

Beating the Odds

EXCEPTIONAL TOURNAMENT SCORES PROBABILITY TABLE

HANDICAP INDEX RANGES

Net Differential	0-5	6-12	13-21	22-30	31-up
0	5:1	5:1	6:1	5:1	5:1
-1	10:1	10:1	10:1	8:1	7:1
-2	23:1	22:1	21:1	13:1	10:1
-3	57:1	51:1	43:1	23:1	15:1
-4	151:1	121:1	87:1	40:1	22:1
-5	379:1	276:1	174:1	72:1	35:1
-6	790:1	536:1	323:1	130:1	60:1
-7	2349:1	1200:1	552:1	229:1	101:1
-8	20111:1	4467:1	1138:1	382:1	185:1
-9	48219:1	27877:1	3577:1	695:1	359:1
-10	125000:1	84300:1	37000:1	1650:1	674:1

The values in the table are the odds of shooting a net differential equal or better than the number in the left column. Net differential reflects how many strokes lower than his Index a player shot.

The above table, taken from the USGA Handicap System manual, shows that it's highly unlikely that a player will shoot more than three strokes below his Handicap Index in a given round. If the same player does it on multiple occasions in a short span, he's either defying the laws of probability or a sandbagger.

For example, a player with a Handicap Index of 10.5 shoots a 74 from a set of tees with a course rating of 71.2 and a Slope rating of 126. His handicap differential is 2.5, taking the Slope rating into account ($74 - 71.2 = 2.8 \times 113/126$). That gives him a net differential of -8.0. From the chart, the odds of this occurring are 4,467 to 1.

Higher-handicap players have a greater chance of shooting an exceptional round because score variability rises with handicaps. That's why mid- to high-handicappers often walk off with the title in a large-field net event. Low handicappers can be consoled by the fact that their consistency gives them the edge in head-to-head play and multiple-round tournaments.