

## How to Play Match Play in Golf

Match play is the oldest form of golf competition and the purest head-to-head format in the game. Instead of counting total strokes over 18 holes, match play is decided hole by hole — win the hole, lose the hole, or tie it. The player who wins the most holes wins the match. It's the format used in the Ryder Cup, Presidents Cup, and WGC Match Play Championship.

### Quick Facts

- **Players:** 2 (individual) or 2v2 (four-ball match play)
- **Format:** Hole-by-hole competition — lowest score wins each hole
- **Scoring:** Holes up/down, not total strokes
- **Skill level:** All levels (with handicaps)
- **Used in:** Ryder Cup, Presidents Cup, club championships

### How Match Play Scoring Works

In match play, you're not trying to shoot the lowest total — you're trying to win more holes than your opponent. Each hole is a separate contest:

1. Both players play the hole and compare scores.
2. The lower score wins the hole. If scores are equal, the hole is "halved" (tied).
3. The running score is expressed as holes up or down: "2 up" means you've won two more holes than your opponent.
4. The match ends when one player is up by more holes than remain to be played.

### Understanding Match Play Terminology

Term	Meaning
<b>1 Up / 2 Up</b>	Leading by 1 or 2 holes
<b>All Square (AS)</b>	The match is tied
<b>Dormie</b>	Leading by exactly the number of holes remaining (e.g., 3 up with 3 to play — can't lose, only win or halve)

<b>Won 3&amp;2</b>	Won the match 3 up with 2 holes remaining (match ended on hole 16)
<b>Concession</b>	Giving your opponent a putt, hole, or the match

### Example Match

Player A and Player B tee off. After 9 holes, Player A has won 4 holes, Player B has won 2, and 3 holes were halved. Player A is 2 up. On the back nine, Player B wins holes 10, 12, and 14 while Player A wins hole 11. After 14 holes, Player B is 1 up. The match continues until one player clinches or all 18 holes are played.

### Concessions: Match Play's Unique Feature

In match play — and only in match play — you can concede a putt, a hole, or even the match. If your opponent has a 2-foot putt for par and you've already made double bogey, you can say "that's good" and concede the putt. The ball doesn't need to be holed.

Concessions speed up play and add a strategic element. Some players concede early putts to build goodwill, then don't concede a similar putt later when the pressure is on. Others never concede anything. There's gamesmanship involved.

Important: once a concession is made, it cannot be taken back.

### Match Play with Handicaps

In handicap match play, the difference in handicaps determines how many strokes the higher handicap player receives. If Player A is a 10 handicap and Player B is an 18, Player B gets 8 strokes — applied to the 8 hardest holes on the course (as ranked on the scorecard).

On those holes, Player B's net score is one stroke lower. A bogey 5 on a stroke hole becomes a net 4. This system keeps matches competitive between players of different abilities.

### When Does the Match End?

A match doesn't always go to 18 holes. It ends when one player has an insurmountable lead:

- **3 up with 2 to play:** The match is over — even if the trailing player wins both remaining holes, the best they can do is lose 1 down.

- **All square after 18:** The match is halved (tied), unless you're playing sudden death extra holes.

### **Strategy Tips**

**Forget your total score.** This is the hardest adjustment for stroke play golfers. A triple bogey that wins the hole is just as valuable as a birdie that wins the hole. Play the opponent, not the course.

**Apply pressure by being in play.** Even if you can't make birdie, hitting the fairway and green puts pressure on your opponent. They know they have to at least match you.

**Take risks when you're down.** If you're 2 down with 4 to play, safe pars aren't going to win the match — you need to make something happen. Go for pins, attempt longer putts aggressively.

**Play safe when you're up.** The opposite applies when leading. Pars are your friend. Let the trailing player take risks and make mistakes.

**Use concessions strategically.** Conceding a few short putts early can lull your opponent into expecting it. Not conceding a 3-footer on a crucial hole can be a powerful psychological move.