

SKILL LEVEL Q&A

I don't understand *The Equalizer*[®], APA's handicap and scoring system. How does it work?

Over the years, this question has frustrated both players and League Operators equally—only because there is so little that can be shared. *The Equalizer*[®] system is designed to allow players with different levels of skill to compete equally. We use a computer-based system that takes into account a number of factors and data. This information is taken directly from the scoresheets of both competing teams, filled out during League play. Information taken into account includes, but is not limited to, the application of specific mathematical formulas relating to the data recorded on weekly scoresheets, win/loss records, Higher Level Tournament performance, and qualitative judgment by Handicap Advisory Committees, as well as other considerations. ***Please refrain from attempting to keep your own records. It is generally regarded as a disruptive practice.***

Why did you raise my skill level?

Your League Operator does not personally raise anyone's skill level. Player skill levels move both up and down based on player performance during APA competition. Every time you play an APA match, data is recorded and added to your player record. Your skill level is then recalculated based on the most recent scoresheet information. This additional data may have been the tipping point to move you into the next skill level; however, your skill level always reflects your overall ability based on your entire match history with the APA.

How often are skill levels updated?

Every time the system generates information from an incoming scoresheet, the skill level of each player in that division is automatically recalculated based on the most recent match data entered since the last scoresheet was generated. In other words, every time you see a new scoresheet, you can be assured that everyone in your entire division has been recalculated based on the latest match data available.

The system doesn't work! My SL6 got beat by a SL3 named John Doe that should be at least a SL4 or SL5.

There could be a couple of explanations for this: 1) John Doe could be a relatively new player. Our system is designed to produce an accurate skill level after 10 matches of APA League play. Remember that if John Doe, as a new player, played a limited number of matches and performed poorly during those matches, the system will calculate his match data as that of a SL3. As John Doe continues to play, accumulating more match data, his skill level will rise to the appropriate level. The thing to keep in mind in this case is that any new player with less than 10 matches played, may fall into this category and, therefore, may not yet be fairly ranked. As with all systems designed for handicapping, the more data that is collected for John Doe, the more accurate his skill level will become. For this reason, the APA requires all of its members to play at least 10 matches before becoming eligible to compete in a Higher Level Tournament. This rule ensures that during higher level play, all players will be competing with an accurate skill level. 2) On the other hand, let's assume John Doe has played 50 matches. Consistency plays a role in determining a player's skill level. John may be having a "career" evening. We all experience this from time to time. Some nights we just can't miss or the table is extremely kind. This can make it look like we are far better than we actually are and can happen to any player, of any skill level, on any given night, in any part of the country. 3) A third possibility is that John Doe has 50 matches played, but this was not a "career" evening. John Doe is actually just about to move up to the next skill level. How would you as an opponent know

this? The answer is simple—you would not, but *The Equalizer*[®] does. Remember that each skill level represents a range of performance. John Doe may actually be at the high end of this range and on the verge of moving to a SL4. You are witnessing the match that will move him to the next skill level. If this is the case, his next week's scoresheet will have a SL4 rating. What should you do in this example? Don't worry about it. Play your match and have fun! Have the confidence to know that one of the above is true and enjoy yourself in the meantime.

How can I be a SL4 in one league and a SL5 in another?

This is not unusual under certain circumstances. You are obviously a player that is improving—from that of a strong SL4 to a beginner SL5 at this time. Since you are competing in two separate areas, and the difference between skill levels is a very precise mathematical calculation, you are calculating to a strong SL4 in one area and a weak SL5 in another area. The more you play and the more data each League area accumulates, the more likely that the data from both areas will place you in the same skill level range.

I play on two different nights in the same League area. I was a SL5 on Monday and a SL4 on Thursday. How can that be?

Based on when you play and when your scoresheet is processed, this can happen from time to time. Skill levels for each division are updated automatically by our computer system every time a new scoresheet is printed for that division. When we process and print scoresheets midweek, this can be the result for players that are on the verge of changing skill levels and play on multiple nights on different teams.

How many matches do I have to lose before I go down to a SL4?

This type of information is never disclosed by a League Operator. It is not our policy to encourage players to lose matches in order to obtain a desired skill level, and providing the information you are asking could do just that. Likewise, we won't disclose when a player is on the verge of moving up a skill level for the same reason.

