

A GUIDE TO DECISIONS ON THE RULES OF GOLF

Each year, the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the R&A receive thousands of inquiries regarding clarification of the Rules of Golf. In order to help millions of golfers around the world better understand how these detailed Rules are applied and interpreted, the USGA and the R&A develop the comprehensive Decisions on the Rules of Golf. The format is geared towards questions and answers and is designed to be used as a reference for golf administrators and those with an interest in the Rules of the game.

Since 1951, the USGA and the R&A have been meeting regularly in order to establish a uniform code of Rules. However, each year brings about new questions that are not specifically addressed in the Rules of Golf, requiring Committees from both organizations to meet to discuss these new questions and arrive at a decision with which both the USGA and the R&A agree. Many of these agreed positions then find their way into the Decisions on the Rules of Golf, which is amended every two years in order to keep up with the ever evolving game of golf.

The purpose of the Decisions on the Rules of Golf is to clarify matters that may not be entirely clear from the Rules of Golf. The Rules of Golf should be consulted in the first instance, but if a question cannot be answered by reference to the Rules, the solution may be found in the “Decisions book.”

The Decisions book also contains the full text of the Rules of Golf. The Rules of Golf are amended every four years and the latest edition of the Rules became effective on January 1, 2012.

In the Decisions book, Decisions are listed under the Rule number and sub section that is considered most pertinent to the facts of the case. For example, if a Decision relates to the removal of a loose impediment in a hazard, it will be listed under Rule 13-4 (Ball in Hazard; Prohibited Actions) as 13-4/#.

Decisions that apply generally to an entire Rule may simply be listed by the Rule number, followed by a number. For example, if a Decision relates to whether a ball at rest is deemed to have moved, it will be listed under Rule 18 (Ball at Rest Moved) as 18/#.

If a Decision has been introduced for the first time to the latest edition of the book, the word “New” is contained in parenthesis at the end of the Decision. If an existing Decision has been amended in the latest edition of the book, the word “Revised” is contained in parenthesis at the end of the Decision. In addition, Decisions are sometimes withdrawn because they are no longer necessary, or re-numbered so that they can be more easily accessed by the reader. For ease of reference, all the amendments to the previous edition of the book are contained in the section entitled “Amendments to the 2010–2011 Edition.”

Where a Decision number is listed as “Reserved” this means that this Decision has been withdrawn at some point in the past but, rather than

re-number the Decisions following it, the number is held in reserve until a new Decision is introduced and given the vacant number.

The best method for consistently and efficiently locating Decisions that are relevant to the query that has arisen is through use of the Decisions book Index. For guidance on how best to utilize the Index please refer to the “Introduction to the Index” on page 582.

GENERAL

The USGA and R&A have agreed to a two-year revision cycle for the “Decisions on the Rules of Golf.” Therefore, no existing Decisions will be revised or withdrawn and no new Decisions will be added to the book until the next edition is published in 2014. The Rules of Golf will not be amended until 2016.

PRINCIPAL CHANGES INTRODUCED IN THE 2012 CODE

Definitions

Addressing the Ball

The Definition is amended so that 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)

Rules

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

The Rule is amended to establish more clearly that, 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 penalized 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.

NEW DECISIONS

- 1-2/0.7 Meaning of “Sole Purpose of Caring for the Course”
- 1-2/3 Breaking Bush in Area into Which Ball May Roll After Drop
- 5-1/1.7 Status of Ball to Be Removed from List of Conforming Golf Balls
- 6-3a/5 Players Start Early
- 13-2/0.5 Meaning of “Improve” in Rule 13-2
- 13-4/9 Player Creates and Smooths Footprints in Bunker Prior to Making Stroke
- 13-4/9.5 Loose Impediment in Bunker Moved When Player Smooths Sand in Bunker for Sole Purpose of Caring for Course
- 14-3/0.7 Player Obtains Distance Information Measured with Electronic Device
- 14-3/17 Player Listens to Music or Broadcast During Round
- 14-5/2 Making Stroke at Oscillating Ball
- 16-1b/4 Ball Lifted from Putting Green by Opponent or Fellow-Competitor While Player’s Ball in Motion
- 18-2b/2 Ball Addressed in Hazard
- 18-2b/5 Ball Moves When Club Rested on Grass Immediately Behind Ball
- 26-1/1.3 When is it Necessary to Go Forward to Establish “Virtual Certainty”

