

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

3. Ball Moved During Search

Current Rule: If a player moves his or her ball while searching for it:

- The player generally gets a one-stroke penalty (there are four limited exceptions), and
- When the player does not know the ball's exact original spot, he or she must return it to play by dropping it as near as possible to that estimated spot.

2019 Rule: Under Rule 7.4, if a player accidentally moves his or her ball while searching for it:

- The player will get no penalty for causing it to move, and
- The ball will always be replaced; if the exact spot is not known, the player will replace the ball on the estimated original spot (including on, under or against any attached natural or man-made objects which the ball had been at rest under or against).

Reasons for Change:

- A fundamental principle of golf is to play the ball as it lies; so the Rules should help the player to find his or her ball and play it from the spot where it was at rest.
- Players often need to probe in grass, bushes, leaves and other conditions to look for a hidden ball, and such reasonable acts create an inherent risk of moving the ball.
- The current Rules allow both an opponent in match play, and other players in stroke play, to help search for the player's ball without risk of penalty if they accidentally move the player's ball; outside persons such as spectators are allowed to help search as well.
- It is inconsistent to encourage everyone but the player or his or her caddie (or partner) to look for the ball, and this creates an odd incentive for the player to hold back and let others search.
- Because the ball's location isn't known before it is found, eliminating a penalty in this situation will be a reasonable exception to the obligation to avoid moving a ball at rest.
- Removing this penalty will not allow the player to benefit from excessive actions in searching for the ball, as there will be a penalty if the player searched in an unreasonable way (that is, beyond what was necessary for a "fair search") that improved the conditions affecting the next stroke (see new Rules 7.1 and 8.1).
- Changing the procedure for replacing a ball moved in search will help make sure the ball is played from its original spot or, if that spot is not known, on the estimated spot, including from a poor lie under grass or other growing things:
 - Today, when a player returns such a ball to play by dropping it as near as possible to its estimated spot, the ball is typically dropped on top of the grass or other growing things, which can result in a much better lie than the player originally had.
 - Under the new procedure, the player will need to replace that ball on its estimated spot on, under or against the grass or other growing things, and so face the challenge of playing from that difficult spot where the ball had come to rest.

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

16. No Penalty for Moving a Ball on the Putting Green

Current Rule: Under Rule 18-2, if a player (or opponent) accidentally causes the player's ball to move anywhere on the course, there is a one-stroke penalty (unless one of several exceptions applies).

2019 Rule: Under Rule 13.1d, there will no longer be a penalty if a player (or opponent) accidentally causes the player's ball to move on the putting green.

The substance of this Rule change has already been implemented as of 1 January 2017 by authorizing Committees to adopt a Local Rule that eliminates the penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green.

Reasons for Change:

- The shape, slope and condition of many putting greens today increase the chances that a ball at rest on the putting green might move, and it can be difficult to determine whether a player caused the ball to move or whether the ball was moved by wind or other natural causes.
- When a ball moves while the player is doing nothing more than taking normal actions to prepare for a stroke, it can seem unfair for the player to be penalized.
- Most "ball moved" situations occur on the putting green, involve minimal movement of the ball, frequently occur when the player is taking reasonable actions to prepare for a stroke and the ball can be easily replaced.
- These considerations are not the same when the ball lies off the putting green, and so the penalty will continue to apply (with exceptions, such as accidentally moving a ball during search) to a player or opponent in those circumstances to reinforce the principle that the ball should be played as it lies and that players should continue to exercise care when near to a ball in play.

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

22. Standard for Deciding Why a Ball Moved

Current Rule: The “weight of evidence” standard is used to decide whether a player (or an opponent) caused the player’s ball to move:

- The decision must be made in the light of all relevant circumstances, evaluating the weight of the evidence and the balance of probabilities (Decision 34-3/9).
- The player will be found to have caused the ball to move if the weight of the evidence indicates that it is more likely than not that he or she was the cause (Decision 18-2/0.5).

But a higher standard (“known or virtually certain”) applies in deciding whether an outside agency (such as an animal, spectator or another player in stroke play) caused a ball to move.

2019 Rule: Under Rule 9.2, the “known or virtually certain” standard (meaning at least 95% likely) will apply to all questions of fact about why a ball at rest moved:

- A player, opponent or outside influence will be found to have caused the ball to move if the player, opponent or outside influence was known or virtually certain to have caused it to move; otherwise it will be assumed that natural forces caused it to move.

Reasons for Change:

- The weight of the evidence test is often difficult to apply in ball moved situations:
 - Many competing factors need to be balanced, such as what the player did near the ball, the lapse of time before the ball moved, the lie of the ball, the slope and other course conditions near the ball and the presence of wind or weather conditions, and
 - There is no prescribed way of prioritizing or balancing these factors.
- The “known or virtually certain” standard will be simpler to apply because it will eliminate most “close calls” where it is hard to know for sure why the ball moved.
- Using this standard will fit well with the new Rule 13.2 that will eliminate the penalty for accidentally causing a ball to move on the putting green:
 - The primary reason for eliminating that penalty is that it is often particularly difficult to decide why a ball moved on the putting green.
 - This is explained further in Explanation for Proposed Rule Change - *When to Replace Ball that Moves on Putting Green*.
 - Given those particular difficulties, using the “known or virtually certain” standard will be more clear-cut and easier to apply, and help avoid the risk of players being penalized for playing from a wrong place (replacing the ball when it should have been played as it lies, or vice versa) based on the same difficult balancing of factors that led to eliminating the penalty for causing the ball to move.
- This Rule change also means that only the single standard of “known or virtually certain” will be used for all ball moved questions, rather than the situation under the current Rules where different standards apply in deciding whether an outside influence moved a ball or whether the player or opponent did so.