



# 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.

## Dropping a ball in a defined relief area

- **Relaxed dropping procedure:** The only requirement is that you hold the ball above the ground without it touching any growing thing or other natural or artificial object, and let it go so that it falls through the air before coming to rest.
- **Defined relief area:** The ball needs to be dropped in a played from a single required relief area.
- **Fixed measures define the relief area:** You use the fixed distance of 20 inches or 80 inches to measure the relief area. This can readily be measured by using markings on the shaft of a club.

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

## **16. Procedure for Dropping and Playing a Ball from a Relief Area**

**Current Rule:** When taking relief (with or without penalty) under many of the Rules, the player is required to use this dropping procedure:

- The player must drop the ball while standing erect and holding the ball at

shoulder height and arm's length; or else it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2a).

The ball must first strike the course in a specified place and must not strike any person or equipment before coming to rest; or else it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2b).

The ball is then to be played from where it comes to rest, except that if it ends up in any of 9 specific locations (such as nearer to the hole or more than 2 club-lengths from where it struck the course), it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2c).

If the ball comes to rest in any of those 9 locations when dropped a second time, the player must place the ball where it first struck the course on the second drop.

**Proposed Rule:** Players would continue to drop a ball when taking relief, but the dropping procedure would be changed in several ways as detailed in Rule 14.3:

How a ball may be dropped is simplified, with no limitations on how the ball must be held or how high it must be dropped from; the only requirement would be that the ball be let go from any height above the ground or any growing thing or other natural or artificial object so that it falls through the air, rather than being set down or placed on these things.

The focus of the dropping procedure would be on a specific "relief area" set by the Rule under which relief is being taken and would be either 20 inches or 80 inches (50.8 or 203.2 centimeters) from a reference point or reference line (and may have certain other limitations).

The ball would need only to be dropped in and come to rest in the relief area; and there would be no re-drop requirement if the dropped ball accidentally hits a person or object before coming to rest in the relief area.

If the dropped ball comes to rest outside the relief area, it would be dropped again; there would be no set number of times for re-dropping, as the player would need to make all reasonable efforts to drop it in a way and place so it stays in the relief area.

In the unusual case where the ball will not come to rest in the relief area no matter how or where dropped (such as a relief area on a steep slope with short grass), the player would then place the ball anywhere in the relief area.

If the placed ball will not come to rest on that spot after two attempts, the player would then place the ball on the nearest spot (not nearer the hole) where it will come to rest.

**Reasons for Change:**

The new procedure moves away from the current mechanical approach on

how to drop a ball, with its several procedural requirements; the focus would appropriately be on where the ball is dropped and played from, not the mechanics of how it gets there.

- At the same time, requiring the player to drop a ball (as opposed to the alternative of placing it) would retain a desired randomness about where the ball will end up:

- o This is especially the case when a ball is dropped in more difficult conditions such as thick rough or longer grass.

- o The player has no guarantee that the ball will come to rest on a desired spot or in a good lie.

- Relaxing the restrictions on how to drop a ball would help pace of play by making it easier for a player to take relief with only a single drop:

- o When a ball is dropped from shoulder height, it often rolls a considerable distance, so that the need for a re-drop is common.

- o In contrast, when a ball is dropped from just above the ground, it will usually come to rest very close to where it hits the ground and should stay in the relief area.

- The new procedure avoids giving players more relief than necessary:

- o A dropped ball is currently allowed to roll up to 2 club-lengths from where it hits the ground – so that, for example, it can end up being played up to 3 club-lengths from the nearest point of relief from a cart path or ground under repair, or up to 4 club lengths from where the original ball went into a lateral water hazard or where it was unplayable.

- o Requiring the dropped ball to come to rest in and be played from the same relief area where it was dropped would make it much more likely that the ball will be played from close to where it originally came to rest.

- o The new procedure would save time and prevent players from undermining the purpose of the Rule, which can occur today when players may deliberately try to drop a ball in a position where it will need to be re-dropped and then will be able to be placed after a second unsuccessful drop.

- Allowing the player to drop a ball from only a little above the ground would help avoid the unfortunate situation that commonly arises today where a ball dropped from shoulder height in a bunker ends up embedded in the sand.

- The new procedure would make it simpler for players to know where and how to drop a ball:

o For example, many times today a player is required to drop a ball as near as possible to a certain spot (such as where the previous stroke was made or where a ball was embedded) and questions can arise about whether it was dropped near enough to that spot.

o The new procedure when dropping with reference to a spot would be to drop a ball anywhere in a relief area measured 20 inches (50.8 centimeters) from (but not nearer the hole than) that spot.

It would be simpler for players to know when to re-drop a ball:

o A player currently needs to know the 9 re-dropping scenarios in Rule 20-2c; these are difficult to understand and apply and this is a widely misunderstood Rule.

o Under the new Rule, the player would only need to know that the ball must be redropped if it comes to rest outside the relief area.

