

Level Up your golf game


By Rob Boyle (PGA of Canada golf pro)
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What does it take to become a much better golfer than you are right now? Do you want to break 100, 90, 80 or shoot much lower? There are certain ingredients to make your desires happen. Today's article will address this and also talk about a unique golf level system. Enjoy.


What is your current level of play?

To begin, you must know that every golfer has a certain level of play. This is often determined by the handicap index which calculates the average of your best 8 games out of your previous 20. Some golfers can do this on their own with a calculator but the handicap system through your local golf association is more efficient. I did a [YouTube video](#) you may watch that explains what the handicap system is all about. Click the link and feel free to watch it to learn more.

You could say there are dozens of levels of play in golf. I once developed a 12-level system but I have simplified it down to just eight. I have ranked the levels from 1 as the complete beginner to the highest and best possible level (8) which is the GOAT level. Getting from the beginning 1st level to the extremely advanced level 8 progressively gets more difficult. What level are you at currently? Here they are...

No.	Name of level Based on playing an 18-hole full-sized golf course	Details 1 is the beginning level and 8 is the most advanced level possible
1	The range rat 	Most golfers will start at this level. The folks who are at this complete beginning level rarely venture out on the golf course. They hit balls on the range and perhaps play mini golf. They will sometimes watch a PGA event on TV too. This is all good as it wets their appetite for one day getting on a course themselves and shooting potentially good scores.
2	Over 100-shooter 	Once range rats venture out to a golf course, they often play at a novice level. We're talking always shooting over 100 on an 18-hole full-sized golf course. You could also say the golfer is always over the score of 50 even on a nine-hole par three course. This golfer is a beginner or may have physical limitations that do not allow him or her to improve beyond this level. There is nothing wrong with being an over 100-shooter. Golfers at this level should consider getting on a solid lesson program with the goal of improving consistency, their score and overall game.

3	<p>A 90s shooter</p> 	<p>If this is you, you break 100 on a consistent basis on a full-sized course. On a nine-hole par three course, you'd shoot about 40-45 which is just under a double bogey each hole. Congratulations. You are now an average golfer. About 50% of all golfers eventually achieve this level. It means you are bogeying a lot of holes (that's good) but you also may get several double bogies or higher. A 90's shooter often has trouble with the putter although there may be other flaws to fix such as inconsistent driving and irons that fly astray. One of my mother's satisfactions in life was scoring a 99 on a full-sized golf course 😊.</p>
4	<p>An 80s shooter</p> 	<p>Shooting in the 80s means you are a solid bogey player and you also can score several pars in a round. You may even enjoy a birdie or two. At a nine-hole par three course, you'll break 40 consistently. You can call yourself a decent player at this level. Approximately 20% of golfers shoot in the 80s on a consistent basis. 80s shooters are good but they may lack a decent short game as well as basic course management skills. The mental aspect comes into play as one improves. 80s players should improve this as they advance beyond this level.</p>
5	<p>A 70s shooter</p> 	<p>Someone who shoots in the 70s consistently on a full-sized course is an excellent player. At a nine-hole par three course, he or she will shoot par golf often. Only 5% of golfers are in this category. A 70s shooter is a golfer who holds a single digit handicap. This is the minimum level the PGAs of the world want their club or teaching pros to become. When I first joined the PGA of Canada, we had to play in a PAT or playing ability test. The entrance score was 78+78 over 36 holes. The exit playing ability test was 76+76. During my exit PAT, I shot 75+70 and easily passed. My personal level over many years has been a single digit handicapper although I did reach a zero handicap one year and tied a course record with a score of 65 😊.</p>
6	<p>A scratch golfer</p> 	<p>A scratch golfer is one who shoots par or better most of the time on a full-sized course. At a par three course, a scratch golfer will often be under par. His or her handicap is a zero or close to it. He or she has the potential of winning various club events, local, state or even national championships. A scratch golfer may have dreams of becoming a tour professional one day but it takes monumental work. Many scratch golfers retain their amateur status. Canadian Hall of Famer, Gary Cowen, won two majors (US Amateur championships) and several other events such as the Ontario Amateur eight times. He did turn professional at age 52 and had a decent career on the senior PGA tour. BC born Doug Roxburgh is an example of a scratch golfer who retained his amateur status his whole life. Doug (pictured to left) won the Canadian Amateur four times and the BC Amateur a record 13 times. He is a Canadian Hall of Famer and truly a wonderful and consistent golfer.</p>
7	<p>A tour pro</p> 	<p>A touring pro plays golf for a living. He or she shoots under par most of the time even on difficult golf courses. There are various tours such as the Canadian tour, the Asian circuit, the Korn ferry tour and of course the US PGA tour. To obtain a PGA tour card, one must compete with other hopefuls in a 72-hole event. The top five out of dozens of players obtain a tour card for one year. The winning golfer in a recent event shot 15 under par. The final spot went to a fellow who was 8 under. These guys are great! Even when one obtains a tour card, it takes a tremendous effort to maintain it.</p>

