

Changes to the Rules of Golf for 2012 – 2015

Every 3 years, the R & A Committee confer on the Rules of Golf, and from January 1st 2012, the following rule changes take place:

1. Definitions

Addressing the Ball

A player has addressed the ball simply by grounding his club immediately in front of or behind the ball, regardless of whether or not he has taken his stance. Therefore, the Rules generally no longer provide for a player addressing the ball in a hazard. (See also related change to Rule 18-2b)

2. Rules

Rule 1-2. Exerting Influence on Movement of Ball or Altering Physical Conditions

If a player intentionally takes an action to influence the movement of a ball or to alter physical conditions affecting the playing of a hole in a way that is not permitted by the Rules, Rule 1-2 applies only when the action is not already covered in another Rule. For example, a player improving the lie of his ball is in breach of Rule 13-2 and therefore that Rule would apply, whereas a player intentionally improving the lie of a fellow-competitor's ball is not a situation covered by Rule 13-2 and, therefore, is governed by Rule 1-2.

Rule 6-3a. Time of Starting

Rule 6-3a is amended to provide that the penalty for starting late, but within five minutes of the starting time, is reduced from disqualification to loss of the first hole in match play or two strokes at the first hole in stroke play. Previously this penalty reduction could be introduced as a condition of competition.

Rule 12-1. Seeing Ball; Searching for Ball

Rule 12-1 is reformatted for clarity. In addition, it is amended to (i) permit a player to search for his ball anywhere on the course when it may be covered by sand and to clarify that there is no penalty if the ball is moved in these circumstances, and (ii) apply a penalty of one stroke under Rule 18-2a if a player moves his ball in a hazard when searching for it when it is believed to be covered by loose impediments.

Rule 13-4. Ball in Hazard; Prohibited Actions

Exception 2 to Rule 13-4 is amended to permit a player to smooth sand or soil in a hazard at any time, including before playing from that hazard, provided it is for the sole purpose of caring for the course and Rule 13-2 is not breached.

Rule 18-2b. Ball Moving After Address

A new Exception is added that exonerates the player from penalty if his ball moves after it has been addressed when it is known or virtually certain that he did not cause the ball to move. For example, if it is a gust of wind that moves the ball after it has been addressed, there is no penalty and the ball is played from its new position.

Rule 19-1. Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped; By Outside Agency

The note is expanded to prescribe the various outcomes when a ball in motion has been deliberately deflected or stopped by an outside agency.

Rule 20-7c. Playing from Wrong Place; Stroke Play

Note 3 is amended so that if a player is to be penalised for playing from a wrong place, in most cases the penalty will be limited to two strokes, even if another Rule has been breached prior to his making the stroke.

Appendix IV

A new Appendix is added to prescribe general regulations for the design of devices and other equipment, such as tees, gloves and distance measuring devices.

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