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## Skill Levels

Skill Levels (Handicaps) are a much discussed topic with some players, so I'd like to explain the PACS philosophy on the subject. Before I get started, let me say that I am always available to anyone who has a question on skill levels or thinks that someone might not be "handicapped" incorrectly. In fact, I welcome it. It is possible that someone may not be correctly handicapped. I'm confident in the PACS handicapping system and if it can't be explained why someone is handicapped the way that they are, they are likely not handicapped properly. My door is always open. With that said, I will not engage in shouting matches. I will treat people like adults and I expect the same in return. I don't respond to threats or ultimatums. I do not expect to make everyone in the league happy. There will always be some unreasonable and/or miserable people in a league this size. My aim is to be fair and appeal to the majority. If any players are playing in this league to try to be "under handicapped" (sandbagging), they are not playing in the right pool league. "Squeaky wheels" won't get rewarded in PACS. If anything, they will be doing themselves and their team a disservice if they complain often. If you are frequently not getting your texts or calls returned when complaining about skill levels, you are probably complaining too often. Choose your battles carefully. You will have to have overwhelming evidence that someone isn't "handicapped" properly for me to change someone's skill level. If the sole argument is "he played great today, there's no way he is a (insert skill level here)", it's probably not worth contacting me. All players will sometimes shoot much better than they normally do, thus appearing to be "under handicapped". Anyone who has played this game knows that EVERYONE has good days and bad days on the pool table, yet so many people seem to forget when they see someone shoot well against them or their team. There are MANY players who are on the cusp of moving up or down in skill level. I win all "ties" when debating a player's skill level. Also, if a player has a long track record of playing as a (insert skill level here), and does move down in skill level, they may move back up in short order after just 2-3 matches once they have regained their footing.

The PACS philosophy of a handicapped pool league is that it should make the playing field more level for lesser skilled players and teams when playing higher skilled players or teams. Notice I said "more level" and not "perfectly level". On average, an average "6" should beat the average "4" more than 50% of the time OVER AN EXTENDED AMOUNT OF MATCHES. Therefore....although it is possible for a team with lesser skilled players to still win a majority of their matches and make the postseason, they will likely have a tougher road than some other teams.

I sometimes will witness a match and afterwards, the player who lost will say "Did you see him shoot? There is no way he is a (insert skill level here)." What they fail to realize/remember is that they (the person complaining) scratched 6 times in the match, E-8'd in one of the games, and gave the opponent ball in hand on the 8 ball in another game. I hate to be harsh here, but if you are a high skilled player and you make those mistakes, Stevie Wonder will probably beat you. Think of a scratch as a turnover in football. Think of an E-8 or giving your opponent ball in hand on the 8 as a "pick 6" (interception for a TD). If you throw enough "pick 6"s or turn the ball over many times in a football game, expect to lose. Losing a pool match does not make you a lesser person. How you handle yourself after a defeat says a lot about your character. Take some accountability, everyone around you will think better of you.

When reviewing skill levels, I do consider player's records, their level of competition, score sheet data, etc. It is a good starting point, but a terrible ending point. [A person's skill level is supposed to be a predictor of a person's true ability and level of consistency in FUTURE matches if they are giving it 100%](#). I will usually be slow to move someone's skill level once they have a long history of shooting at a certain level. If a player moves up or down in skill level every time they have a 3 or 4 match winning or losing streak, it becomes too easy for teams or players to manipulate their skill level so that they are properly "positioned" to win when it matters (in the tournament). I played in pool league for many years and am pretty familiar with most/all of the tactics that some players or teams will use to try to gain an advantage by sandbagging. A player's ability to play the game doesn't usually suddenly "disappear" unless they have a sudden physical setback to their health. Don't confuse a slump with a change in ability to play the game. Everyone has slumps. They are frustrating and just something that players have to work through. If a player has a long history of shooting at a certain skill level and they suddenly start playing much worse than their long term average, I want it to put their team at a disadvantage and hurt their team's prospects of making the postseason. Losing should not be rewarded. If I take a different approach, PACS goes from being a pool league to being a sandbag league. I am very familiar with the abilities of many of the players in this league. I have seen firsthand many of the players shoot hundreds of games. I know their long term history in pool leagues. This is a much better indicator of someone's true ability or level of consistency in future matches than anything. As I enter the stats for players, there are trends that jump off the page at me. Here are some in no particular order...

