

Golf Handicapping for PHRF

by John Collins

PHRF obviously works best when there is a small handicap range in each class. That is fine if you have many boats. If, however, you have few boats with sailors of wide ranging abilities and boats with a wide range of speeds, the racing will be dominated by one or two boats. This leads to unhappiness. A possible remedy, at the local club level, is to institute golf handicapping.

PHRF golf handicapping works just the way that golf handicapping works. The PHRF handicap is adjusted after each race, or regatta, based on the race performance. This should only be attempted in small fleets. It should not be used for large regattas or for large fleets sailing in several areas.

The way it works is to pick a reference boat, say the boat that corrected out 40 percent of the way down the fleet. Then figure out the seconds per mile that the other boats either beat or lost to this boat. Take a small fraction of this delta, say 10 percent, and lower the faster boat's handicaps by this amount and raise the slower boats. By taking a small percentage you do not make radical changes to a boat's handicap.

If the boat corrected significantly faster or slower than the reference boat, say by 50 seconds per mile, do nothing with these boats. There has to be a reason for this large delta like luck, or bad luck. You don't want to contaminate your adjustments with such races.

The golf handicap scheme is very simple to apply, at the local level. It can help a small fleet. Over time it will tend to even things out. It will still allow the good guy to win overall.