

The Match Ladder

Handicap format — net match play, strokes given

Basic Rules · Draft v1

The Ladder is an ongoing competition where **every member competes on equal footing**. Because matches are played with handicap strokes, the newest 22-handicap can beat the steadiest 8 on any given day. You climb by challenging the players above you and winning head-to-head.

1 The Ladder

Every participating member occupies a numbered rung, from **1 at the top** down to the last rung. The goal: climb as high as you can — and hold your rung when the challenges come.

2 Issuing a Challenge

- You may challenge any player ranked **up to three rungs above you** (e.g. #8 may challenge #7, #6 or #5, but not #4).
- Challenges only go *upward* — you cannot challenge someone below you.
- You may have **one open challenge at a time**. Settle it before issuing another.
- After a match, those two players cannot re-challenge *each other* until each has played someone else — no instant rematches.

3 Accepting & Scheduling

A challenged player **must accept** — you can't decline. The job of finding a time falls on the *defender*: within **3 days**, offer the challenger at least **two or three reasonable options** on different days.

- Play the match within **14 days** of the challenge.
- **"Reasonable" means a genuine chance to play** — not a single dawn weekday slot. Ignore the challenge or offer no workable times, and the **challenger wins by forfeit**.
- If the **challenger** turns down fair offers or backs out, the challenge is **void and counts as a loss**.

- **Genuine deadlock** — both offered times in good faith but nothing lines up (travel, illness)? The challenge is **cancelled with no change and no penalty**, and may be re-issued later. Ask the committee if you need a ruling.

4 The Match

- **18-hole match play** is standard. A **9-hole** match is allowed if both players agree in advance (handicaps are halved for 9 holes).
- Played under the **USGA Rules of Golf** and the local rules of the course you play.
- Hole-by-hole: lower **net** score wins the hole; tied holes are halved.

5 Handicap Strokes

Matches are **net**. Strokes are applied the standard USGA match-play way:

- Take the difference between the two players' **Course Handicaps**.
- The **higher-handicap player receives that full difference** in strokes; the lower player plays off scratch.
- Strokes fall on the hardest holes first, by the scorecard's **stroke-index (handicap) rating**.

Example. A 19 Course Handicap challenges a 12. The difference is 7, so the 19 gets **one stroke on each of the 7 hardest holes** (stroke index 1–7). On those holes, a net score decides the hole. Everywhere else they play even.

6 Result & Moving the Ladder

OUTCOME	WHAT HAPPENS
Challenger wins	The two players swap rungs . The challenger moves up.
Higher player wins	No change. Position successfully defended.
Challenger loses	Must play (and win) against a different opponent before challenging that same player again.

7 Ties

If the match is all-square (net) after the agreed holes, **the tie goes to the higher-ranked player** — the defender keeps the rung. To move up, the challenger has to win outright.

8 No-Shows on Match Day

- Once a time is agreed, a player who fails to show **forfeits the match** — the result stands as if they had lost (challenger takes the rung; or the defender keeps it).
- A pattern of no-shows may be marked **Inactive** by the committee until that player is ready to play.

9 Handicaps Stay Current

Use each player's **Course Handicap on the day of the match** from their current GHIN/USGA Handicap Index. Posting your scores keeps the ladder fair for everyone.

10 Going Away (Inactive Status)

Traveling, injured, or just need a break? Tell the committee and you'll be marked **Inactive**. While inactive you hold your rung but **cannot be challenged** — and you can't issue challenges either. You return at the same position.

11 Pace, Conduct & Disputes

Keep a reasonable pace, call your own breaches honestly, and keep it fun, friendly, and competitive — in that order. Anything two players can't settle goes to the **Ladder Committee**, whose decision is final.

12 Recognition

- The ladder is perpetual — it doesn't reset. From time to time (say, at year's end) we may recognize whoever holds **#1**.
- We may likewise recognize the **"Most Climbed"** player — biggest jump from their starting rung — to reward the chasers, not just the front-runners.

★ How the Ladder Is Seeded

The opening ladder is ordered by each member's **current USGA Handicap Index, lowest index at the top**. It's objective, transparent, and needs no extra qualifying rounds.

Because every match is played **net**, this starting order says nothing about who will end up on top — it's simply a fair, neutral way to draw the first rungs. From day one, a higher handicap can climb

right past a lower one by winning matches. *(If members prefer, the committee can instead seed by random draw.)*

The Match Ladder — Handicap Format · Draft for review. Rules subject to committee approval and refinement.