

Designing an Order of Merit *isn't straightforward*

An order of merit sounds simple: rank players over a season from best to worst. In reality, it involves choices. What are we really trying to measure?

The Key Question

Before choosing a system decide “What do we want the order of merit to reward?”

There are three different (and competing) ideas:

- Skill – who plays at the highest level on average.
- Success – who beats other players most often.
- Season performance – consistency + good rounds + participation.

These may not always produce the same winner.

Two Common Approaches

1. Average-Based (e.g. best 16 scores from a season of say 40 rounds)

Ranks players by their average performance.

Strengths

- Rewards consistency.
- Reduces impact of bad rounds.
- Fair to those who miss some weeks.

Limitations

- Does not reward winning directly.
- Treats all rounds as equal but impacted heavily by conditions.

2. Points for Positions (e.g. points for best 16 rankings from a season)

Players earn points based on weekly finishing position.

Strengths

- Rewards beating other players.
- Feels competitive and intuitive.
- Creates a season-long narrative.
- Condition independent

Limitations

- Can reward frequent participation.
- Results depend on how points are allocated: even distribution versus skewed.

The Participation Issue: Not everyone plays every week.

Without adjustment:

- Frequent players potentially gain an advantage.

Typical solutions:

- Minimum number of rounds to qualify.
- Count only a fixed number of best results.

This balances fairness and participation.

NB. Need to avoid a player winning the OoM but only participated in small number of events.

The Most Important Lever: Number of Counting Scores

This single choice strongly shapes the outcome:

- Fewer scores (e.g. 12)
→ potentially rewards brilliance (a few great rounds)
- Middle (e.g. 16)
→ potentially rewards consistent good performance.
- More scores (e.g. 20)
→ potentially rewards reliability and commitment.

Changing this number changes what “merit” means.

Field size effects

When using “Points for Positions” it is “easier” to win when there are fewer players. So some scaling multiplier is needed. This usually is **1** for the average field, **<1** for smaller field and **>1** for larger field.

Simplicity vs Complexity

More complex systems can adjust for:

- Weather and conditions
- Strength of field

But If players don’t understand the system, they won’t trust it.

Clarity and transparency are essential.

What Matters Most

There is no single “correct” system.

A good order of merit should be:

- Clear – easy to understand.
- Fair – reflects good golf.
- Consistent – avoids anomalies.

The Decision

The key question is what do we mean by “*the best golfer over a season.*”

Only then can one think about the methodology.

Takeaway:

Any system prioritises something—brilliance, consistency, or competitive success.

The choice defines what “merit” really means.