

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

29. Use and Replacement of Clubs Damaged During Round

Current Rule: Rule 4 sets out two complex standards to be applied in sequence for determining whether a player may continue to use or replace a club that is damaged during the round:

- A damaged club may be used only if it was damaged in the “normal course of play”.
- A club damaged in the normal course of play may be replaced with another club only if the damaged club meets an additional test of being “unfit for play”.
- A club damaged outside the normal course of play (such as when slammed against something in anger) must be declared out of play, must not be used for the rest of the round, and must not be replaced even if unfit for play; or else the player is disqualified.

2019 Rule: Under Rule 4.1:

- A player will be allowed to keep using and/or to repair any club damaged during the round, no matter what the damage and even if the player damaged it in anger.
- A player will not be allowed to replace a damaged club, except when it is damaged during the round by an outside influence or natural forces or by someone other than the player or his or her caddie.

Reasons for Change:

- This Rule change will greatly simplify the complex Rules on damaged clubs.
- In particular, deciding when a club is “unfit for play” may require a technical judgment that few players have the depth of understanding to make, and even referees can find it challenging to make such judgments quickly and consistently on the course.
- Allowing a player to keep using or to repair any damaged club, regardless of the nature or cause of the damage, will benefit players in several ways.
 - It will help players avoid the disqualification penalties that can arise today when a player hits a club against something in anger and then continues to use the club, not realizing that the shaft was slightly bent or some other damage had occurred.
 - The player will be able to choose whether to continue using that club in its damaged state or to use another club; whereas today, for example, a player who damages a putter in anger is not allowed to use it for the rest of the round (even if it is still in a usable form) and so ends up having to putt with a wedge or another club.
- Although there will be times when a damaged club is unusable and cannot be readily repaired on the course (such as when a driver head comes off), the practical ability to get a replacement club is seldom present other than at some elite levels of golf.
- This potential downside from a player’s perspective is outweighed by the ability to use or repair any damaged club, as well as by the significant simplification that results
- This change will be consistent with the overall philosophy that a player normally should play the entire round with only the clubs that he or she started with or added during the round to get to the 14-club limit.