

A Game Changer

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Like most children growing up and throughout our lives, we are faced with all types of rules. Eat your peas, make your bed, don't get dirty, do your homework, go to college, get married etc. Life is full of does and don'ts, rules for this and rules for that.

There are rules in our everyday lives and rules for play. In any given game or sport there are defined rules with the intent of making it fair for everyone. For most recreational golfers, the newly proposed rules of golf may not apply completely to your daily round.

A little bit of history with regards to today's Rules of Golf - For many years, there were two sets of rules; codified by the USGA and the R&A. Beginning in 1952 these two groups standardized the rules, publishing a new set every two years, usually with some minor changes. However, it was not until 1990 that the two sets of Rules truly became one, as both groups settled upon a standard set for the game. The biggest difference for many years was that the R&A allowed play with a 1.62-inch diameter ball, while the USGA ball was standardized at 1.68 inches.

There are three basic premises governing the Rules of Golf: 1) play the ball as it lies, 2) play the course as you find it, and 3) if unable to do either 1) or 2), do what is fair. There are currently 34 rules, with many sub-rules, and sub-sub-rules. In addition, the USGA and R&A publish a book called Decisions on the Rules of Golf, which are specialized rulings that have been standardized over the years, based on questions that have come up in competitive play.

Much of the time, the Rules of Golf have changed in response to an infinite variety of unforeseen or unique circumstances that keep changing in a sport played outdoors in a natural setting. Reasons for rule change have been varied and included the progression of course design, maintenance and agronomics; innovation in clubs, balls and other player equipment; the list goes on. More generally, the Rules of Golf Committees have often made changes after listening to passionate debates among golfers about whether particular outcomes or procedures are fair or appropriate.

For many of these reasons, the USGA and R&A decided this past March 1st, 2017 to update the rules by which we play. The proposed new rules are to take effect January 1st, 2019 and would be replaced by a 24 rules handbook instead of the existing 34.

The online release of this preview began a six-month feedback and evaluation period during which all golfers worldwide have the opportunity to learn about the proposed changes and *provide input* before being finalized in 2018. The deadline for input was until 31 August 2017.

The announcement follows a comprehensive review process that began in 2012 with a working group of key R&A and USGA Rules administrators, professional tour officials and other Rules experts. While the Rules are revised every four years, this is the first fundamental review since 1984 and was established to ensure the Rules fit the needs of today's game and the way it is played around the world.

Most of these rules are set for professional play, not necessarily for the recreational golfer, however, in order to play and enjoy the game you do need to understand some of the basic rules of play.

Due to the limitations of a single article, there are many proposed updates that cannot fit inside of this article. For more detailed information visit the USGA and or RandA.org websites.

With this in mind here are a few of the highlights proposed:

Pace-of-play support: Reduced time for searching for a lost ball (from five minutes to three); affirmative encouragement of 'ready golf' in stroke play; recommending that players take no more than 40 seconds to play a stroke and other changes intended to help with pace of play. I like this new change 😊

A simplified way of taking relief: A new procedure for taking relief by dropping a ball in and playing it from a specific relief area; relaxed procedures for dropping a ball, allowing the ball to be dropped from just above the ground or any growing thing or other object on the ground.

Elimination or reduction of 'ball moved' penalties: There will be no penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green or in searching for a ball, and a player is not responsible for causing a ball to move unless it is 'virtually certain' that he or she did so.

Relaxed putting green rules: There will be no penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits an unattended flagstick in the hole; players may putt without having the flagstick attended or removed. Players may repair spike marks and other damage made by shoes, animal damage and other damage on the putting green and there is no penalty for merely touching the line of putt.

Relaxed rules for 'penalty areas' (currently called 'water hazards'): Red and yellow-marked penalty areas may cover areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc., in addition to areas of water; expanded use of red penalty areas where lateral relief is allowed; and there will be no penalty for moving loose impediments or touching the ground or water in a penalty area.

Relaxed bunker rules: There will be no penalty for moving loose impediments in a bunker or for generally touching the sand with a hand or club. A limited set of restrictions (such as not grounding the club right next to the ball) is kept to preserve the challenge of playing from the sand; however, an extra relief option is added for an unplayable ball in a bunker, allowing the ball to be played from outside the bunker with a two-stroke penalty.

Relying on player integrity: A player's 'reasonable judgment' when estimating or measuring a spot, point, line, area or distance will be upheld, even if video evidence later shows it to be wrong; and elimination of announcement procedures when lifting a ball to identify it or to see if it is damaged.

What do you think? Personally, I am in favor of these proposed updates, mostly when it comes to pace-of-play.

Hopefully, it will keep us golfing for many years to come. Let's see what the 2019 golf season will bring!

A SMILE MOMENT: Why was the computer so good at golf? Because it had a hard drive.

To book your next golf lesson, contact Lisa today via e-mail at lisalgolpro@gmail.com or by telephone at 506-232-0728 or visit her website at www.PrivateGolfPro.ca .

Lisa Elle is the PrivateGolfPro who teaches in the greater Moncton area and southeast NB. Her unique golf service assists all levels of players with their golf swing. Her golf articles have been published in print and on websites across Canada. She is also the face of the charitable trust 'Lisa's Fund - a breath for Cystic Fibrosis'.