

Rules of Golf Changes for 2019

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Now that the R&A and the USGA have announced the final changes to the new Rules of Golf for 2019 I have taken the time to digest them and am ready to offer some initial thoughts. I do welcome most of the changes, especially those that should help to address what I believe to be the biggest problem facing the majority of amateur golfers – the time take to play a competition round of 18 holes. I do not intend to get into specific detail about individual Rules changes for two main reasons; first, the Ruling Bodies have done an excellent job of highlighting those changes with videos and explanations on their web sites; second, there are still nearly nine months before the new Rules are implemented and for those of us in the northern hemisphere, that means a whole season of golf, where the existing Rules continue to apply.

However, I do encourage those of you who are involved in golf Committees to start planning for the changeover, sooner rather than later, as there are many items that should not be left to the end of the year. For example, most score cards will have to be reprinted, as the Local Rules will almost certainly require several major changes. It is presumed that most Clubs and Societies will introduce the Local Rule that provides an alternative to the stroke and distance

penalty for a ball that is lost or out of bounds. This option allows the player to drop in a large area between the point where the ball is estimated to have been lost, or gone out of bounds, and the edge of the fairway at a point that is not nearer the hole, rather than returning to where they last played from, if a provisional ball was not played. Another change that needs to be carefully considered, is whether other areas of the course are to be considered as penalty areas, which can now be expanded beyond water hazards, such as deserts, jungles, or expanses of trees or shrubs

I am also concerned that Club/Society Committees will not be fully prepared to handle the vast increase in the numbers of Rules situations that will inevitably occur in the early months of 2019. In the northern hemisphere many Clubs will be operating non-handicap counting competitions for the first few months, due to local abnormal conditions ('Winter Rules'), but those below the equator will be in the middle of their seasons, where one month they will be competing under the current Rules and the next month under the new Rules, which differ in so many ways. I expect that many players will absent-mindedly take relief by dropping a ball from shoulder height instead of from knee height, and others will play a dropped ball that has rolled a few inches outside of the permitted drop relief area, forgetting that under the new Rules a ball has to be re-dropped in this circumstance. Those of us who take an interest in the Rules should assist players wherever possible in preventing a breach of Rule before it happens, by stepping in and providing information on the new procedures. In both of the above cases, the player can avoid a penalty if they are informed that their drop was not valid and they then correct their mistake before making a stroke at their dropped ball, new Rule 14.3. Note that not only have all the Rules number references changed, they are presented in a different format; e.g. currently Rule 25-2b(ii), in 2019 Rule 14.3b(2).

Those of us engaged in any sector of golfing media have some additional problems to deal with. There are many significant alterations in the terminology used in the new Rules from that which has evolved over more than two centuries. Some are definitely welcome; for example 'fellow competitor', which was never used consistently by many golfers and golf commentators, who incorrectly referred to players in the same group as 'playing partners'. In the new Rules they, are now just 'players' (not even 'competitors') in the same 'group'. But how long will it be before we get used to the fact that there will no longer be any 'hazards' ('bunkers' and 'penalty areas'), no 'margins' ('edges'), no 'outside agent' ('outside influence'), no 'Conditions of Competition' ('Committee Procedures') and no 'through the green', 'rub of the green' or 'stipulated round'.

I have now made the decision to continue with my efforts to assist others to obtain a better understanding of the Rules of Golf and will shortly announce a new partnership that will extend the services that I will be able to offer to both individuals and Clubs/Societies. Keep watching this space!

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Good golfing,

Barry Rhodes