- 33-8/37.5 Local Rule for Water Hazard with Bunker Adjacent
- 33-8/39.5 Local Rule Deeming Partially Grass-Covered Wall of Bunker to Be Part of Bunker
- 34-3/1.3 Competitor Incorrectly Advised to Cancel Stroke

REVISED DECISIONS

- 1-3/2 **Agreement to Concede Short Putts**
Answer expanded to clarify that players must be aware that they are agreeing to waive a Rule in order to be in breach of Rule 1-3.
- 1-4/12 **Player Breaches Rules More Than Once; Whether Multiple Penalties Should Be Applied**
Principles amended for clarity and additional examples added.
- 4-1/1 **Groove and Punch Mark Specifications Effective January 1, 2010 Including Condition of Competition**
New first paragraph added for clarity.
- 4-3/2 **Meaning of “Repair”**
Expanded to clarify that the term “repair” contemplates the club being comprised of the same grip, shaft and clubhead after the repair as it had prior to the damage occurring.
- 4-4a/5 **Competitor Inadvertently Uses and Thereafter Carries Fellow-Competitor’s Club**
Expanded to address the case where the competitor continues to carry his fellow-competitor’s club after using it in error.
- 4-4a/6 **Excess Club Put in Player’s Golf Bag**
Amended to provide clarification on when a player is penalized after a club is added to his bag by mistake by another player prior to starting the round.
- 4-4a/15 **Assembly of Club Components During Stipulated Round**
Expanded for clarity.
- 8-1/2 **Exchanging Distance Information**
Second paragraph deleted in view of the introduction of new Decision 14-3/0.7.
- 9-3/1 **Competitor in Hole-by-Hole Play-Off Gives Wrong Information**
Amended so that a competitor does not incur a penalty for lifting his ball as a result of being provided wrong information by his fellow-competitor during a stroke-play hole-by-hole play-off.
- 13-2/32 **Improving Line of Play by Removing Stone from Wall**
Expanded to clarify why individual stones may not be removed from a stone wall.

- 15-3b/2** **Play of Two Different Wrong Balls Between Strokes with Ball in Play**
Amended to provide for a penalty of four strokes and to reference Decisions 1-4/12 and 1-4/13.
- 17-2/2** **Flagstick Attended by Opponent or Fellow-Competitor Without Authority While Player's Ball in Motion**
Expanded to clarify when it is deemed that removing the flagstick "might have influenced the movement of the ball" in breach of Rule 17-2.
- 19-2/10** **Ball Stopped or Deflected by Rake Held by Player's Caddie**
Amended to provide that the player is penalized under Rule 19-2.
- 20-2b/2** **Measuring Club-Lengths**
Expanded to clarify that a player may not measure through a natural undulation of the ground.
- 20-3b/8** **Loose Impediment Affecting Lie of Ball Moved**
Answer expanded to clarify that, although loose impediments may affect the lie of the ball, they are not part of the lie.
- 20-7c/3** **Ball Believed to Be Lost in Bunker; Competitor Drops Another Ball in Bunker and Plays It; Original Ball Then Found Outside Bunker**
Answer amended to clarify that the ball was in play when it was dropped.
- 21/1** **Removing Paint from Ball**
Amended to refer to paint rather than lime.
- 26-1/1** **Meaning of "Known or Virtually Certain"**
Expanded to further clarify the term "virtual certainty."
- 27/17** **Competitor Plays Out of Turn Other Than from Teeing Ground and Puts Another Ball into Play at Spot of Previous Stroke**
Answer amended to refer to the Definition of "Lost Ball."
- 30-2/1** **Player Plays Out of Turn from Tee in Three-Ball Match**
Amended for clarity.
- 33-7/4.5** **Competitor Unaware of Penalty Returns Wrong Score; Whether Waiving or Modifying Disqualification Penalty Justified**
Amended to provide for exceptional circumstances where a Committee would be justified in waiving the penalty of disqualification under Rule 6-6d for returning a score lower than that actually taken due to failure to include a penalty that the competitor did not know he had incurred.
- 33-8/27** **Local Rule Providing Relief Without Penalty from Bunker Filled with Casual Water**
Expanded to provide recommended wording for the Local Rule.

