

Certain Topics Not Addressed in the New Rules of Golf for 2019 – March 2018 Update

Introduction

The Rules Modernization Initiative has been comprehensive in scope. Every one of the game's 34 Rules has been reviewed, including a careful assessment of the historical evolution and current effectiveness of each Rule. In doing so, we have been guided by a central theme for this fundamental review: even far-reaching Rule changes should be open for discussion, but golf's essential principles and character must be preserved.

The new Rules reflect a large number of changes, many of which came from suggestions that have been voiced by people in the golf community over the years. However, it is also necessarily the case that there are a significant number of suggestions for change that we have noted, but decided not to include in the new Rules. We categorize and list below some of these ideas that we have not adopted.

1. Preserving the Essential Character of Golf

- Dimensions of the hole – The size of the hole in the putting green is retained at 4 ¼ inches in diameter. Golf is a combination of many skills, with the touch and feel of putting being in marked contrast to the strength, coordination and timing required for full shots. An increase in the dimensions of the hole (as a few people have suggested) would alter that balance and we have found no good reason to do so.
- Number of clubs a player may carry in a round – While the 14 club limit is essentially an arbitrary limit (established in the late 1930's), it has worked well and we can see no compelling reason to decrease or increase the limit.
- Number of holes in a round – We recognize the concern that many have about the amount of time it takes to play a round and the time constraints faced by many golfers. The current Rules provide the appropriate flexibility by allowing a round to be either 18 holes (the maximum allowed) or any fewer number of holes. While 18 hole rounds continue to be recognized as a traditional and common length of round, shorter rounds (for example, 9 hole rounds) are allowed and encouraged as well. The definition of "round" in the new Rules will more clearly recognize that a round is "18 or fewer holes played in the order set by the Committee".
- Match play and stroke play - An early consideration of the project was whether it was right to preserve these two basic forms of playing the game. We feel that the game is stronger and more fun by allowing players to choose to compete in either match play or stroke play (and to do so either as an individual or with a partner). Match play and stroke play involve fundamentally different tactics and strategy and enable golf to be played competitively and enjoyed in different but equally valid ways.

2. Preserving the Fundamental Challenge of the Game

- Play the ball as it lies – In its simplest form, golf is about playing the ball from tee to green by hitting it with a golf club, and not otherwise touching the ball. A fundamental challenge of the sport is to deal with whatever position your ball comes to rest in – whether good or bad. While there are some necessary exceptions (such as obstructions and other abnormal course conditions), the essential nature of golf means these must remain exceptions rather than the norm. Therefore, the new Rules do not provide relief without penalty from situations that some

golfers complain about, such as when their ball comes to rest in a divot hole on a fairway or in footprints in a poorly raked bunker. In addition to being contrary to the fundamental principle of playing the ball as it lies, providing free relief in such circumstances would make the Rules harder to apply (for example, what is the difference between an irregularity of surface and an old divot hole?) and could slow down play when there are difficult questions about what is or isn't a divot hole.

- Prohibitions against improving the “conditions affecting the stroke” - In conjunction with “play the ball as it lies,” the fundamental principle of “play the course as you find it” helps reinforce that players need to accept the outcome of their previous stroke (good or bad) and play the ball from where it comes to rest. The core restrictions that support this principle (namely, prohibiting improvements to the lie of the ball, the area of stance or swing and the line of play) are maintained in the new Rules.
- Restrictions on touching sand in a bunker – Although the new Rules significantly relax the current prohibitions on what a player can do in the bunker, we have retained certain restrictions (namely, no deliberately touching the sand with hand or club to test the condition of the bunker and no touching of the sand with a club in the area right in front of or behind the ball or in making a practice swing or the backswing for the stroke). These prohibitions have been maintained to preserve the essential challenge of playing a shot from the sand in a bunker.
- No general exemption from penalty for a player accidentally causing the ball to move – While the new Rules eliminate the penalty for accidentally moving a ball during search or when it is on the putting green, the penalty for accidentally moving a ball that lies off the putting green has been retained. There is a good reason for the distinction: we still want players to be careful around their ball, which in turn helps to support the principles of playing the ball as it lies and the course as you find it. If players were free to remove all loose impediments under or right next to a ball without fear of penalty for moving the ball and could be careless around the ball without any sanction, there would be too many situations where the ball would end up being replaced in and played from a lie that was not exactly the same as the original lie. Such a concern does not apply on the putting green where the lie is known and the ball can be replaced on its estimated spot.
- Dropping procedure retained but simplified – There was strong consensus that the current dropping procedures are too complicated and should be modified. To that end, we considered many alternatives, including various possible procedures for dropping the ball and the alternative of allowing the ball to be placed rather than dropped. Our conclusion was that the procedure being proposed is a better solution than allowing the ball to be placed in all circumstances, as it achieves the goal of simplifying and speeding up how relief is taken without completely losing the element of randomness associated with dropping the ball.

