



# MODERNISATION OF THE RULES OF GOLF.

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## Rules Modernisation: The Background

This section provides background on how the Rules have been revised since the earliest codes and why now is the time to pursue a major revision to the Rules. There is an outline of the overall goals and objectives of the proposals and an explanation of the anticipated process and schedule leading to the implementation of the new Rules.

**The R&A** and the **USGA** have announced a major set of proposed changes to the **Rules of Golf**. These changes result from their Rules Modernisation initiative that began five years ago in an effort to bring the Rules up to date to fit the needs of the game today globally.

In addition to proposing many substantive Rule changes, this Rules Modernisation initiative has focused on changing how the Rules are written and presented. This has resulted in a new writing style and format, a reorganisation of the Rules and the introduction of a “Player’s Edition” of the Rules.

## Ball at Rest Accidentally Moves

- **Accidentally moving your ball while searching for it:** There is no longer a penalty.
- **Accidentally moving your ball or ball-marker when it is on the putting green:** There is no longer a penalty.
- **New standard for deciding if you caused your ball to move:** You will be found to have caused your ball to move only if that is known or virtually certain (that is, it is at least 95% likely that you were the cause).

I will deal with each of the three scenarios separately; indicating the current rule; the proposed rule and the reasons for change.

## 2. 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.

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

- The player would get no penalty for causing it to move, and
- The ball would always be replaced; if the exact spot is not known, the player would replace the ball on the estimated original spot (including on, under or against any attached natural 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 would be a reasonable exception to the obligation to avoid moving a ball at rest.
- Removing this penalty would not allow the player to benefit from excessive actions in searching for the ball, as there would 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 would 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 would 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.

## 15. 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).

**Proposed Rule:** Under new Rule 13.1, there would 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 authorising 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 penalised.
- 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 would 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.

## 21. 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.

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

A player, opponent or outside influence would 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 would 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:

o 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

o There is no prescribed way of prioritising or balancing these factors.

The “known or virtually certain” standard would be simpler to apply because it would eliminate most “close calls” where it is hard to know for sure why the ball moved.

Using this standard would fit well with the new Rule 13.2 that would eliminate the penalty for accidentally causing a ball to move on the putting green:

o The primary reason for eliminating that penalty is that it is often particularly difficult to decide why a ball moved on the putting green.

o This is explained further in Explanation for Proposed Rule Change - When to Replace Ball that Moves on Putting Green.

o Given those particular difficulties, using the “known or virtually certain” standard would be more clear-cut and easier to apply, and help avoid the risk of players being penalised 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” would 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.

## GONGU CHANGES 2018

Changes to the CONGU UHS System have recently been announced. In view of the proposed introduction of the World Handicap System (WHS) these changes have been kept to a minimum and take into account some of the options likely to be adopted in the WHS, *principal of which is to encourage players to submit more scores to their handicap record.*

The changes, which come into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018, are: -

- Retirement of Club and Disability Handicaps – *As a result of their low impact these have been removed and replaced by a new Category 5 for Men and Category 6 for both Men and Women, PROVIDING FOR A MAXIMUM HANDICAP OF 54 FOR ALL GOLFERS.* Players will be able to maintain a ‘Competition Handicap’ in all six categories. Upward adjustments for all categories will remain at **0.1** and downward adjustments for Net Differentials below the Buffer Zones will be **0.5 for Category 5 and 0.6 for Category 6.** After the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 Handicap Committees can increase handicaps above the current limits of 28 and 36, and they will also increase above those limits automatically as a result of above Buffer Zones returns in Qualifying Competitions and Supplementary Score submissions.
- Supplementary Scores – Relaxation of the rules to allow an *unlimited number of score submissions per year and removal of the restriction of one per week.* However, the restriction on Category 1 players will remain in place.
- Mixed Tee Competitions – Reinforcement of the single CSS Adjustment Calculation. *Having a single CSS adjustment for two or more competitions will provide a more equitable value when one of the competitions has a very low number of players.*
- Definitions – Confirmation that cards submitted for initial Handicap Allocation are included in the definition of Qualifying Scores for handicap purposes. Accordingly a player whose handicap is allocated on the basis of such submitted scores under Clause 16 will automatically be allocated a Competition Handicap status.
- 9 Hole Competitions – Introduce the option of 9-Hole Medal Competitions and 9-Hole Open Competitions. For handicap purposes, the 9-hole medal scores will be converted to Stableford and will appear as a Stableford on the players handicap record.
- Handicap Adjustments – Confirmation that the adherence to Appendix M (Guidelines for Handicap Reviews) is mandatory, not optional.

