Professional Disc Golf Association Par Guidelines

01/01/2022

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to help Tournament Directors and Course Designers properly determine par.

Why Par Matters

When par is set appropriately:

- Players have a consistent standard to compare their performance:
  - To other players during the tournament.
  - On different courses.
  - To the expected prize-winning scores.
  - To their own performance at other tournaments.

- Players can better plan their strategy:
  - By knowing what score they want to shoot for on each hole.
  - By knowing that each birdie helps as much as each bogey hurts.

- Spectator interest is increased because:
  - Fans can track favorite players even if they are in different groups.
  - Remarkable performances are revealed relative to a consistent standard.
  - Commentators have a meaningful and well-known reference to talk about.
  - The actual difficulty of each hole is revealed.

- Tournament Directors benefit from:
  - A more professional appearance as a result of providing players and spectators with realistic pars.
  - Greater ease of noticing scoring anomalies.
  - Confidence in knowing penalties for missed holes are fair no matter which holes are missed.
Tournament Director's Role

The PDGA requires the Tournament Director to set par for each hole in every sanctioned event. The pars set by the Tournament Director are final and not subject to appeal.

- The Tournament Director should at minimum make the effort to set pars which are appropriate for the highest skill level division offered at a tournament. Using these pars for all divisions is acceptable.
- The Tournament Director can provide better service by setting par on each course layout for the highest skill level that is actually playing that layout.
- For high-visibility divisions the Tournament Director can set different pars, even if a higher skill level division is also playing the same layout.
- Setting different pars for every combination of layout and division would theoretically be the highest level of service, but that is not practical at this time.

Course Designer's Role

Course Designers should set par for the skill level the course layout was designed for. Setting multiple pars for a variety of skill levels is also encouraged.
Definition of Par

*Par is the score that an expert disc golfer would be expected to make on a given hole with errorless play under ordinary weather conditions.*

Experts for Skill Levels and Divisions

For each division, the appropriate "expert disc golfer" will represent a player who is better than most - but not the best - in the division.

This chart on Expert skill levels provides useful player rating information to determine par for PDGA Divisions. These are based on the distribution of ratings of all players who played in these divisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>MPO, MP40, RPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>MP50, MP55, MP60, MA1, MA40, MJ18, RAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>FPO (Score-Based Methods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>FPO (Hole Length Methods), MP65, FP40, MA2, MA50, MA55, MA60, MJ15, RAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>MP70, MP75, FP50, FP55, FP60, FP65, MA3, MA65, MA70, FA1, FA40, MJ12, RAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>MP80, FP70, MA4, FA2, FA50, FA55, MJ10, FJ18, RAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>FA3, FA4, FA 60, FA65, FA70, MJ08, MJ06, FJ15, FJ12, FJ10, FJ08, FJ06, RAG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acceptable Ways to Set Par

There are a number of methods that can be employed to set par. The methods below represent different approaches to setting par and are useful in different situations.

- Par by Scoring Distribution
- Par by Average Score
- Par by Effective Hole Length and Foliage
- Close Range Par
- Par by Hole Length
- Par by Hole Length and Hole Difficulty
- Par Adjusted by Round Ratings
- Par by Expert Opinion
- Other Methods

See the following pages for details and how-to. Choose whichever method you are most comfortable with for your situation.

While these all aim to accurately determine par, none of the methods will automatically set par correctly all the time. The Tournament Director or Course Designer should review the results and make adjustments as needed.

On the final page are a few methods which should be avoided or only used in special circumstances.
Acceptable Ways to Set Par

Par by Scoring Distribution

The most accurate method of automatically setting par is based on the Scoring Distribution - the frequency of each score - experienced by experts at the targeted skill level.

1. Use the scores from a group of players:
   - who are all near the targeted skill level, and
   - whose average rating equals the targeted skill level, and
   - who played under ordinary weather conditions.

2. Determine the Scoring Distribution by counting the scores of the experts. (How many 2s, 3s, etc.) A weighted count also works - with less weight given to players farther from the targeted skill level.

