

Major Changes to the 2019 Rules of Golf

Ball at Rest Moved – While actively searching for a ball, a player is no longer penalized for accidentally moving the ball in play. Replace the ball on the spot or estimated spot. Rule 7.4

Ball on Putting Green Accidentally Moved – If A ball at rest on the putting green is accidentally moved, there is no penalty and it must be replaced. Rule 13.1d.

Standard for Player Moving a Ball – We must have “Virtual Certainty” (95%) that a player caused the ball to move for a player to get a penalty. Rule 9.2.

Replacing v Dropping – When replacing a ball, it will always be on a spot (even if it has to be estimated). When dropping a ball, it was always be in a relief area. Rule 14.2c & Rule 14.3b(3).

Ball in Motion Accidentally deflected – When a ball in motion hits a player, his equipment or caddie by accident, there is no penalty and play the ball as it lies. Rule 11.1.

Dropping – Is now done at knee height, the ball must strike and come to rest AND be played from the defined relief area for that Rule. The size of the relief area is measured by the players’ longest club that is not a putter. Rule 14.3

3 Minute Search Time – A player is now allowed 3 minutes to find and identify their golf ball. Rule 18.2.

Substitution of Ball – A player may now always substitute a ball whenever dropping a ball in taking free or penalty relief. This also includes re-dropping and placing. This does NOT include replacing a ball. Rule 14.3

Embedded Ball - A player may now take relief for an embedded ball in the general area that is not in sand, no matter what the cut of grass is (Fairway, Rough, Fringe..) Rule 16.3. The relief area is no longer a spot.

Back-on-a-Line Relief - When taking relief back on a line through a spot to the hole, the player will drop within one club length of the defined reference point in a relief area. Rule 14.3.

Replace Ball after marked on Putting Green - If a ball moves for any reason after it has been marked and lifted from the putting green, it will always be replaced. Rule 13.1d.

Damage to putting Green may be Repaired – Almost all damage including spike marks, hole plugs, animal hoof damage, pitch marks may be repaired. Exceptions to this Rule are; common maintenance practice such as aeration holes and verticutting, as well as unreasonable delay must be avoided. Rule 13.1c(2).

Touching the Line of Play on Green is Allowed. There is no longer a penalty for merely touching your line of play on the green. Rule 13.1

Ball played from Putting Green may strike an unattended Flagstick – The player may leave the flagstick in for any reason and the ball will be played as it lies without a penalty. Rule 13.2b(2).

Penalty Areas – Committees may now define any area of a course to be a penalty area. They will still include water features, but are now expanded to include native grass, desert, lava, etc. All penalty areas may be marked red.

Relaxed Restrictions in a Penalty Area – A player may move loose impediments, take a practice swing and ground their club in a penalty area. Rule 17.

Relaxed Restrictions in a Bunker – A player may move loose impediments in a bunker, but still may not touch sand at address, for a practice swing or during the backward motion of a club in making a stroke. Rule 12.2a & b.

Unplayable Ball in a Bunker – May now be taken out of the bunker using back-on-a-line relief, for a 2-stroke penalty. Rule 19.3b.

Damaged Clubs – Clubs damaged by a player for any reason may be used but cannot be replaced. Rule 4.1.

Distance Measuring Devices – Are now allowed in the Rules, but still cannot measure slope or wind speed, etc... Rule 4.3.

Caddie Alignment – A caddie (or partner) may not deliberately stand on an extension of a player's line, while that player has begun to or is taking their stance. Rule 10.2b(4).

Caddie Lifting a Ball – A caddie may lift the player's ball on the putting green only without that player's permission. All other situations the caddie will need permission each time to lift the ball. Rule 14.1b.

Double Hits - A player is no longer penalized for accidentally hitting a ball more than once during a stroke, and the ball will be played as it lies. Rule 10.1a.

Maximum Score – A committee may play a version of stroke play with a maximum score per hole. The maximum may be a straight number (gross or net), or relation to par or however the committee wishes, so they may “pick up”.

Lifting for Identification – A player is no longer required to announce and have the lifting of his ball witnessed by another person. Rules 4.2c, 7.3, 16.4.

Reasonable Estimation – If a player uses reasonable judgment to estimate a spot (such as where a ball entered a penalty area), they will not be penalized if he turns out to be wrong based on future evidence, such as video or spectator testimony. Rule 1.3b.