

Dear Golfer,

This month we take a closer look at the often-misunderstood subject of Front / Forward Tees and we encourage all golfers to play from them when wishing to have a quicker round.



Understanding Forward Tees

Most golf courses have multiple tee boxes on each hole, usually designated by coloured tee markers. A golfer can decide when playing the course which set of tees they would like to play on any given day – in the same way as they can decide which golf course in the area they would like to play on a particular day.

Since each of these tees provides a different course rating (Standard Rating), it helps to think of them as different golf courses. Some courses have three tees; Front, Club and Back/ Championship, while other courses have four or more tees and these are usually referred to as Back, Club, Front and Forward.

The Forward or Front Tee, which sees the golfer playing the course at its shortest, should be available for anyone to play off, be they juniors, ladies or scratch golfers. When correctly rated, these tees will have a lower Standard Rating than the other tees on the course, as this version of the course is the easiest.

Who is allowed to play off the Forward Tee?

Any golfer is entitled to play off the Forward Tee in a social round and enter the score for handicap purposes using the Standard Rating of the Forward Tee. In a competition the organiser can decide if they will allow the use of multiple tees.

Does my handicap have to change if I choose to play off the Forward Tees?

A handicap adjustment is only required if golfers are competing against one another off a different set of tees. So if you are playing off the Forward Tee against friends who are playing off the Club Tee, you must adjust handicaps up or down by the difference in the ratings of the two tees. The same would apply in a competition.

The adjustment is equal to the difference between the Standard Rating of the tee from which they are playing and the tee from which the other competitors are playing.

For example, if a player chooses to play off the Back Tee (Rated 72), while the rest of his fourball plays off the Club Tee (Rated 70), he is effectively playing a harder golf course, so in this case he is entitled to two additional shots on his handicap. Similarly, if a player elects to play off the Forward Tee (Rated 68), he is effectively playing an easier golf course and in this case his handicap should be cut by two strokes to reflect this.

I always play off the front tee, so why do I have to cut my handicap when playing off the Forward Tee in a competition but not in a social round?

The Handicap system calculates your Handicap Differential from whichever golf course or tee you play off on any given day. So if you play off the Forward Tee at two different courses, they will have different difficulty ratings (Standard Ratings) and the system will adjust the scores for Handicap purposes accordingly. In the same way, if you always play off the Forward Tee but decide one day to play off the Club Tee, the system still accepts the score and records the score off that tee's rating for your Handicap.

When entering a score for handicap purposes, you record the Adjusted Gross Score and the system records the difference between your Score and the Standard Rating (SR) of the set of tees and not Par for the course. The lower Standard Rating of the Forward Tee thus already takes into consideration the shorter/easier course and the differential used in the handicap calculation is therefore higher.

When playing in a competition, the scores are calculated relative to Par and since you are playing a shorter/easier course you need to adjust your handicap down by the difference in the Standard Rating of the tees. This also applies to ladies competing against men from tees with different stroke ratings in a social round or competition round.

I only play off the Forward Tees, so surely I am handicapped off the Forward Tee?

It is very important to remember that you are not handicapped from a particular tee relative to par of the course, but rather your Adjusted Gross score relative to the Standard Rating of the tee you played. Playing from an officially-rated Forward Tee is essentially no different to playing from the Club Tee at another course if they have the same rating.

Remember, your handicap calculation is based on the best 10 differentials of your last 20 scores. A differential is the difference between the Adjusted Gross score entered on the system and the Standard Rating of the tee from which the round was played.

Example: We have an 18-handicap golfer and he plays to his handicap differential each round at a course with a par 72 which has three different tees – with standard ratings of 68, 70 and 71. The following are his scores and Stableford points if he plays to his handicap differential off each tee.

Tee	Gross Score	Standard Rating (SR)	Differential	Handicap	Stableford Points to Par 72
Front	86	68	86 - 68 = 18	18	40
Middle	88	70	88 - 70 = 18	18	38
Back	89	71	89 - 71 = 18	18	37

So, whenever you are competing with another player (male or female) off different tees, whether in a social round or in a competition, you need to adjust the players' handicaps by the difference in the Standard Ratings of the tees.

In other countries they recommend that the player playing the harder tee (the higher Standard Rating) should get the extra strokes added on to his or her Handicap. Where the majority of the players are playing off, say, the Club Tee, and a few players are playing off the Forward Tee, then it makes more sense to deduct strokes from the few players playing the Forward Tee rather than adding strokes to the majority playing off the Club Tee. Those playing off the Back Tee would, of course, have strokes added.