1. A player's long term "non tournament" record indicates that they are a "weak 4", yet in tourney play, they are 15-4 and shoot like a "6". They will explain it as "I'm more serious in the tourneys and am more focused" Everyone at the tournament is trying to win and is more focused, so that's not a good argument. I put more weighting on how player's play when there is something at stake. Players should keep this in mind also when looking at a player's skill level. Tournament records don't show on the weekly standings, but I do consider them in my assessment of skill levels. In fact, as a player has a larger amount of matches in tournament play, much more consideration will be given to their play in tournaments vs. regular session since there is TYPICALLY less "wriggle room" for a player to purposely tank games or matches in tournament play. A player might wonder why they shoot like a "3" in the regular session, but never drop below a "4" in skill level. The reason is likely that their tournament play indicates that in matches of importance, they play better than a "3". As stated earlier, [a person's skill level is supposed to be a predictor of a person's true ability and level of consistency in FUTURE matches if they are giving it 100%](#).
2. If a player plays on a team that is doing well enough to afford that player the luxury of losing badly (not "on the hill") in every match they play in an attempt to have that player be assigned a lower skill level, I will notice that. For example, let's assume that a player's long term record suggests that person plays at a "strong 5" level. However, they are suddenly mired in a 10 match losing streak and they have been shooting like a "3" during that stretch. This level of misery is highly unlikely and will be met with a healthy dose of skepticism. They will likely not be moving down until they demonstrate to me that they also can't win in critical situations.
3. A team has a disturbing (and highly unlikely) trend of having every person on their team win 55% of their matches. They don't ever go above this number for fear that their skill level will adjust in the wrong direction. My goal is to have teams "handicapped" in a way that no team has a huge "paper advantage" in a tournament. If EVERY player on a team is usually very strong at their current handicap and has been for a long time, they are not handicapped properly as a team and I am not doing my job properly. Most if not all teams probably have player(s) whereby an argument could be made that player A should be "higher" and player B should be "lower".

That is why I will sometimes move a player up and a player down on the same team so that it is a “net 0” change for the team.

In a perfect world, every player would give 100% effort on every shot of every game of every match. Every score sheet would be 100% accurate. In this world, going strictly by the numbers would be the ONLY way to go. None of us live in that world. As I said, my door is always open if anyone has questions regarding skill levels. I even encourage it as it keeps me on my game. [Before making that call to question someone’s skill level, please take a look at your own team and ask yourself if a good argument can be made that a player\(s\) on your team might be under handicapped. Does the person you want to complain about play on a team that has a player\(s\) who might be over handicapped? Is it possible they had a good night? Other players besides yourself are allowed to have nights where they shoot much better than normal.](#)

As mentioned earlier, many players in the league are very close to moving up or down in skill level. As a rule, it’s probably not going to be worth your time debating a person’s skill level unless you feel that person shoots at least a FULL skill level different than their assigned skill level. Let me explain... If someone’s skill level is a “4” on paper and you feel that person shoots more like a “weak 5”, it’s probably not worth picking up your phone. Similarly, if a person on your team is a “5” on paper, it’s probably not worth picking up the phone unless you think they are a “weak 4” or worse. In other words, there will have to be overwhelming evidence for me to change someone’s skill level.

Most of you who are sandbagging are doing your team more harm than good. I probably know you are doing it anyway. There is no need to tell me repeatedly every time that I see you how bad you are doing, I already know. I will put my handicapping methodology against any handicapped pool league who supposedly “goes strictly by the numbers” on the score sheet. First, I’m not drinking that cool aid. If they are doing it this way, their equation does not include probabilities of things happening or examination of a [player’s \(or team’s\) motive](#) for suddenly shooting horribly in relation to their long term average. Show me a league that goes “strictly by the numbers” and I’ll show you a league that has the same teams “working the system” session after session, year after year.

If I listened to everyone’s opinion on skill levels, the entire league would be nothing but 6s and 7s in about a week. The reason is that many people are basing their opinion of someone’s ability on a very small sample size on a night when that person played much better than normal. It is interesting to note that in almost all cases when I get a complaint about someone’s skill level, it is that someone on another team is “under handicapped”. It is rarely that someone on their own team is “over handicapped”. The reason for this is that people are much more familiar of the abilities of their own players who they see shoot often. In other words, they are basing their opinion of their own player on a much larger sample size than one match. Observing one pool match as the basis of your assessment of a person’s skill level is the same as watching a pro football team play one half of football to determine if they will go to the Super Bowl. In statistics, they teach the importance of having a representative sample size to be able to make a prediction with any amount of accuracy. There is a reason that the winner of the presidential election isn’t announced after the first 30 votes are counted. If you go on vacation to San Diego and it rains 5 of the 8 days you are there, that does not mean it usually rains in San Diego. It means you were terribly unlucky. It can happen with the weather. It can happen in pool.

If a team is having a bad session and they decide as a group that they are going to “pack it in” and start tanking matches in the hopes of coming into the next session “properly positioned” (aka “under handicapped”), I will definitely notice it and it’s not going to work. The probability of an entire team playing MUCH worse than their long term average and continuing that pattern is (if they are trying to win) highly unlikely. It is a statistical anomaly and will be treated as such. If that team wants to play in postseason, my advice to that team would be to play better and start playing like their long term average suggests that they should be playing. Probably 90% of the teams feel that their team is good enough that

they should be playing in the Invitational and yet only about 50% actually get there in a given session. This is not a league in which everyone gets a trophy or bad play gets rewarded. Those teams will likely have to “step up their game” to make the tourney in future sessions.