RE-NUMBERED DECISIONS

- 1-2/9 Player Presses Ball into Surface of Putting Green (Formerly 18-2a/6)
- 1-2/10 Player Wraps Towel Around Self or Places Towel on Cactus Before Taking Stance (Formerly 1-4/11.5)
- 10-1a/3 Players Agree Not to Tee Off in Prescribed Order to Save Time (Formerly 1-3/1)

DECISIONS REVISED DUE TO RULES CHANGES AND DECISIONS WITH MINOR REVISIONS

- 1-2/0.5 Serious Breach of Rule 1-2
- 1-2/1.5 Competitor Alters Line of Play of Fellow-Competitor
- 1-2/2 Shielding Line of Putt from Wind
- 1-2/3.5 Player Repairs Hole After Holing Out But Before Opponent, Fellow-Competitor or Partner Holes Out
- 1-2/4 Player Jumps Close to Hole to Cause Ball to Fall into Hole
- 1-2/5.5 Player Purposely Stops or Deflects Ball; Where Next Stroke Must Be Played from
- 1-2/7 Player Purposely Deflects Partner's Ball in Motion on Putting Green
- 1-2/8 Player Presses Down Turf as Ball Is Rolling Towards Area
- 1-4/9 Bird's Nest Interfering with Stroke
- 1-4/10 Dangerous Situation; Rattlesnake or Bees Interfere with Play
- 2-4/15 Player Concedes Match After Winning It When Opponent Lodges Invalid Claim Regarding Strokes Taken
- 2-4/16 Valid Timely Claim Made After Concession of Match
- 2-5/2 Procedure for a Valid Claim
- 2-5/3 Player Lifts Ball Before Holing Out; Opponent Then Picks Up His Ball Claiming Player Loses Hole
- 3-3/2 Second Ball Played Despite Adverse Ruling
- 3-3/9 Second Ball Played in Match Play
- 5-3/3 Ball Not Unfit for Play Deemed Unfit
- 5-3/8 Opponent or Fellow-Competitor Disputes Player's Claim That Ball Is Unfit for Play
- 6-3a/1.5 Exceptional Circumstances Which Warrant Waiving of Disqualification Penalty Under Rule 6-3a
- 6-3a/2 Time of Starting; All Competitors Must Be Present

- 6-3a/2.5 Meaning of “Time of Starting”
- 6-3a/3 Time of Starting; Both Players in Match are Late
- 6-8a/6 Match Discontinued by Agreement Due to Rain; One Player Subsequently Wishes to Resume; Opponent Refuses on Ground Course Unplayable
- 10-2c/2 Competitors in Stroke Play Agree to Play Out of Turn But Not for Purpose of Giving One of Them an Advantage
- 12-1/3 Top of Ball in Hazard Covered by Leaves But Part of Ball Visible from Another Angle
- 12-1/5 Player Kicks Ball While Probing for It in Water in Water Hazard
- 13-2/14.5 Branch Broken on Backswing and Swing Discontinued
- 13-2/16 Stake Supporting Tree Broken in Attempt to Remove It
- 13-2/29 Worsening and Then Restoring Line of Play
- 13-2/35 Removal of Dew or Frost
- 13-4/7 Touching Casual Water in Bunker with Club
- 13-4/10 Referee Enters Bunker; Whether Player May Smooth Footprints
- 13-4/11 Smoothing Footprints Made in Search for Ball in Bunker Before Playing Stroke from Bunker
- 13-4/12 Ball Touched Accidentally with Club in Hazard But Not Moved
- 13-4/16 Removal of Loose Impediment in Water Hazard Covering Wrong Ball
- 13-4/19 Condition of Bunker Altered by First Player to Play from It
- 13-4/35.8 Player Deems Ball Unplayable in Bunker, Announces His Intention to Proceed Under Rule 28a Outside Bunker and Then Rakes Bunker on New Line of Play
- 14-2/2 Player Holds Umbrella Over Own Head When Playing Stroke
- 14-2/2.5 Player Positions Bag for Purpose of Providing Shade for Ball
- 14-2/3 Caddie Shields Player from Sun During Stroke
- 14-3/14 Electronic Instrument Used to Find Ball
- 14-6/1 Ball Moves in Water in Water Hazard After Stance Taken
- 16/4 Hole-Liner Not Sunk Deep Enough
- 16-1a/6 Damaged Hole; Procedure for Player
- 16-1a/10 Loose Impediments Brushed Along Line of Putt Rather Than to Side