3. Focus on the Playing Rules (rather than the Equipment Rules)

- Specifications or performance limits for clubs and balls – The Rules Modernization Initiative is about the playing Rules, and it does not address the specifications or performance of clubs and balls. Accordingly, the absence of any changes in relation to these topics should not be viewed as indicating that any decisions have been reached about whether to make any future changes

to the Equipment Rules; these rules are vitally important for the future of the sport, but are the subject of a separate, ongoing review.

4. Match Play and Stroke Play are Different Forms of the Game

- Differences in penalties and procedures in match play and stroke play – Having decided to retain match play and stroke play, we considered whether these two basic forms of playing the game could have entirely the same penalties. In terms of the general penalty, it was quickly noted that there is an inherent difference in the two forms of play – in match play the general penalty is loss of hole (which is quick and easy to apply), whereas in stroke play it is two penalty strokes (as there can be no concept of loss of hole in stroke play). In addition, we reviewed all other penalties to determine if they could be identical. After due consideration, it was determined that it remains appropriate for a small number of penalties and procedures to be different (for example, the correction procedure for playing outside the teeing ground).
- Differences in the Rules on practising on the course before a round – We recognize that the players in a match have the same opportunities to practise, whereas players in stroke play will have different opportunities depending on their starting times. Therefore, the Rules on whether a player may practise on the competition course before a round will continue to be different. As indicated in new Rule 5.2, however, we are relaxing the restrictions on practising after a round on the day of a stroke play competition, which have been problematic for multiple round events.

5. Simplicity, Clarity and Enforceability are Important Considerations because of Self-Regulation

- Simplicity – Any new Rule needs to be as simple as possible. This is not the single determining factor, but it is an important consideration. For example, it was suggested that we should allow “regression” under the unplayable ball Rule (that is allowing stroke-and-distance relief at the spot where any previous stroke had been made on the hole in question, rather than only the spot of the last stroke). We believe that the occasions where this might have been helpful will be rare and the suggested solution is too complicated.
- Clarity – Any new Rule needs to be as clear as possible. As with simplicity, this is not the single determining factor, but it is another important consideration. For example, it was suggested that we should remove the requirement to announce the playing of a provisional ball, deeming this to be the player’s intention, unless he or she declared otherwise. However, as players are not always required to declare what they are doing, including when putting a ball into play under stroke-and-distance, this suggestion was not supported because it would have created too much uncertainty in terms of which ball is “in play”.
- Enforceability – Any new Rule needs to be enforceable. For example, while improving pace of play is a fundamental objective of this initiative, it is not considered feasible to impose specific limits on a player’s actions in preparing for a stroke (such as a limit on practice swings, or a limit on the amount of putting green repair). Hence, the new Rule recommends (rather than requires) 40 seconds as the maximum time in which a stroke should be made (while also emphasizing that it usually should be possible to make a stroke more quickly than that). This also gives Committees the flexibility to set their own time limits and other requirements in a Pace of Play Policy that is suited to their particular competitions.

Conclusion

As noted, one of the guiding themes throughout our review has been that, in considering any possible change in the Rules, golf's essential principles and character must be preserved. We believe that the new Rules strike the right balance – enhancing golf's important traditions, while updating the Rules of the sport. Under the new Rules, the game will still look and feel entirely like golf.