

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

4. Ball Played from Green Hits Unattended Flagstick in Hole

Current Rule: Under Rule 17-3, if a player makes a stroke on the putting green and the ball then hits the unattended flagstick that was left in the hole, the player gets the general penalty.

2019 Rule: Under Rule 13.2b(2):

- There will no longer be a penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits a flagstick left in the hole.
- Players will not be required to putt with the flagstick in the hole; rather, they will continue to have the choice to have it removed (which includes having someone attend the flagstick and remove it after the ball is played).

Reasons for Change:

- Allowing a player to putt with the flagstick in the hole without fear of penalty should generally help speed up play:
 - For example, if a putt is long enough that the player cannot easily see the hole unless the flagstick is left in, the player currently needs to wait for another person to attend the flagstick even if it is the player's turn to play or (in stroke play) if the player is ready to play and it would save time to go ahead and do so.
 - This change could also speed up play for short tap-ins, as the player could simply putt the ball into the hole without first removing and then replacing the flagstick.
- When the players do not have caddies, the current Rule can result in considerable delay, such as:
 - When the opponent (or the other player in stroke play) is raking a greenside bunker and will be delayed for a minute or two before coming on to the green.
 - When other players in stroke play are delayed in coming on to the green for other reasons, such as a ball search, indecision about what club to use or shot to play, etc.
 - When all players in the group have long putts and so will need to walk back and forth to the hole to attend the flagstick for one another (which sometimes produces uncertainty about who will or should attend for someone else).
- In match play, a player without a caddie will now be able to choose to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole rather than ask the opponent to attend the flagstick, reducing the potential for dispute that can arise when the opponent attends for the player (such as when the opponent fails to remove the flagstick and the ball hits it).
- On balance it is expected that there should be no advantage in being able to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole:
 - In some cases, the ball may strike the flagstick and bounce out of the hole when it might otherwise have been holed, and
 - In other cases, the ball may hit the flagstick and finish in the hole when it might otherwise have missed.

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

20. Repairing Damage on Putting Green

Current Rule: Rule 16-1c allows only limited repair of damage on the putting green:

- A player may repair any old hole plug or ball-mark on the green on his or her line of play, whether the ball is on or off the putting green (this is an exception to Rule 13-2).
- But a player must not repair any other damage on the green (such as spike marks, animal damage, etc.) if it might assist in his or her subsequent play of the hole.

2019 Rule: Rule 13.1c(2) allows repair of almost any damage on the green:

- “Damage on the putting green” will be defined to include all types of damage (such as ball-marks, shoe damage, indentations from a club or flagstick, animal damage, etc.), **except** aeration holes, natural surface imperfections or natural wear of the hole.
- The player is allowed to repair damage only with his or her hand, foot or other part of the body or a ball-mark repair tool, tee, club or similar item of normal equipment and must not unreasonably delay play.

Reasons for Change:

- Because putting greens are specially prepared for playing the ball along the ground, the Rules allow the player to do things on the green that are not allowed anywhere else:
 - The player may mark, lift and clean a ball on the green at any time, remove sand and loose soil on the green and repair old hole plugs and ball-marks on the green.
 - Given this philosophy of allowing players to try to have a smooth surface for rolling the ball, there is no conceptual reason for prohibiting repair of other types of damage (whether made by players, animals, maintenance staff, etc.).
- This Rule change will eliminate the frequent questions among players and referees about whether a particular area of damage on the green is a ball-mark that may be repaired or is a shoe mark or other damage that must not be repaired.
- This change will also reduce the current tension between prohibiting a player from repairing damage while playing a hole and then encouraging the player to repair that damage (such as repairing the ragged edge of the hole or tapping down spike marks) as a courtesy to following groups or in care of the course (Decisions 1-2/0.7 and 1-2/3.5).
- The concern has been noted that allowing repair of all damage on the putting green could slow down play if players try to repair too many areas; but we believe this is unlikely to be true for most players and that the Rule against unreasonable delay (as well as a Committee’s pace of play policy) can be used to address situations where a player seeks to make excessive repairs.

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

26. Touching Line of Play on Putting Green

Current Rule: Under Rule 16-1a, when a player's ball is on the putting green:

- The player is generally prohibited from touching his or her line of putt.
- But there are seven exceptions (such as when removing loose impediments or movable obstructions, when lifting or replacing a ball, when repairing ball marks, etc.).

2019 Rule: The prohibition of touching the line of play on the putting green will be eliminated:

- There will no longer be a penalty for merely touching the line of play on the putting green (the term "line of play" will apply everywhere on the course including the putting green, and the term "line of putt" will no longer be used).
- But the player will still be subject to the prohibition on improving his or her line of play on the putting green (see Rule 8.1a, as limited by 8.1b).