- 16-1a/13 Line of Putt Damaged Accidentally by Opponent, Fellow-Competitor or Their Caddies
- 16-1a/17 Ball Lifted on Putting Green Placed Ahead of Ball-Marker and Then Moved Back to Original Position
- 16-1b/1 Ball on Putting Green Lifted Because Player Feared Ball Might Move
- 16-1b/2 Ball Lifted from Putting Green; Ball Replaced While Another Ball in Motion But Then Lifted Because Moving Ball Might Strike It
- 16-1b/3 Ball Lifted from Putting Green; Ball Replaced While Another Ball in Motion Subsequently Deflects Ball
- 17/4 Adjustment of Flagstick; Player's Rights
- 17-3/2 Opponent or Fellow-Competitor Attending Flagstick for Player Fails to Remove It; Player's Ball Strikes Flagstick
- 18-2a/9 Ball Lifted Without Authority Dropped Instead of Being Replaced
- 18-2b/3 Ball Moves After Player Has Taken Stance in Bunker
- 18-2b/4 Ball Moves After Player Grounds Club Short Distance Behind Ball But Before Grounding Club Immediately Behind Ball
- 18-2b/5.5 Placing Clubhead on Ground in Front of Ball When Addressing
- 18-2b/5.7 When Player Who Putts "Side-Saddle" Has Addressed Ball
- 18-2b/7 Ball Moves After Player Addresses It and Then Steps Away
- 18-2b/11 Ball Moved by Another Agency After Address
- 18-2b/12 Ball Moves After Address and Is Stopped by Player's Club
- 19-1/4.1 Ball Deliberately Deflected or Stopped Through the Green by Spectator
- 19-1/5 Ball Deliberately Deflected or Stopped on Putting Green by Fellow-Competitor
- 19-2/1 Ball Stopped by Player's Foot Moves When Foot Removed
- 19-2/1.5 Ball Moves Prior to Address and Is Accidentally Stopped by Player's Club; Player Removes Club and Ball Moves Away
- 20-1/19 Placing Object Marking Position of Ball Other Than Behind Ball
- 20-2a/3 Ball Dropped in Improper Manner and in Wrong Place
- 20-2a/5 Caddie Holds Back Tree Branch to Prevent Branch from Deflecting Dropped Ball
- 20-2c/2 Ball Dropped Third Time When Placement Required After Second Drop

- 20-2c/4 Caddie Stops Dropped Ball Before It Comes to Rest; When Penalty Incurred
- 20-3a/0.5 Whether Player Himself Must Place or Replace Ball
- 20-3b/4 Lie of Ball Through the Green Altered; Original Lie of Ball Known But Spot Where Ball Lay Not Determinable
- 20-3b/5 Lie of Ball in Rough Altered by Outside Agency; Original Lie of Ball Not Known and Spot Where Ball Lay Not Determinable
- 20-3b/6 Lie of Ball in Bunker Altered; Original Lie of Ball Known But Spot Where Ball Lay Not Determinable
- 20-4/2 Ball Lifted from Putting Green and Placed by Caddie Behind Marker
- 22/7 Ball Assisting Fellow-Competitor on Putting Green; Procedure for Referee If Competitor Does Not Lift Ball
- 23-1/10 Removal of Loose Impediments Affecting Player's Play
- 24-2b/17 Obstruction Interferes with Abnormal Stroke; Abnormal Stroke Reasonable in Circumstances
- 24-2b/18 Obstruction Interferes with Abnormal Stroke; Abnormal Stroke Not Reasonable in Circumstances
- 24-2b/19 Stroke at Ball Impracticable Due to Interference by Immovable Obstruction and Casual Water
- 25-1b/19 Ball Lies on Mound Made by Burrowing Animal; Impracticable to Make Stroke Due to Bush
- 25-1b/20 Stance Interfered with by Burrowing Animal Hole; Impracticable to Make Stroke Because of Other Condition
- 25-1b/25.5 Application of Exception to Rule 25-1b When Ball Lies Underground in Burrowing Animal Hole
- 26/6 Ball Assumed to Be in Water Hazard Found Outside Hazard After Another Ball Played Under Stroke-and-Distance Procedure
- 26-1/4 Ball Played Under Water Hazard Rule Without Knowledge or Virtual Certainty That Original Ball in Hazard; Original Ball Then Found in Hazard
- 30-3f/4 Wrong Information Given by Player Out of Contention in Four-Ball Match
- 30-3f/13 Partner Stands on Extension of Player's Line of Play Behind Ball
- 31-2/1 Absent Player Joins Partner After Fellow-Competitor Plays from Teeing Ground But Before Partner Plays
- 33-7/5 Play of Wrong Ball Not Rectified on Advice of Referee
- 33-8/4 Local Rule for Events in Which Motorized Golf Carts Permitted

