

'Pope's' points try to level fields

By James Achenbach

BONITA, CALIF.

The Knuth Tournament Point System is earmarked for net events with at least 50 players. It is designed to identify golfers who win prizes with regularity.

The end result: These golfers have their handicap strokes reduced for net competition.

Section 10-3 of the USGA Handicap System manual deals with handicap reduction, but it is aimed at players who score better in tournaments than in everyday play.

"I championed the identification of exceptional tournament scores in the USGA Handicap System," Knuth said. "That helped in reducing 'exceptional performance,' but it wasn't enough. I realized over the years that there were people who were dominating handicap events at clubs. The USGA Handicap System never seemed to catch up with them.

"My system doesn't care about scores, it cares about how you finish. That's all it cares about. They are basically two different concepts – the USGA uses scores without any relationship to the field; I care about relationship to the field."

Here's how the KTPS works:

Points are assigned to golfers with the lowest five net scores in the field. This doesn't necessarily mean the top five net finishers. If a player wins a gross prize but is still within the low five in net scores, he

gets a piece of the points pie:

1st place = 5 points.

2nd place = 4 points.

3rd place = 3 points.

4th place = 2 points.

5th place = 1 point.

If a player accumulates 7 points over a two-year period, his handicap for a tournament is reduced by two shots. Each additional 2 points earned by the player in this two-year period would result in an additional stroke being subtracted from his handicap for net competition.

Once again, it is important to emphasize that the USGA handicap index is not reduced, just the handicap that is assigned to the player for that particular event.

The Southern California Golf Association has been the biggest supporter of the KTPS, and its use has spread to more than 100 clubs under SCGA jurisdiction.

The Pacific Northwest Golf Association was an early advocate of Knuth's system, adopting it in 1995.

"It's been extremely well-received for net events," said John Saegner Jr., PNGA senior director of membership services.

"I remember when we first announced it. We held a dinner during the PNGA senior men's event. We got to the end of it, and we announced, 'We've got a new program we're interested in trying.'"

"The room grew very quiet. After we finished explaining the Knuth System, everybody stood up and started clapping."

ArrowCreek Country Club (Reno, Nev.) began using the KTPS in 2005.

"It's the big equalizer," said director of golf Martin Chuck. "It's going really, really well. It creates equity for all golfers. The (USGA) handicap system is supposed to do that, but, as we know, it doesn't always work so well."

Chuck said most of ArrowCreek's 450 members are happy with the system.

"The ones who feel it's not so great are the ones who get reduced," Chuck said, "but I think everybody understands that we're trying to be fair. By and large, it's been very effective."

The Golf Association of Philadelphia has adopted the system for this year.

"It is the talk of the 2007 tournament season," said GAP executive director Mark Peterson. "We have seen some individuals who have tremendous success in those events – it's a concern for clubs across the nation.

"So we went looking for a nonsubjective system. The Knuth Tournament Point System basically allows us to say, 'If you've won more than once, congratulations, you've been fortunate. Now we're going to create a level playing field.'"

"We're not trying to penalize the winners; we're trying to create a system in which everyone can win."

Some clubs have modified the system slightly, and Knuth has introduced a variation for tournaments with several different flights.

Still, the theme is the same: Golfers who seem to win most frequently will have their handicap strokes reduced.

Tournament limitations

Here's a look at a sampling of handicap index limits for U.S. Golf Association national championships and top state amateur events:

Championship	USGA	N.California	S.California	Florida	Michigan	Minnesota	Texas	Arizona	Colorado	PNGA	Washington
Public Links	8.4	4.4	4.5	6.4	x	x	8.4	8.4	NL	16.4	NL
Women's Public Links	18.4	x	x	x	x	40.4	x	x	x	40.4	NL
Junior Amateur	6.4	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	x	NL	24.4	24.4
Girls' Junior	18.4	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	x	30.0	40.4	40.4
Women's Amateur	5.4	40.0	10.4	34.0	15.4	36.0	*low 96	30.0	30.0	12.4	20.4
Amateur	2.4	4.4	4.4	11.4	5.4	6.4	NL	NL	NL	4.4	6.4
Mid-Amateur	3.4	x	5.4	NL	5.4	3.4	6.4	8.4	3.8	None	8.4
Women's Mid-Amateur	9.4	x	x	x	20.4	25.4	x	x	x	16.4	16.4
Senior Women's Amateur	18.4	40.0	34.0	34.0	20.4	39.0	*low 96	40.4	30.0	27.1	26.4
Senior Amateur	7.4	7.4	10.4	NL	12.4	7.4	8.4	NL	NL	22.4	12.4

New York and Kentucky have no handicap limits for state amateur events.

* – Texas Women's Amateur and Senior Women's each take 96 players with lowest handicap indexes.

PNGA: Pacific Northwest Golf Association (serves British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington)

x: no event

NL: no limit

– Golfweek research