3. Reading from left to right in the following table, choose the lowest par which passes the test.

| If 59% of experts get a 2 or better, | If 45% of experts get a 3 or better, | If 35% of experts get a 4 or better, | If 26% of experts get a 5 or better, | If 20% of experts get a 6 or better, |
| par is 2 | par is 3 | par is 4 | par is 5 | par is 6 |
Par by Average Score

1. Determine the average score of Experts for the Skill Level.

2. Use the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Score</th>
<th>1.00 to 2.44</th>
<th>2.45 to 3.69</th>
<th>3.70 to 4.94</th>
<th>4.95 to 6.19</th>
<th>6.20 and up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Par</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Par is not average, so this table adjusts for the tendency of holes to generate numerous scores that are higher than bogey, but hardly any scores that are lower than birdie.
Par by Effective Hole Length and Foliage

1. Decide whether the hole has Heavy Foliage or Light Foliage. (This usually depends on the density of trees.)

2. Calculate the Effective Length of the hole (see below).

3. Select the Skill Level and look up par for the Effective Length.

Pars for some holes can fall outside these guidelines. The lowest-scoring holes of each length can have pars lower than shown on the chart, while the highest-scoring holes can have pars higher.

Effective Length is the Measured Length adjusted for elevation, Doglegs, and carries over water.

- To adjust for Elevation:
  - When the target is higher than the tee, the Effective Length is longer than the Measured Length. When the target is lower than the tee, the Effective Length is shorter than the Measured Length.
  - To get Effective Length start with Measured Length and add three times the difference in elevation from the target to the tee.

- To adjust for Doglegs:
  - A Dogleg is a feature which limits the maximum distance a good throw would travel. Doglegs increase the Effective Length of a hole.
  - First, adjust the length of the Dogleg for Elevation (see above).
  - If the effective length of the Dogleg is longer than the length of a Fairway Throw, no adjustment is needed. (See the table in Close Range Par below for the length of a Fairway Throw by skill level).
  - If the effective length of the Dogleg is shorter than the length of a Fairway Throw, increase the Effective Length of the hole by excess of the Fairway Throw minus the dogleg.

- To adjust for Water Carries:
  - A Water Carry can increase the Effective Length of the hole when the player cannot take a direct route to the target.
  - If a water carry is longer than a Fairway Throw, increase the Effective Length of the hole by the extra distance the player would need to traverse to avoid the water carry.
Effective Length = Measured Length
    + 3 x (Target Elevation - Tee Elevation)
    + (Fairway Throw Length - Dogleg Effective Length) not less than zero
    + (Extra Length forced by Water Carries).
Close Range Par

1. Determine the effective length of the Drives and Fairway Throws players would be attempting. (See above for how to determine effective length.)

2. Using the maximum distances from the following table, determine the expected number of throws to get within Close Range near the target.

3. Then add two throws to get par.

Maximum Throw Lengths in Feet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Drive Length</th>
<th>Fairway Throw</th>
<th>Close Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maximum Throw Lengths in Meters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Drive Length</th>
<th>Fairway Throw</th>
<th>Close Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Par by Hole Length**

1. Choose the row for the Skill Level.
2. Par is the column the hole length is in.

This is the simplest method, but disc golf scores can vary widely for holes of a given length. Strictly following the table will not give appropriate pars for all holes.

