

# Retiring -- To the Nineteenth Hole

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On January 1, 1952, if the Royal and Ancient Club membership approves the recommendations of the American-British Special Committee, our good old friend the "stymie" will retire to the Nineteenth Hole, where it can be negotiated with ease. This may be an unkind fate for that which over the years has produced so many thrills and created so many heartaches; nevertheless, it will not be forgotten for, I daresay, locker room discussion of its abolition will continue as long as golf is played.

In some respects, this may be called a "casualty" because it appeared that, without exception, each of the 12 men taking part in the London conferences were "stymie" advocates, but all recognized the futility of imposing a rule against which such universal sentiment had developed. Many suggested compromises were considered. Among them were the right to concede the next putt to the player laying the "stymie" and lifting the interfering ball except in cases where interference is self-imposed. However, agreement except on an "all or nothing" basis was found to be impossible.

### Several Accomplishments

Exit of the "stymie" will be only one of the aftermaths of the negotiations, but no fundamentals of the game will be altered by the proposed amendments which have been approved by the United States Golf Association Executive Committee, subject to like action by the Royal and Ancient Club. Some of the major accomplishments will be: A uniform code with one exception (the size of the ball), simplification of Rules arrangement, clarification of language and a more consistent and equitable application of penalties.

It is unfortunate that the size of the ball should be the stumbling block to complete uniformity, but until further study and research can develop some con-



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trol of distance, unlimited use of the small ball would change the character of a large percentage of American courses which are not subjected to the same wind conditions which have made the 1.62 inch ball more adaptable in the British Isles than the 1.68 inch ball. While these studies are in progress, we have agreed to permit use of the small ball in international team matches.

On the question of implements, agreement has been reached for the first time. As an example, a putter with the shaft affixed to the head at other than the heel will be legalized by the Royal and Ancient if the amendments are accepted.

All related Rules will be grouped together and all Definitions will be lifted from specific Rules and placed in one

section with appropriate references in the Rules wherever necessary.

#### Few Basic Changes Here

Penalties may be considered by some as "stiffer," especially those playing under Royal and Ancient Rules which were liberalized in 1950 for a two-year trial period, but the only real changes from the American viewpoint are: The return to "stroke and distance" for ball out of bounds, the modification of the disqualification penalty to two strokes in some cases, and the discretion granted to the committee for modifying or waiving the disqualification penalty in other cases where the circumstances warrant such action.

There has been much discussion about the stroke and distance penalty for a ball out of bounds and about the severity of this penalty as it applies to a ball lost or unplayable. For an outline of the reasoning behind the return to the former provision, attention is called to an article in the August issue of the USGA JOURNAL on this subject ("Stroke and Distance for Out of Bounds"). After exhaustive experimentation, it became obvious that there was only one answer and it is hoped that clubs and district associations will cooperate in developing an understanding of the inter-relationship of these particular Rules.

The prohibition against practice strokes (not practice swings) has been tightened. The retrying of putts after holing out will be allowed, *provided* delay in anyone's play does not result therefrom. The penalty for delaying play between holes, by practicing or in any other way, is applied to the following hole.

#### New Putting Green Definition

Rules have been adopted for the first time governing the play of a ball which has come to rest in a lateral water hazard (commonly referred to as a parallel hazard), which is appropriately defined.

The Definition of a putting green will be amended to read: "All ground (of the hole being played) which is especially prepared for putting or otherwise defined as such by the Committee." This new

Definition would not affect the Rules of stroke play within 20 yards of the hole, but it will clarify the Rules relating to play on the putting green, which in the present Rules is described as all ground, except hazards, within twenty yards of the hole being played.

The Definition of a ball "holed" will appear in the USGA Rules for the first time: i. e., "when it lies within the circumference of the hole and all of it is below the level of the lip of the hole."

The Rules for dropping and placing will be simplified and the following general principles will be followed: In a hazard the ball will generally be dropped, not placed. On the putting green, the ball will always be placed. Through the green the ball will always be dropped except for situations in which its position can be marked. In this event, replacing will be permitted.

Rules governing casual water, ground under repair and holes made by burrowing animals will be combined, with the former provisions of the casual water Rule prevailing. A ball need not be found in order to obtain relief under the new Rule, but in order to treat it as "lost," there must be reasonable evidence to that effect.

Rules for "Better Ball Stroke Play" will be an innovation. The Rules have always made provision for four-ball match play but they have been silent on stroke play.

While the above comments do not mention all of the proposed changes, they do cover most of the significant points. It is not to be expected that the new Code will be accepted with complete approval by everyone. However, it has been developed after considering every known factor, and it will reflect the knowledge and accumulated experiences of the governing bodies of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States, all of which were brought to light, probably for the first time, around a conference table.