- 34-3/1.5 Committee Error and Scoring in Stroke Play
- 34-3/2 Committee Does Not Penalize Player in Breach of Pace of Play Condition Believing Player Had Already Lost Hole
- 34-3/3 Player in Match Makes Stroke from Wrong Place Due to Incorrect Ruling; Procedure for Player When Error is Discovered
- 34-3/3.3 Competitor in Stroke Play Makes Stroke from Wrong Place Due to Incorrect Ruling; Procedure for Competitor When Error is Discovered
- 34-3/3.5 Player Lifts Ball Without Authority Due to Misunderstanding Referee's Instructions
- 34-3/3.7 Player Incorrectly Advised to Continue with Provisional Ball
- 34-3/7 Player Proceeds on Basis of Ruling; Subsequent Facts Prove Ruling to Be Incorrect
- 34-3/8 Player Proceeds on Basis of Ruling; Player's Version of Facts Subsequently Found to Be Incorrect
- 34-3/9 Resolution of Questions of Fact; Referee and Committee Responsibility

WITHDRAWN DECISIONS

- 1-2/3.8 Player Jumps Close to Hole to Cause Ball to Drop; Ball Does Not Move
- 1-2/4.5 Player Leaves Putt Short and Instinctively Throws Putter at Ball
- 1-2/6 Player Removes Loose Impediment Affecting Lie of Opponent or Fellow-Competitor in Hazard
- 2-4/18 Defaulting Player Plays Informal Match with Opponent and Wins
- 2-5/1 Player's Obligation Re Lodging Claim
- 3-2/3 Competitor in Error Does Not Hole Out; Error Corrected Before Playing from Next Tee
- 4-4a/3 Competitor Withdraws During Round and Puts His Clubs in Fellow-Competitor's Bag
- 8-1/1 Seeking Information About Length of Hole
- 12-1/1 Searching with Clubhead for Ball Covered by Sand in Bunker
- 12-1/2 Ball Covered by Sand in Bunker Removed from Buried Lie During Search
- 13-2/22 Knocking Down Leaves with Practice Swing
- 13-2/32.5 Improving Line of Play by Removing Part of Fence

- 13-4/0.7 Player Rakes Bunker When Ball Lies in Another Bunker
- 13-4/23 When Stance Taken in Bunker
- 13-4/32 Club Touches Partially Embedded Pine Needle on Backswing in Bunker
- 14/6 Ball Popped Up Swung at in Disgust
- 14-2/4 Caddie Inadvertently Stands on Extension of Line of Play Behind Ball
- 16-1e/2 Player Plays from Stance Astride Extension of Line of Putt Behind Ball
- 16-2/3 Casting Shadow on Ball Overhanging Hole
- 17-1/6 Attended Flagstick Placed on Ground Subsequently Lifted
- 17-1/8 Removed Flagstick Being Held by Opponent or Fellow-Competitor Subsequently Moved
- 18-1/11 Ball Moved by Wind or Casual Water While Play Suspended
- 18-2a/5 Ball in Hazard Moves After Loose Impediment Outside Hazard Moved
- 18-2b/2 Ball Moves After Stance Taken in Hazard Without Club (Note: Replaced by New Decision)
- 18-2b/5 When Club Grounded in Grass (Note: Replaced by New Decision)
- 18-2b/6 Ball Perched on Heather Moves When Club Rested on Heather
- 19-1/4 Ball Played from Putting Green Deliberately Deflected or Stopped by Spectator
- 19-1/10 Ball in Motion After Stroke on Putting Green Deflected by Ball Played at Another Hole
- 19-5/3 Competitor's Ball Played on Putting Green Deflected by Balls of Two Fellow-Competitors
- 20-1/10 Ball-Marker Moved Off Green by Wind or Casual Water While Play Suspended
- 24/10 Paved Area
- 24/16 Opponent or Fellow-Competitor Removes Movable Obstruction Affecting Player's Play
- 26/4 Man-Made Reservoir
- 29/5.5 Raking Sand in Bunker After Partner Fails to Extricate Ball but Before Stroke; Foursome Match
- 33/5 Distance Markers