8	<p>The GOAT level</p> 	<p>I call the final level of golf the GOAT level. This is where the golfer is considered in the running for the title of Greatest of all Time. Bobby Jones had that title back in 1930 when no one could beat him. He won all major championships that year and received a famed ticker tape parade for his efforts. Other potential GOAT players are Ben Hogan (1940s and 1950s), Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus (1960s to 1980s) and Tiger Woods in the 2000s. Other golfers have had shorter timeframes of GOAT status. Johnny Miller from 1972 to 1976 for example could rarely be beat. Will Scotty Scheffler in the 2020s ever be considered a GOAT? He is pictured in the previous level seven.</p> <p>The term “GOAT” has had controversy over the years as it seems difficult to compare eras. The holder of the most major championships is one way to see who is the GOAT. That title belongs to Jack Nicklaus with 18 professional majors. Tiger Woods is in second place with 15 professional majors. Who do you think is the GOAT?</p>
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How can you advance through the levels?

Listed below are eight checkboxes to see what it takes for someone to make it through the various levels. I call these checkboxes “ingredients” that one must have in order to advance.

☐ **Desire** – You must have a real desire and a personal passion to advance from one level to the next. At any level of play, one should follow the STAR system of goal setting, work with a competent coach and you will be on your way to achieving success. I did a YouTube video about the STAR system of goal setting. **The link to that video is here.**

☐ **Work ethic** – You gotta put in the time practicing full swing techniques, short game work and mental toughness to be successful. You should play a lot of golf on the course too. You must also work-out physically, eat nutritious food and avoid unhealthy drugs or activities. A sound lifestyle focusing on family first increases your chances of success. Jack Nicklaus is a wonderful example of a family first individual.

☐ **Physical attributes and age** – You should be strong physically and have minor health issues. Your body type is partly a factor here. For example, if you are too tall or too short, it may have a negative influence on your potential success but sometimes that can be overcome.

Age is a factor in that the younger you are and the younger you start, the greater potential you have of achieving the desired result. In other words, a 15-year-old prodigy has a better chance of becoming a tour pro than a 40-year-old novice.

☐ **Mental acuity and successful thinking** – You should be smart to make proper decisions in life to achieve success in golf especially at the touring pro level. You should also develop a positive mindset and an overall philosophy of what’s important in life other than golf.

☐ **Money** – You should have the financial ability to pay for range balls, a membership at a club or to pay for green fees. Extra fees are needed for coaching, tournament entries, travel and more. A competent coach is important too as he or she will be on your team as you rise to success.

☐ **Environment** – A star golfer may have had a golfing environment in his or her younger years. This plays a role on how good of a golfer he or she could be. Examples → A child born to parents who are golf pros. This can be a strong influence. Charlie Woods, son of Tiger Woods is an example. as his role model.]

☐ **Natural talent** – Natural talent is the innate or inborn aptitude to perform certain tasks with ease and seemingly without a lot of practice. Some people seem to be born with a gift to excel in piano, sports, math skills or other aspects of life. John Daly may be a good example of golfing expertise. Daly in his prime years of golfing could shoot a low score of 68 with not only no practice but little sleep the night before a tournament. Here's a short video clip of Daly explaining his preparation before a tourney → [John Daly link \(17 seconds.\)](#)

☐ **Luck** – You may have heard the old saying “luck has nothing to do with it.” This is mainly true. Sometimes there are bad breaks in golf like your ball hitting a flagstick on the final hole and ricocheting in the water, etc. This is just one hole however and you probably had good breaks that you forgot about in your 72-hole event. You must take the good breaks with the bad and if you keep trying, you will succeed in the long term. Long time PGA tour pro Gary Player once said that the harder he practiced, the luckier he got on the course.

Conclusion → The above ingredients are checkpoints that are instrumental in leading a person to advance through various levels. Each person has the potential to advance of course. It may take someone longer to advance from one level to another. A personal coach can assess one's personal potential and give him or her a timeline towards success. The real key in success however is that you enjoy yourself no matter your level of play.