

Somerset Scratch Golf League 2025 – Proposal

Background

The World Handicap System – love it or hate it – has made a huge difference to golf, particularly to low handicap golfers who now find it very difficult to compete in handicap events.

This includes the top divisions of the Avalon League where low handicaps no longer have the ability to represent their club in a competitive environment.

Change is inevitable. Many players I have spoken to (and by others involved in this initiative) view a scratch league as an inevitable outcome and solution.

Proposal for 2025

10 clubs have indicated they would join a scratch league in 2025. All 10 clubs are receiving this proposal – with your support, let's get this in place for 2025. A league structure is detailed below which can evolve in years to come – I believe the structure below will work and is an excellent starting point – crucially, the key is to get this going now!!!

There are 3 sections below. Firstly, a list of current issues with the Avalon league, some relating to low handicap golfers, some more general issues. Secondly, is a list of how the structure of the Somerset Scratch League will, wholly or partly, resolve these issues. Thirdly, is the league system and play-off structure for 2025.

1. Current Issues

1. Uncompetitive Golf – the handicap allowance per division in the Avalon league, combined with WHS, makes it very difficult for low handicap golfers to compete in this environment.
2. Clogged Calendar – the change in climate, making earlier season golf impossible in some areas and a requirement to complete by early September, makes fixture scheduling difficult around each club's own events and competitions
3. Travel time – Somerset is a large county and travel time from one side of the county to the other is too long. Minehead to Salford, for example, in the height of summer can take 2.5 hours each way
4. Matches Conceded – teams, particularly towards the end of the season when promotion / relegation may have been decided, struggle to field a complete team with some matches conceded and some where one player competes against two. This is further aggravated by long distance away matches
5. Meaningless matches – with six teams per division, some late season matches can have no effect on the outcome of the division and often result in conceded matches as in 4 above
6. Effect on Somerset County Golf – the lack of a competitive scratch environment outside of the county structure hinders progression and competitiveness at county level

2. Somerset Scratch League Structure

1. The 10 initial clubs will be split into regional divisions (South and West Division, North and East Division). Each league will have five teams resulting in eight matches, four home and four away. (Resolves 2, 3 and 4 above)
2. The league fixtures will run from first Saturday in April until the last but one Saturday in September, giving clubs three extra weeks to arrange fixture (resolves 2 and 4 above)
3. Teams will consist of eight players playing four 4BBB matches (resolves 4 above)
4. A play-off system will conclude the season with semi-finals on the final Saturday of September and the final on the first Saturday of October. The top team in each division will qualify with a home semi-final against the 2nd placed team from the alternative division. This will allow teams in 3rd and 4th (even 5th) to have something to play for deep into the season. (Resolves 4 and 5 above)
5. Each match will consist of 4 scratch four-ball betterball matches. Each team will choose its desired pairings but each pair will play in "combined handicap order". This means the best pair from each team play each other - this will ensure each match is as competitive as possible and should result in the strongest team from tip to toe crowned champion club. (Resolves 1 and 6 above). It needs to be made clear here that handicaps are used here solely to decide running order to ensure maximum competitiveness. An example of how this will work is in appendix A below.
6. The points system will include bonus points for outstanding wins and close losses as an encouragement towards thorough competitiveness, excellence, determination and resolve. (Resolves 1 and 6 above). See appendix B below.

3. League Structure

1. Each of the two divisions will comprise five teams. Each team will play home and away giving eight fixtures. All teams will decide and agree on fixture dates.
2. The top two teams will qualify for the play-offs on the final Saturday of September. The winners from each division will have home advantage against the 2nd place team from the alternative division. Each winner will progress to the final on the 1st Saturday in October on a neutral venue.
3. In the play-off and final, any match tied on points will be decided by a sudden death play-off between each captain's nominated pair.
4. Matches will take place on a Saturday or Sunday (or weekday evening between May 20th and July 20th by agreement), tee time as arranged by home team but no later than 2pm
5. No food will be part of the league arrangements, each team can manage their own requirements.
6. The league will attempt to find a sponsor.
7. Entry, to cover administration, finals day and trophies will be £100. No further match by match cost.

Appendix A – Determining playing order

HOME TEAM				AWAY TEAM			
Player	HI	Combined HI	Playing Order	Player	HI	Combined HI	Playing Order
John Juniper	1.2	0.2	1	Fred Fennel	-1.2	-0.5	1
Chris Cucumber	-1.0			Jim Swede	0.7		
Graham Carrot	2.1	4.5	2	Keith Cabbage	1.2	4.3	3
Simon Spinach	2.4			Roy Onions	3.1		
Peter Parsley	3.3	8.4	4	David Sage	4.0	3.8	2
Richard Radish	5.1			Geoff Rhubarb	-0.2		
Clive Celery	1.9	6	3	Barry Beetroot	2.9	6	4
Terry Turnip	4.1			Liam Lettuce	3.1		

In the event of more than one pairing having an exact same combined HI, the team captain decides the order of these pairs

This structure ensures best against best, the most competitive environment possible. It avoids the situation that can occur in the Pickeridge Bowl where the strongest in one team is pitted against the weakest in the opposition, creating a match that neither player can get much benefit nor gain.

Appendix B – Scoring

For each of the four matches...

WIN	LOSS	TIE/HALF	WIN BONUS	LOSS BONUS
10	0	5	3	3
Awarded for each win		Awarded for each halved match	Awarded, in addition, for any win on or before the 15 th hole	Awarded for any loss on or after the 17 th hole

The win bonus awards excellent and outstanding play, the “killer” instinct

The loss bonus awards resilience and determination, “never over until it’s over”.

The points system has been carefully calculated to ensure, in a 2.5 to 1.5 match result, the losing team with 1.5 loss cannot overhaul the points for a 2.5 win, via bonus points. However, they are vital for the overall league positioning.

Example – The away team loses 2.5 to 1.5 but picks up all bonus points. The home loss did not gain any bonus. The finals points tally is Home Team 25pts, Away Team 24pts

Match 1: Home Win 10 points, Away 3 pts

Match 2: Home Win 10 points, Away 3 pts

Match 3: Half, 5 pts each

Match 4: Home loss 0 points, Away Win 13pts

Therefore, the maximum score per match is 52 points (4 x wins at 10 points, all concluding on or before the 15th hole for 4 x 3 points).