## 12. Fixed Distances (not Club-lengths) Used for Measuring

**Current Rule:** Club-lengths are used to measure the limits of many areas under the Rules:

One club-length defines the dropping area for free relief (such as relief from obstructions or ground under repair) and two club-lengths defines the dropping area for certain types of penalty relief (such as relief from lateral water hazards or an unplayable ball).

Two club-lengths are also used as the limit of how far a dropped ball may roll from where it first hits the course without needing to be re-dropped (Rule 20-2c(vi)).

The teeing ground on any hole is defined as a rectangular area two club-lengths deep.

**Proposed Rule:** Club-lengths would no longer be used to measure for any purpose:

The relief area for dropping a ball would have a fixed size: 20 inches (50.8 centimetres) replaces one club-length, and 80 inches (203.2 centimetres) replaces two club-lengths.

A re-drop would only be required when a ball comes to rest outside the relief area and therefore how many club-lengths a dropped ball rolls would no longer matter when determining if a re-drop is required.

The teeing area of any hole would have a fixed depth of 80 inches (203.2 centimeters).

## Reasons for Change:

- The smaller relief area (and not permitting any ball to roll outside that relief area) would usually mean that the player will play from closer to the ball's original spot and the nearest point of relief than where the player may play from today.
- Using a fixed distance for measuring would eliminate a number of issues, such as:
  - o The inconsistency and potential unfairness of having the size of a relief area differ for each player based on the length of his or her clubs (including eliminating the advantage for players who currently can use a long putter for measuring).
  - o The confusion about when a player may use two different clubs in taking relief (under current Rules, a player may use one club to find the nearest point of relief, and another club to measure, but must use only a single club for measuring the area for dropping and the distance a dropped ball has rolled).
- A player would no longer be able to make strategic choices about the size of the relief areas by choosing a shorter club or longer club for measuring.  Using a fixed measure would be a simple process, with 20 and 40 inch (50.8 and 101.6 centimeters) markings on the shaft of clubs likely to be the primary tool used by players for measuring.

## Relief for an embedded ball

- **Relief for embedded ball in the general area:** You may take relief if your ball is embedded anywhere (except sand) in the general area (which is the new term for 'Through the Green') except where a Local Rule restricts relief to the fairway or similar areas (this reverses the default position in the current rules).

I will deal with the scenario separately; indicating the current rule; the proposed rule and the reasons for change.

## 18. Relief for an Embedded Ball

**Current Rule:** In certain circumstances, a player is allowed to take relief when his or her ball is embedded in its own pitch-mark:

- Rule 25-2 allows relief only when a ball is embedded in a closely-mown area (that is, an area cut to fairway height or less) that is through the green.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule that extends this relief to a ball embedded anywhere through the green, whether or not in a closely-mown area (except when embedded in sand).
- In taking relief, the player must drop the original ball as near as possible to

where it was embedded and not nearer the hole.

**Proposed Rule:** The current default position in the Rules will be reversed:

New Rule 16.3 would allow relief for a ball embedded anywhere in the “general area” (that is, the area currently known as “through the green”), except when embedded in sand.

But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule restricting relief to a ball embedded in those parts of the general area cut to fairway height or less.

In taking relief, the player would drop the original ball or a substituted ball within 20 inches (50.8 centimetres) from (but not nearer the hole than) the point right behind the spot where the ball was embedded.

**Reasons for Change:**

This is an appropriate exception to the principle of playing the ball as it lies because having to play a ball that is stuck in soft or wet ground (whether in the fairway or the rough) should not be considered part of the normal challenge of playing a course.

Allowing relief throughout the general area is consistent with other relief Rules, which do not make distinctions based on the height of the grass in the general area.

Many Committees throughout the world, from the professional and elite amateur levels to the typical club level, have adopted the current Local Rule.

In many countries the Local Rule is sufficiently well established that golfers assume that the Rules always allow relief anywhere in the general area.

Reversing the default position would help avoid the confusion that sometimes exists today when clubs or players do not realise that such relief is not allowed unless a Local Rule has been adopted.

Basing the relief area on the reference point “right behind” the spot of the embedded ball would avoid the question of what to do when a dropped ball comes to rest in the same pitch-mark where it had been embedded; such a ball would always be re-dropped because it came to rest outside the relief area.

## **Ball in use in taking relief**

- **Substituting another ball:** You may continue to use the original ball or substitute another ball, whenever you take free relief or penalty relief under a Rule.

I will deal with the scenario separately; indicating the current rule; the proposed rule and the reasons for change.

## 23. Substitution of Ball Always Allowed When Taking Relief

**Current Rule:** A player is allowed to substitute a ball only when taking relief under certain Rules:

- Substitution is allowed when taking penalty relief, such as when a ball is in a water hazard, is unplayable or is lost or out of bounds (Rules 26-1, 27-1, 28).
- Substitution is not allowed when taking free relief, such as relief from obstructions or abnormal ground conditions (Rules 24-2 and 25-1); this means the player must use the original ball (except when that ball is not immediately recoverable).