**Hole Length Ranges in Feet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Par 2</th>
<th>Par 3</th>
<th>Par 4</th>
<th>Par 5</th>
<th>Par 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>0-185</td>
<td>186-585</td>
<td>586-1010</td>
<td>1011-1395</td>
<td>1396+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>0-85</td>
<td>86-480</td>
<td>481-845</td>
<td>846-1245</td>
<td>1246+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0-55</td>
<td>56-430</td>
<td>431-765</td>
<td>766-1170</td>
<td>1171+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>0-30</td>
<td>31-375</td>
<td>376-680</td>
<td>681-1010</td>
<td>1011+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>0-310</td>
<td>311-525</td>
<td>526-790</td>
<td>791+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>0-220</td>
<td>221-430</td>
<td>431-680</td>
<td>681+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hole Length Ranges in Meters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Par 2</th>
<th>Par 3</th>
<th>Par 4</th>
<th>Par 5</th>
<th>Par 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>0-58</td>
<td>57-180</td>
<td>179-308</td>
<td>307-426</td>
<td>425+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>0-27</td>
<td>26-148</td>
<td>147-258</td>
<td>257-380</td>
<td>379+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0-18</td>
<td>17-131</td>
<td>130-234</td>
<td>233-358</td>
<td>357+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>0-11</td>
<td>10-115</td>
<td>114-208</td>
<td>207-309</td>
<td>308+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>0-95</td>
<td>94-161</td>
<td>160-242</td>
<td>241+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>0-67</td>
<td>66-132</td>
<td>131-208</td>
<td>207+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Par by Hole Length and Hole Difficulty

1. Choose the chart for the appropriate Skill Level.

2. Slide over to the hole length and look at that vertical sliver of the chart.

3. Par is one of the areas the vertical slice intersects.

   - Choose a higher par if the hole is relatively difficult compared to other holes of that length.
   - Choose a lower par if the hole is relatively easy compared to other holes of that length.

Example: Setting par for a 750-foot (230-meter) hole for MPO. Using the Gold chart, the vertical slice at 750 intersects the Par 3 area, the Par 4 area, and the Par 5 area.

Most of the holes at this length are par 4, so par is very likely 4. However, if the hole is extremely difficult (perhaps severely uphill and wooded) it could be par 5. If the hole is extremely easy (perhaps downhill into a baseball backstop) it could be par 3.

(For this table "Difficulty" means how hard it is to get a par score. Do not consider additional penalties and punishment which only serve to increase the higher scores.)
Par Adjusted by Round Ratings

Round ratings can be used to fine-tune a total course par.

- The round rating for a score equal to par should usually be higher than the skill level rating. This is because skill level ratings are based on average play, while par is based on errorless play.
  - On a typical course, a score equal to par should generate a round rating about 10 points higher than the skill level rating.
  - On a course with a lot of punishment, a score equal to par should generate a round rating as much as 20 to 30 points higher than the skill level rating. (Punishment means trees, penalty areas, or anything that can make a bad throw cost more throws.)
  - On an easy course with no punishment, a score equal to par should generate a round rating equal to, or slightly under, the skill level rating.
- If the round rating for a score equal to par is not appropriate for the skill level rating and amount of punishment on the course, consider adjusting par on some holes.
  - If the round rating is too low, decrease par on the most-birdied hole or holes.
  - If the round rating is too high, increase par on the most-bogeyed hole or holes.

Example:

A Pro Open division played on a course designed for Advanced players. The tee sign par was 58. A score of 58 was rated 966. Three or four holes likely had par that was too high (too easy) for MPO. Par should be decreased on the holes with the most birdies.
Par by Expert Opinion

If one or more players of the appropriate skill level are available, hole pars can be set based on their knowledge of which score they would honestly be expected to get when they don't make an error and don't get a lucky break.
Other Methods

The above methods are not the only acceptable ways to set par. Tournament Directors and Course Designers may use other methods which produce substantially equivalent results.
Undesirable Ways to Set Par

Based on Statistics from the Entire Field

It is not recommended to set par based on the scoring statistics of the entire field (unless all the players in the field are experts). Often there are a significant number of players in a field that would not be considered experts in the division. Including those scores would inflate par.

Using Tee Sign Par or Daily Par as Tournament Par

For tournaments, it is not recommended to simply default to the course pars - unless the course was designed for the appropriate experts for the division. Very few courses were designed for the skill level of MPO.

Hyperbolic Par

It is never acceptable to set pars higher to create sensational under-par scores; whether total under par or to generate sham Eagles (two under par) or Albatrosses (three under par). More than one Eagle on a hole is suspect. An Albatross should be next to impossible; requiring never-before-seen throws.

It is also never acceptable to set pars higher or lower to make a course appear tougher or easier than it is.