. Within the TDGA area, we typically rate around 6 courses per year.
- Each hole on the course is rated by evaluating the difficulty of the obstacles players face while moving from tee to the putting green. This is done for each tee, and for scratch and bogey golfers. This information is entered into the CRS, which then computes Course Rating and Slope numbers. These numbers are then published by the TDGA.
- What are the obstacles we evaluate?
  - Length of the hole
  - Size of the Putting Green
  - Fairway landing zone widths
  - Difficulty of stance after the tee
  - How hard is the shot to the green?
  - Number, location, size and depth of bunkers
  - Obstacles that must be carried
  - Obstacles on the sides of the hole
  - Trees
  - Rough Height
  - Green Speed
  - Green contour
  - How difficult is it to recover if the approach shot misses the green?

And while there is a fair amount to this, new raters work with veteran members of the Rating Team and much becomes clear quickly. We try to work in teams of three, with each team rating a specific tee set. It takes about four hours to rate 1 set of tees. We usually start around 8:30 AM, preferably on a Monday, finish around noon, then gather for lunch and discuss our results.