

CHANGES IN RULES AFFECT PLAY ON GREEN

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THE practical value of international work on the Rules of Golf is borne out in the two major changes which become effective January 1, 1956. One of these changes was suggested by the British representatives and the other by the USGA committee during conferences last May in Great Britain.

The British proposal was designed to reduce the present excessive amount of lifting the ball nearer the hole when it lies on the putting green and to speed play. The Americans as well as the British had been concerned with these matters ever since the stymie rule was abolished four years ago, but it was the Royal and Ancient Golf Club committee which came up with a concrete proposal which has now been adopted.

Similarly, there had long been problems on both sides of the Atlantic about handling the flagstick. Many players had become involved in confusing and sometimes unpleasant incidents. During the Rules meetings last spring the USGA committee presented a proposal which was the brainchild of its Chairman, Richard S. Tufts, and it comes into effect in January. It should produce a vast simplification of the matter.

These two items reflect the cooperative spirit which has marked the R. and A.-USGA collaboration ever since the present basic world-wide code was drafted in the spring of 1951. They illustrate the fact that international conferences are not merely a polite, congenial business but that they produce valuable practical results. The British, with their background of centuries of playing golf, always bring wise experience to the meetings. However,

when decisions are made on debatable points, it is not unusual for some Britons to side with some American, and vice versa. Thus, such divisions as occur are usually on doctrinal lines rather than on national, and the decisions are invariably made with the best interests of golf at heart.

The Changes for 1956

The two main amendments for 1956 relate to events on or about the putting green, and they give the player of the stroke more control of the situation.

Handling of the flagstick will be under the complete control of the player who is about to play the stroke, and the Rule will be the same for match and stroke play. The player alone will have the right to have the flagstick attended, removed or held up. At present in match play the opponent as well as the player may have the flagstick removed, but in 1956 the opponent (who is not playing the stroke) will have no such right.

Only the player will be penalized if his ball strikes the flagstick when attended or removed, or if it strikes the person attending the flagstick. The penalty will be loss of hole in match play and, as before, two strokes in stroke play. At present in match play if the opponent or his caddie attends the flagstick, the opponent loses the hole if he or his caddie or the flagstick is struck by the player's ball.

In stroke play as well as match play, there will be no penalty if the flagstick is struck when not attended and is in the hole. At present in stroke play there is a two-stroke penalty for striking the flagstick from within 20 yards of the hole or whenever it is attended regardless of the distance.

All those changes deal with Rule 34, which will comprise only five paragraphs compared with eleven paragraphs as in the 1955 code.

To reduce ball-lifting on the putting green and to speed play, several changes were made in Rule 35, and the net results are as follows:

(a) Match play: Only the player who is about to play may control temporary lifting of the opponent's ball, and then only if he thinks it might interfere with his play. At present either the player or the opponent may have the opponent's ball lifted if either thinks the ball might interfere with or might assist the player.

(b) Stroke play: If the competitor (who is about to play) considers that the fellow-competitor's ball might interfere with his play, the competitor may require the other player to lift or to play his ball, at the owner's option. If the fellow-competitor thinks his ball might assist the competitor, he may play first. The present Rule gives the competitor and the fellow-competitor equal rights to have the ball nearer the hole lifted or played first, at the owner's option, if either thinks it might interfere with or assist the competitor.

Minor Amendments

The other 1956 amendments in the Rules are of minor importance and do not affect the basic nature of golf. Most of them are not likely to be invoked in every-day play. They are intended merely to clarify and to simplify certain Rules and to incorporate in the code some technical decisions which have arisen in past incidents.

Among the minor alterations are the following:

Rule 3: Penalty for violation of 14-club rule reduced to:

(a) Match play—loss of each hole in which a violation occurred; penalty may be applied after the round even though a claim has not been made within normal time limit;

(b) Stroke play—two strokes for each hole in which a violation occurred.

Present penalty in both cases is disqualification.

Rule 8-2: Between play of two holes, practice stroke is prohibited from any hazard or on or to putting green of any hole not yet played.

Rules 23, 27-2a, and 27-3: Ball should be lifted by owner, his partner or either of their caddies. In match play, if opponent or his caddie lifts player's ball, penalty is one stroke, under Rule 27-2a, not loss of hole under present Rule 23-1. In stroke play, if fellow-competitor or his caddie lifts player's ball, there is no penalty (Rule 27-3); present penalty is two strokes under Rule 23-1. Present Rule 23-1 ceases to be a Rule and becomes a preamble.

Rule 24-1a: Except on putting green, opponent's ball may be temporarily lifted when within two club-lengths (presently one club-length) of player's ball. Only the player may direct this; the opponent no longer has any say in the matter.

Rule 28: Permission to replace a damaged ball is limited to a ball damaged during play of the hole. This prohibits changing after a ball known to be damaged is driven from the tee.

Rule 30-1a: A provisional ball must be identified as such before it is played. Play of a provisional ball covers all contingencies except that player may exempt its application to a ball in a water hazard.

Rule 35-1, Note: New recommendation for marking ball to be lifted on putting green by placing small coin immediately behind ball's position; if it interferes with another player, it should be moved one or more putterhead-lengths to one side.

Rule 35-2d: On putting green, player may knock away opponent's ball at any time to concede next stroke.

You can't help a little child up the hill without getting nearer the top yourself.