Some of my teammates went up in skill level, and now my team can't stay under the 23-Rule. The 23-rule is just designed to make me split up my team of friends so that you can have more teams and make more money!

This is simply not the case. While it is true that we are constantly trying to "grow" the league, having any of our members play at inaccurate skill levels—whether higher or lower—would result in "losing" teams. If an individual joins the league and is "inappropriately" raised (as you suggest) so that he or she is not at the appropriate skill level, that player would not be able to compete and most likely will quit. The League would actually lose teams! The last thing we want is for players to be upset over skill levels. In order to be fair to all of our members, we must allow *The Equalizer*[®] handicap and scoring system to give appropriate skill levels to all players. Some players fail to realize that when a team plays together for an extended period of time, the skill levels of their teammates inevitably improve because they are playing more competitive pool each week. This ultimately results in teammates going up in skill level. At some point, this can result in a team failing to meet the 23-Rule. There are some solutions to help your team avoid 23-Rule issues during a session. Try to organize a team with a lot of flexibility, meaning that you will need to build a team around players with many different levels of ability. We recommend a minimum of two "beginner level" players (SL2 or SL3 in 8-Ball; SL1 or SL2 in 9-Ball) on every team in order to provide room for improvement. Also, be sure to always have a full, 8-person roster, even if all eight teammates can't make it every week. Having eight members to choose from with varying degrees of experience/skill makes meeting the 23-Rule much less of an issue. It also provides you and your teammates the ability to be much more strategic in your approach to each week's lineup.

What is a “defensive shot” and how does it affect my skill level? Most teams don’t mark defensive shots anyway, so does it matter if we do?

As noted on page 58 in the **APA Official Team Manual**, a defensive shot is marked on the scoresheet for any shot where there is no INTENT to pocket a ball. Defensive shots are only one part of our overall handicapping system and should be marked on both teams scoresheet. The second part of the above question is a myth. Most teams do mark defensive shots each week throughout the nation. Remember that we receive 2 scoresheets for every match that each team plays all session long. Teams that fail to consistently mark their own defensive shots will immediately be very obvious to your League Operator. As a result, your team will be more heavily scrutinized when it comes to skill levels than other teams that routinely mark defensive shots on a weekly basis. So the best solution is to accurately mark them on your scoresheet. This will help to ensure that your League area is accurately ranked.

A brand new player just joined the APA and played one match. After his first match, I received my scoresheet, and the League raised him to a SL6!

This means that for the moment—and based on one match played according to our system—this player is a SL6. This ranking may or may not be accurate at this time because of the fact that it is based on only one match played which is a very limited data set. This player may actually have the true ability of a SL3, but was extremely lucky in the first match he played. Based on limited data entered into our software, it determines that the player is a SL6. Alternatively, this player may actually have the true ability of a SL7, but didn’t actually play at his true ability in his first match. The player may be adjusting to a new League and environment playing pool and may have been just a little nervous. In any event, all skill levels with new players may jump around for their first session as our system is accumulating data and determining the player’s true ability. The main thing to keep in mind is that ALL NEW players that join our league MAY not have accurate skill levels until their 10th match played. For this reason, when you see a player that is playing a match whose skill level does not seem to reflect their true ability at the table, realize that it is probably a relatively new player that has joined the league with less than 10 matches played.

I just went up to a SL4. There is no way I am a SL4. I am not near as good as Jane who is a SL4 in my division. She would win if we were to play!

There is certainly a difference between a player that just moved up to a SL4 and someone who has been a SL4 for quite some time. There is a range of skill for each level of play. Players that have just moved up in skill level will have to play their best to defeat a player that has been at that skill level for quite some time. On the other hand, moving up in skill level only means that you have to win 1 additional game in 8-Ball or pocket 5 to 11 additional balls in 9-Ball to win your match.

What does moving up in skill level really mean?

Moving up in skill level is one of the most exciting and rewarding elements of playing in the APA! Playing in the League is all about having fun, making some new friends and improving your pool game at the same time. We have developed **The Equalizer®** system over the last 30 years to make fair play available to players with different levels of skill. This is one of the cornerstones of our League. Enjoy it and embrace it. Having an accurately handicapped League is fun for everyone and in all of our best interests. Work together with your fellow pool players to make sure that your scoresheet is filled out accurately each night you play. This will help ensure an accurately handicapped League. Make sure to have fun when you are out playing on League night! Have faith and trust that our system is working for all of our players all across the country.