**Proposed Rule:** Under new Rule 14.3, when taking relief the player would always be allowed the choice to substitute a ball or to use the original ball, including:

- When taking penalty relief as well as when taking free relief (Rules 15-19), and
- Any other time the player is required to drop and play a ball, such as when returning to play from where a previous stroke was made after the stroke is cancelled.

### Reasons for Change:

- The requirement to use the original ball in some relief situations but not others is confusing, hard to remember and leads to unnecessary penalties. Taking a consistent approach that always allows a player taking relief the choice to substitute a ball or use the original ball is much simpler.
- There is no need for a different procedure based on whether the player is taking relief with penalty or without penalty:
  - o The penalty is applied for reasons having to do with where the ball ended up (lost, out of bounds, in a penalty area or unplayable), not with which ball is played next.
  - o For example, if a ball lies in easy reach of the player, there is no reason to require the original ball to be used when taking relief because of interference by an animal hole, while allowing substitution when taking relief because the ball is unplayable.
- This change would eliminate the need when taking free relief to decide whether the original ball is “not immediately recoverable”, which can raise questions in various cases such as when the ball is in a few inches of temporary water or is under a prickly bush.
- This would also draw a clearer and more intuitive line between when substitution is allowed in returning a ball to play and when the original ball must

be returned to play:

- o Substitution would be allowed only when a player is taking relief under any Rule – that is, when the player is required or allowed to play the next stroke from somewhere other than where the original ball came to rest.
- o Substitution would not be allowed when a ball was lifted or moved and the Rules require it to be replaced on its original spot – in that case, the original ball must still be used (unless it cannot be recovered with reasonable effort and in a few seconds).

## Lost ball

- **Reduced time for ball search:** A ball is lost if not found in three minutes after you begin searching for it

I will deal with the scenario separately; indicating the current rule; the proposed rule and the reasons for change.

### **24. Time for Search Before Ball is Lost**

**Current Rule:** If a player's ball is not found within 5 minutes after the player or his or her caddie began searching for it:

- The ball is treated as “lost”, and
- The player gets a one-stroke penalty and must play another ball from the spot of the previous stroke (that is, must play under penalty of stroke and distance). (Definition of “Lost Ball”; Rule 27-1c.)

**Proposed Rule:** Under new Rule 18.2, the time for a ball search (before the ball becomes lost) would be reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes.

#### **Reasons for Change:**

- Limiting the search period to 3 minutes is more consistent with the underlying principle that golf is to be played in a prompt and continuous way, without long pauses in play.
- In most cases, if the ball is going to be found, it will be found within the first 3 minutes.  The total delay for a lost ball can be much longer than the search time alone; for example, it may take 10 minutes or longer to look unsuccessfully for a tee shot including the 5 minutes for search, the walk back to the tee to play another ball under penalty of stroke and distance, and the walk back down the hole to where that ball comes to rest.
- The time taken in each ball search can also have a negative impact on the pace of play of following groups; when there are multiple long ball searches, the

cumulative delay can be major for all those playing on the course.

Although this change may increase the number of lost balls, on average the overall impact should be to speed up play.

Knowing that the search time is limited to 3 minutes should encourage players to play a provisional ball when they believe there is a chance their ball may not be found.

## WORLD HANDICAP SYSTEM FEATURES

The new 'World Handicap System' will come into being in 2020. England Golf has recently released the detail of the new features to the system.

The appropriate detail of each feature is shown below: -

- Flexibility in formats of play, allowing both competitive and recreational rounds to count for handicap purposes and ensuring a golfer's handicap is more reflective of potential ability.
- A recommendation that the number of scores needed to obtain a new handicap be 54 holes from any combination of 18 hole and 9 hole rounds, but with some discretion available to handicapping authorities or National Associations to set a different minimum within their own jurisdiction.
- A consistent handicap that is portable from course to course and country to country through worldwide use of the USGA Course and Slope Rating System.
- An average based calculation of a handicap taken from the best EIGHT out of the last TWENTY scores and factoring in memory of previous demonstrated ability for better responsiveness and control.
- A calculation that consider the impact that abnormal course and weather conditions might have on a player's performance each day.
- Daily handicapping revisions, taking account of the course and weather conditions calculation.
- A limit of Net Double Bogey on the maximum hole score (for handicapping purposes only)
- A maximum handicap of 54, regardless of gender, to encourage more golfers to measure and track their performance.

## 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.
- 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.
- No more than a maximum of four players in a group playing a round.
- If needing to chip onto the green before putting out, take your iron and putter with you to save you having to go back to your bag to retrieve your putter after chipping onto the green.
- If playing a Stableford and you cannot score any points pick up your ball rather than play out the hole.

There will be further tips in the next article.

Have a good year golfing.