Reasons for Change:

- No advantage is gained if a player or his or her caddie merely touches the surface of the putting green on the line where the ball will be played.
- Over time, the prohibition on touching the line of putt has become subject to many exceptions:
 - Current Rule 16-1a lists seven different situations in which a player is allowed to touch the line of putt.
 - The Decisions recognize additional exceptions, such as that there is no penalty if a player accidentally walks on the line of putt.
- The current prohibition is difficult to administer and penalties are not often applied; and those penalties that are applied may be perceived as serving little or no purpose, such as when a caddie accidentally touches the line of putt with the flagstick.
- The change that will allow a player to repair almost all damage on the putting green (see also Explanation for Proposed Rule Change - *Repairing Damage on Putting Green*) is a further reason why the prohibition on merely touching the line of putt is no longer needed.
- Eliminating the prohibition on touching the line of putt will also be consistent with the related change in new Rule 10.2b(2), which will eliminate current Rule 8.2b's prohibition on merely touching the putting green when pointing out the line of play for a ball on the green.

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

31. When to Replace Ball that Moves on the Putting Green

Current Rule: If a player's ball on the putting green moves before the stroke is made:

- The player must replace the ball if it was moved by any player, caddie or outside agency (such as an animal, spectator or moving object).
- But the moved ball must always be played from its new spot if the ball was moved by wind, water or other natural forces (including when the ball moves for no apparent reason because of the effects of gravity).

2019 Rule: Rule 13.1d, will revise the procedure for when a ball on the putting green is moved by wind, water or other natural forces, so that it must sometimes be replaced and sometimes be played from its new spot:

- If the ball had been lifted and replaced on its original spot before it moved, the ball must always be replaced on its original spot, regardless of what caused it to move.
- The ball must be played from its new spot only if the ball had not been lifted and replaced before it moved.

Reasons for Change:

- When a ball at rest is moved by natural forces such as the wind, it is normally played as it lies because its movement is considered a continuation of the previous stroke, as no person or object has affected where the ball lies.
- But when the moved ball had already been lifted and replaced, the connection to the previous stroke is no longer obvious.
- This is especially true on the putting green, where a player is allowed to mark, lift and replace a ball for any reason and many players do so as a matter of course.
 - It can be difficult to determine whether a person or object caused the ball to move or whether it was moved by wind or other natural causes.
 - It will simplify the Rules to provide that a ball always must be replaced if it moves from a spot where it had already been lifted and replaced.
- When a ball on the green moves after having come to rest:
 - It can result in outcomes that seem unfair, such as when the ball rolls off the green (sometimes ending up in a bunker or in water) or rolls close to or into the hole.
 - Requiring the ball to be replaced if it had already been lifted and replaced will eliminate such outcomes in those situations.
- This Rule change may also be helpful in conditions of very high wind on the course, as it may allow play to continue in conditions where it might otherwise not be possible or fair because too many balls are being blown from their spot on the green.

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

5. Caddie Lifting Ball on the Putting Green

Current Rule: A player's caddie has no general authority to mark, lift and replace the player's ball on the putting green:

- A caddie is treated the same as any other person for these purposes: the caddie may mark and lift the ball only if authorized by the player, and the caddie may replace the ball only if he or she was the one who had lifted or moved it; and
- This authorization must be given each time the player wants the caddie to lift the ball.

2019 Rule: Under Rule 14.1b:

- The player's caddie will be allowed to mark and lift the player's ball on the putting green any time the player is allowed to do so, without needing authorization.
- The caddie will continue to be allowed to replace the player's ball only if the caddie was the one who had lifted or moved the ball.

Reasons for Change:

- There is no compelling reason to prohibit a caddie from performing these purely mechanical acts when the player's ball is on the putting green:
 - A player is already free to mark, lift, clean and replace a ball on the putting green at any time, and thus this happens routinely.
 - The elimination of the penalty for a player who accidentally causes his or her ball to move on the putting green will eliminate any risk that allowing a caddie to mark, lift and replace the ball will result in unforeseen consequences to the player.
- In many places, it is common practice for caddies to mark, lift, clean and replace the player's ball when it first comes to rest on the putting green without authorization from the player, even though this is not permitted under the current Rules.
 - In some areas of the world, this is a cultural expectation relating to the role of a caddie.
 - In other places, this is done to help with pace of play - for example, where a caddie is shared by two players, the caddie may mark, lift, clean and replace one player's ball (so that he or she can be ready to play) before going to help the other player.
- This change will also benefit players who have physical limitations that make it difficult to bend down to mark and lift the ball, without needing to give the caddie specific permission each and every time.
- Giving the caddie this authority is consistent with the limited role of a caddie:
 - Any player who prefers not to have the caddie mark and lift the ball will simply be able to tell the caddie not to do so.
 - A caddie will still be prohibited from making strategic choices for the player, such as deciding to take relief under a Rule, deciding where to drop a ball, etc.