Whitevale Golf Club – How the Lottery Works

This document explains how the Whitevale tee time lottery works. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the background to the tee time lottery, including how to complete a ballot, and the rationale for using a lottery in the first place. This document describes the steps performed by the Pro Shop and the lottery system to make the tee time assignments.

The majority of the lottery process is performed by a computer system, but there are some human decisions that are made along the way to provide the best outcomes for members. The following are the steps in the process.

Combining Ballots

The lottery begins with the ballots that are prepared by Whitevale members. Most ballots contain the names of four golfers who will make up a foursome, but some ballots may contain one, two or three players. Each ballot also contains the preferred tee time.

Combining ballots is a manual process in which the person running the lottery uses the system to combine some ballots to make larger groups (ideally foursomes) and free up other times. A number of factors are taken into account, including:

- Are the time requests close to each other? (Ideally, they should be very similar.)
- Are the people likely to enjoy each other's company? (Similar ages, skills, gender, etc.)
- Do the players like to be combined? (Some players want this, while others may prefer to play alone.)
- How much demand is there for tee times on this day?

The person running the lottery reviews each of the groups with less than four members and where it makes sense, combines partial groups.

Counting Rounds Played

In the second step, the computer system examines each ballot and sums the rounds played, the rounds where tee times have been assigned but golf has not yet been played, and the cancellations and no-shows for each player. Weather cancellations do not count, and any bumps give a one round credit to the member. The period being considered begins two weeks before the date of play. The computer then divides the sum of all rounds by the number of members on the ballot to produce a rounds-played number for the group. This maintains fairness across different-sized groups, and groups with guests.

This process is performed on all ballots for the day of play. There is no consideration given to the requested tee time at this stage.

Finally, the ballots are ordered starting from the lowest number of rounds played and going to the highest. In the event of an identical number of rounds played, a random tie-breaker is used.

Assigning Tee Times

The computer system starts with the first ballot in the sequence, i.e., the ballot with the lowest average number of rounds played. It assigns the group named on this ballot the tee time it requested. It then moves to the second ballot in the sequence and if its requested tee time is available, it will assign it to the group named on the ballot. If that tee time is not available, the computer will assign the closest tee time that is open either before or after the requested time.

1

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This process continues through the entire set of ballots. If the computer cannot find an available tee time within 3 hours of the requested time for a ballot, it marks the ballot as bumped and moves on to the next ballot in the sequence.

After all ballots have been processed, the person running the system receives a tee sheet that contains all of the assigned groups, and a list of bumped groups (if there were any). For each group on the tee sheet, there is a requested time, an assigned time, the variance, and the points calculated by the rounds-played algorithm. This allows a reasonability check to ensure that nothing unexpected occurred.

Finishing the Lottery

In most cases, the tee sheet which was produced will be finalized without any change. But in the event that the person running the lottery sees an issue which warrants a change, he or she can move groups up or down. This would only occur if something very odd was recognized, for example, one group having an unusually large variance which could be corrected without impacting the variance of the other groups in the run.

Once the tee sheet is finalized, emails are sent to the members on the sheet to let them know what their tee times are.

Questions

The following are some of the questions and comments we have received.

Q – Why do some tee times appear to have multiple groups while others have only one.

A – The lines you see with golfers' names are individual ballots that the golfers created. The blank ballot is simply a convenience for anyone who wishes to request that tee time. The times listed and number of ballots at each tee time have no bearing on what happens in the lottery.

Q – Why do we allow multiple groups to select the same tee time?

A – The groups are not selecting a tee time; they are stating a preference to tee off at that time. If we were to force groups to choose a different time, the spirit of the lottery would be lost. We would be encouraging members to be the first to grab a time in the lottery and that would defeat the purpose of the four-day booking period.

Q – If I enter a ballot and choose a time that no one else has selected, will I get that time?

A – Not necessarily. Groups with lower numbers of rounds played will be processed before you, and if that is the closest tee time to their request, they will receive it.

Q – I'd like to have multiple groups follow one after the other on the tee sheet. Is that possible?

A – During heavy days of play, this is unlikely to happen. For best results, select a less popular time that is in the middle of the set of times you would like, and choose the same time for every group.