At a recent meeting of the Admirals Club Handicap Committee the following decisions were formalized taking into account the above factors: -

1. That three competition divisions will remain and the qualifying handicaps for each division will be **Division 1. 0 to 12; Division 2. 13 to 18 and Division 3. 19 to 54.** The current definition of 6 entrants being needed to make a division will be raised to 9 to provide a better balance.

2. The Seniors Section would continue to have two divisions, setting the 'cut line' after all entries had been submitted, this will produce a broadly even split of entrants between the two divisions.
3. Club Competition Rules have been modified showing the new upper handicap limit. The modified rules will appear in the 2018 Diary.
4. Men's Competition Eligibility –
  - **Club Singles KO – maximum handicap to remain at 28 to preserve quality of competition entries.**
  - **Rabbits Singles KO – handicap limits will now be 21 to 54.**
  - **Club Pairs KO - maximum handicap to remain at 28 to preserve quality of competition entries.**
  - **Scratch Cup – no amendments required.**
  - **David Downes Trophy – no amendments required.**
5. **Rule 18 Junior Section – new wording regarding eligibility to read 'attains CONGU Handicap'.**
6. **Trophy Winners Upper Handicap – to be raised from 28 to 54.**
7. Club Open Competitions –
  - **Waterloo Open – Handicap limits will now be 28 for Men and 36 for Women with a ¾ restriction.**
  - **Seniors Open – Handicap limits will now be 32 for Men and 40 for Women with a 90% restriction.**
  - **Jackie Frith Mixed Open - Handicap limits will now be 32 for Men and 40 for Women with a 90% restriction.**
  - **Junior Open - Handicap limits will now be 32 for Men/Boys and 40 for Women/Girls with a 90% restriction.**

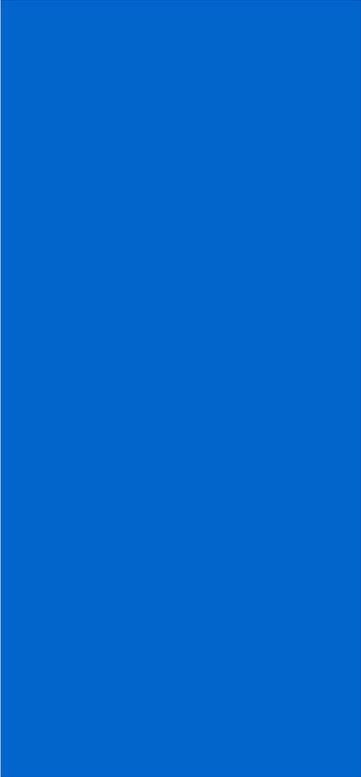
All the above changes will be reflected in the Club Diary and also the Club Website.

All the above decisions will be subject to review in December 2018.

## **AVOIDING SLOW PLAY 2018**

Some simple tips: -

- Be prepared to play 'ready golf' – this will come into formal existence with the 2019 rules changes.
- Mark up score cards at the next tee rather than at the hole you have just played.
- If in doubt where your ball has landed always play a provisional.
- Before helping your playing partners look for a potential lost ball – play your shot first.

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- Leave your golf bags at the exit to the next tee.
  - If you have lost a complete hole to the group in front be prepared to wave through the group following.

There will be further tips in the next article.

Have a good year golfing.