

2019 Rules of Golf Notable Changes

Rule 1 – The Game, Player Conduct and the Rules

Notable Changes

Concept of “Serious Misconduct” introduced. Focuses on a player’s actions as well as underlying intentions – brings etiquette into the Rules.

Committee may create a “Code of Conduct” that applies golf penalties to actions that are not a breach of a Rule.

“Reasonable Judgment” standard introduced to recognize that players are regularly required to make estimates when applying the Rules and often cannot be precise.

Rule 2 – The Course

Notable Changes

Areas of the course go from 4 to 5

Term “hazard” eliminated

“Through the green” is now the general area

New term “abnormal course conditions” now include immovable obstructions

Concept of a “no play zone” replaces the previously limited use of environmentally sensitive area and GUR mandatory relief

Rule 3 – The Competition

Notable Changes

“Wrong information” replaced by “giving the wrong number of strokes taken” and “failing to tell opponent about a penalty”

Hole scores are now certified, rather than the scorecard (now one word) being signed, to allow electronic forms of scorecards

The 2018 Local Rule (no penalty for a wrong score because of an unknown penalty) incorporated into the Rules

Timeline to “request a ruling” on the last hole of a match extended until the “match is final”

Timeline to correct a mistake on the last hole of a stroke-play round extended until the scorecard is returned

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Rule 4 – The Player’s Equipment

Notable Changes

No penalty for carrying a non-conforming club, penalty only for making a stroke

A player may repair any damage to a club that occurs during a round – “normal course of play” limitation on repair has been eliminated.

If an adjustable feature on a club has been purposely changed, it may be restored without penalty before it is used

Damaged ball, only “cut” or “cracked” damage substitution allowed, “out of shape” has been eliminated for replacing a damaged ball

The Rules now permit distance-measuring devices, a Local Rule may be used to prohibit their use

Rule 5 – Playing the Round

Notable Changes

Players may practice on the *course* after they have completed play for that day, even between consecutive rounds of stroke play

Penalty for a first breach of “unreasonable delay” is now one stroke in both match and stroke play

An individual may “stop play” on his or her own only because of lightning – stopping due to sudden illness or to get a ruling are now addressed under the unreasonable delay rule

Rule 6 – Playing a Hole

Notable Changes

The teeing area (not “teeing ground”) is two club-lengths in depth as measured by the player’s longest club that is not a putter (definition of club-length)

Any time a ball is in the teeing area, there is no penalty for accidentally or deliberately moving the ball when it is in play, including moving it somewhere else in the teeing area

Recommendations related to prompt pace of play, including encouraging “ready golf”

Rule 6.3 – Playing a Hole: Ball Used in Play of Hole

Significant Changes

A ball is lost only if not found within the three-minute search time

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Another ball may be substituted when taking free relief (dropping and placing)

Rule 7 – Ball Search: Finding and Identifying Ball

Notable Changes

Player no longer gets a penalty for improving *conditions* during a search so long as it happened while “fairly searching”

No longer necessary to announce or involve others when lifting a ball for identification

No longer a penalty if a ball is *moved* while searching or trying to identify it

Rule 8 – Course Played as It Is Found

Notable Changes

The definition of “conditions affecting the stroke” allows the “protected areas” in the 2016 Rules to be referred to in the new Rules under this umbrella definition.

Building a stance is now a breach of “improving,” no longer stand alone Rule.

If a player improves a condition affecting their stroke, in some cases the actions may be “undone” before the next stroke is made and the player will not get a penalty.

In some cases when a condition affecting a player’s stroke are worsened, the player can restore (improve) the worsened condition.

Rule 9 – Ball Played as It Lies; Ball at Rest Lifted or Moved

Notable Changes

A ball is “treated as” moved only if it is known or virtually certain that it did move

Definition of moved now includes the “naked eye” standard

Player protections from getting a penalty for moving a ball extended to cover “while taking reasonable actions”

“Directly attributable” limitation eliminated

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Rule 10 – Preparing for and Making a Stroke; Advice and Help; Caddies

Notable Changes

Making a *stroke* when standing across or on *line of play* is not allowed anywhere on the course

Line of play on the *putting green* may be touched, for instance in showing a player where to aim, even when ball is on the putting green

A player's *caddie* (or *partner*) must not be positioned behind the player when the player begins to take his or her *stance*

Rule 11 – Ball in Motion Accidentally Hits Person, Animal or Object; Deliberate Actions to Affect Ball in Motion

Notable Changes

No penalty for accidental deflections and ball is played as it lies (in stroke play still penalty for putting and striking ball at rest on putting green)

Deliberate deflections under Rule 11.2 are “outcome based,” there is no penalty if ball is not deflected

“Might influence the movement of the ball” standard eliminated and replaced by intent-based standard for deliberate acts

Rule 12 - Bunkers

Notable Changes

Walls and lips are not part of the *bunker*

Relaxed restrictions on touching the sand when ball is in a *bunker*

Loose impediments may be removed without penalty

Rule 13 – Putting Greens

Notable Changes

Almost all damage to the *putting green* may be repaired

No penalty for any accidental movement of a ball or ball-marker on the *putting green*

If player's ball has been lifted or *moved*, and the ball then *moves* after being *replaced*, the ball now “owns” that spot. The player will play from that spot no matter what caused the ball to move.

Interference from a wrong green now includes the player's *stance* and area of intended swing

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Player may leave the *flagstick* in the *hole* when playing from anywhere, and gets no penalty if it if his or her ball in motion strikes it

Rule 14 – Procedures for Ball: Marking, Lifting and Cleaning; Replacing on Spot; Dropping in Relief Area; Playing from Wrong Place

Notable Changes (14.1 – 14.7)

New limitations on what may be used to mark the spot of a ball

Ball must be replaced by hand to be replaced in the “right way”

Dropping in the “right way” includes three things

- Player must drop ball (but in partner forms of play, partner may as well)
- Ball must be dropped from knee height and must not touch any person or equipment before it hits the ground
- Ball must be dropped into the relief area

Any procedure that requires dropping will always include dropping in a relief area – there are no procedures in the Rules that require the player to drop on a specific spot, line or reference point

Rules now state that putting a ball into play is an intentional act

If a player is required to drop a ball again and has done something that would be a penalty, he or she might not get a penalty if a ball is dropped again

Deadline for correcting a *serious breach* of playing from a *wrong place* on the last hole is before the player’s scorecard is returned

Definitions

Abnormal Course Conditions include *immovable obstructions*, in addition to *GUR*, *temporary water* and *animal holes*

Animal Holes, including casts and runways, are no longer limited to holes made by “burrowing” animals

Obstructions are one or the other, movable or immovable, not both

Rule 15 - Relief from Loose Impediments and Movable Obstructions (including ball or ball-marker helping or interfering with play)

Notable Changes

Loose impediments may be removed from bunkers and penalty areas

Player will drop a ball into a relief area when taking relief for a ball in or on a movable obstruction

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Lifting a ball based on it “helping” another player (previously “assisting), only applies when the helping ball is on the putting green

Balls and ball-markers are treated equally with respect to helping or interfering

Rule 16 - Relief Abnormal Course Conditions (including immovable obstructions), Dangerous Animal Condition, Embedded Ball

Notable Changes

Abnormal Course Conditions now include *immovable obstructions*

Any *abnormal course condition* may be treated as a *no play zone*

Embedded ball Rule now applies in the *general area* by default. A Local Rule may be used to restrict relief to “fairway height or less areas”

No longer necessary to announce or involve others when lifting a ball to see if relief is allowed

Rule 17 – Penalty Areas

Notable Changes

The terms “water hazard” and “hazard” have been eliminated from the Rules

Penalty Areas are not limited to just open water courses, Committees have wide discretion on what can be marked a *penalty area*

“Edge” of a *penalty area* replaces the term “margin” of a water hazard

Relief on the opposite side of a red *penalty area* is only available by Local Rule

Any *penalty area* can be treated as a no play zone

Rule 18 – Stroke - and – Distance Relief; Ball Lost or Out of Bounds; Provisional Ball

Notable Changes

Players now have a one club-length relief area when taking stroke-and-distance relief

A ball is lost if not found within three minutes after the player’s side or caddie has started to search for it

A player may go back and play a provisional ball after going forward to search

Announcement of a provisional ball may be made to anyone

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Rule 19 – Unplayable Ball

Notable Change

Players have a new two stroke penalty relief option to get out of a bunker

Rule 20 – Resolving Rules Issues During Round; Rulings by Referee and Committee

Notable Changes

If a player does not announce which ball he or she wishes to score with when playing two balls, the first ball played is treated as the ball selected

Naked eye standard introduced to disregard breaches that could not have been seen with the naked eye or were otherwise not possible to know

After the result of the match is final or the stroke-play competition is closed, players may be disqualified for serious misconduct

Rule 21 – Other Forms of Individual Stroke Play and Match Play

Notable Changes

New form of stroke play introduced, Maximum Score

Rules now recognize and embrace scrambles, greensomes and other forms of play not previously supported by the Rules

Rule 22 – Foursome (also known as alternate shot)

Notable Change

Either player may act for the side, regardless of which player is next to play (such as dropping a ball, deciding a ball is unplayable, etc.)

Rule 23 – Four - Ball

Notable Change

Either partner may take an action regarding the other player's ball (example: your partner can drop your ball for you)

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Rule 24 – Team Competition

Notable Changes

This Rule is new and covers a topic not previously addressed in the Rules

New term “advice giver” is used to refer to the individual(s) in a team competition who may give or be asked for advice.

So long as there is no individual component in a team competition, a Local Rule can be used allowing teammates in the same group to give each other advice